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**MADE EASY
WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS**

WEEK-3

15th January - 21st January, 2021

Targeted Examinations:
**CSE, ESE, PSUs, State Exams,
SSC and Banking Exams**

15th JANUARY 2021

Tsar Icicle

- Tsar Icicle has recently collapsed, killing four visitors in Russia. The Vilyuchin waterfall in winter is called Tsar Icicle. The Vilyuchinsk waterfall is situated on the Kamchatka peninsula. It is home to more than a hundred and sixty volcanoes.
- Icicle is a spike of ice produced by the freezing of water from the object.
- The Vilyuchinsk town is a closed town under Krai jurisdiction. The town served as a base for submarine construction. Vilyuchinsk Waterfall located in the Ring of Fire region.

About Ring of Fire:

- It's called the Ring of Fire, and it forms a track along the shore of the Pacific Ocean. More than 75% of the earth's volcano is found in a ring of fire.
- It has oceanic trenches, plate movements and volcanic arcs. More than 80% of the world largest earthquakes occur along the circum-pacific belt.

Pradhan Mantri Kausal Vikas Yojana 3.0

- The Government of India is initiating the third step of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana.
- It shall be enforced by the Ministry of Skills Growth and Entrepreneurship.

Key features:

- In the third step of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, 729 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra is to be formed and more than 200 ITIs are to be deployed under the Capacity India mission. This would create a deep pipeline of trained practitioners.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0 is to train more than 1 lakh candidates for a period of one year with an investment of 950 crores of Rupees.

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana Phase 2:

- Step 2 of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana has been initiated in 2015. It was based on the following
- **Short-term training:** Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas training centres offered short-term training to applicants who were either school or college drop-outs or unemployed.
- The training was provided according to the National Skills Qualification Framework. The curriculum mainly focused on entrepreneurship, soft skills, digital literacy.

Pradhanmantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana Phase 1

- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana was launched as the National Skill Development Mission in 2010. It consisted of the following three institutions
 - Prime Minister National Council on skill development
 - National Skill Development Corporation
 - National Skill Development coordination board
- The main focus of the phase was to provide training to class 10 and class 12 dropouts.

NOTE:

The National Policy on Skill Development had set a target of skilling 50 crore people by 2022 under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana.

RBI Working Group on Digital Lending

- The Reserve Bank of India has recently formed a working group on digital loans. The working group was formed to research all facets of digital lending practises in the regulated and regulated financial market.

Functions of the working group:

- The Working Group will examine the practises of digital lending in the region.
- It will determine the requirements for outsourced digital lending activities of organisations controlled by the Reserve Bank of India.

- It will recommend policy reforms to help the orderly development of digital lending.
- The task force is to define the threats to be faced by unregulated digital loans. It will concentrate primarily on the threats faced by customers and regulated institutions who are vulnerable to unregulated digital loans.
- It will propose legislation to broaden the regulatory reach of digital lending. It will also detail the role of various regulatory and government bodies in digital lending.
- The working group will recommend a robust fair practice code for Digital lending players.

16th JANUARY 2021

RBI Financial Stability Report 2020

- The Reserve Bank of India recently issued the December 2020 Financial Stability Report. This is the 22nd issue of the Apex Bank Financial Stability Report. It's published twice a year.

Key Findings:

- The gross non-performing asset ratio of the scheduled commercial banks is projected to rise to 13.5 per cent by September 2021.
- The net NPA and GNPA levels are starting to fall. The GNPA ratio stood at 7.5% in September 2020. On the other hand, the NNPA ratio stood at 2.1% in September 2020 and 3% in March 2020.
- According to the financial stability report, the GNPA might increase to 13.5% by September 2021 under baseline scenario. Under severe stress scenario, the GNPA ratio might increase to 14.8% by September 2021.

NOTE:

The RBI Financial Stability Report is released by the Financial Stability and Development Council. The idea of the council was mooted by the Raghuram Rajan Committee in 2008.

Prarambh: Startup India International Summit

- The Prime Minister of India will be engaging with the entrepreneurs and attending the Startup India International Summit in Prarambh.
- The Startup India International Summit is hosted by the Department for the Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry.
- The main objective of the Summit is to focus attention on global capital for startups in India, provide opportunities for accessing International markets to the startups in the country, mobilize domestic capital and evolve enabling policy provisions.

Significance:

- The Summit will pull together speakers from around the world. This will promote conversations on creativity, technology, robust policy and allow foreign organisations and policymakers to express their opinions and thereby guide them to solve problems and challenges.
- The Summit also marks the 50th anniversary of Startup India initiative. The startup India initiative was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 16, 2016.

Startup India

- The Startup India initiative was launched to promote and support the startup in India by providing bank finances. The three main pillars of the startup India scheme are as follows:
 - To provide funding support
 - Incentives to the startup in the country
 - To provide industry Academy partnership

Impeachment of Donald Trump

- US President Donald Trump has become the country's first president to be impeached twice.

- The House of Representatives of the United States recently agreed to accuse President Trump of inciting a mob assault on the US Congress.
- The US President may be charged on offences such as treason, high crime, extortion, and misdemeanours.
- The Great Green Wall is an African project. The African Union started combating desertification, land degradation, drought in 2007.
- The initiative aims to sequester 250 million tonnes of carbon and create ten million green jobs. It will support the African communities to grow fertile land and increase economic opportunities for the youngest population.

US Constitutional Provisions:

- The Constitution of the United States states that there are two ways to punish an accused official. One is to suspend the convicted official from his position and disqualify him from holding any office of honour, profit or trust under the administration of the United States.
- The second way is to remove an official by conviction with two third majority from the US Senate. Only a simple majority is needed for disqualification.

Impeachment of the President of India:

- The impeachment charges of an Indian President are initiated either in Lok Sabha or in Rajya Sabha.
- After the impeachment resolution is passed by majority of two thirds in one house, it is sent to the other house. The other house investigates the charges.
- If the other house also sustains the charges, an impeachment resolution is brought in.
- If the impeachment resolution is passed with two-thirds majority, the president is said to be impeached.

Great Green Wall Initiative

- The Great Green Wall for the Sahel and Sahara Project recently secured USD 14 billion in funding at the latest One World Biodiversity Summit.
- The money will be used to regenerate depleted property, improve resilience, build green jobs and conserve biodiversity.

Key Points:

- The goal of the Great Green Wall initiative is to change the lives of 100 million Africans by developing 8,000 kilometres long and 15 kilometres wide mosaic of trees, vegetation, grasslands and plants.

NOTE:

The countries that are selected as intervention zones for the Great Green Wall initiative are Chad, Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal, Djibouti.

17th JANUARY 2021

Houbara Bustard

- Pakistan issued special permits to Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum and five other members of their family to hunt Houbara Bustard.
- The controversial private hunting expeditions of Houbara Bustard by the Dubai Royals date back over four decades.

About Houbara Bustard

- The Houbara Bustard is a large terrestrial bird found in parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle east. After breeding in central Asia during spring, the Houbara bustards migrate south to spend the winter in Pakistan.
- According to the International Fund for Houbara Conservation, currently there are only 42,000 Asian Houbara Bustards and 22,000 North African Houbara Bustards.
- **Conservation:**
 - **Great Indian Bustard:** Critically Endangered (IUCN)
 - **Houbara Bustard:** Vulnerable (IUCN)

Sudden Stratospheric Warming

- Southern India received excessively heavy rainfall (ten times the normal) in the beginning of 2021.
- This winter rain, according to the scientists, is due to sudden stratospheric warming that occurred in the Arctic region.

About Sudden Stratospheric Warming:

- The Sudden Stratospheric Warming is an event where the polar stratospheric temperature increases up to fifty degrees Celsius.
- It is preceded by a situation where the polar jet stream of westerly winds in the northern hemisphere is disturbed by natural weather patterns. This is usually addressed as the polar vortex.
- The polar vortex is a whirling cone of low pressure over the poles. The polar vortex is the strongest in winter. It spins in the stratosphere.
- During winter, the polar vortex is the strongest due to the difference in temperature between polar and mid latitude regions.
- When the polar vortex is the strongest, it forms a wall protecting the mid-latitudes from cold Arctic air. When Polar Vortex weakens, the stratosphere begins to warm and the event is called Sudden Stratospheric Warming.

Abell 370: NASA shares picture

- NASA recently shared the picture of a huge cluster of galaxies called Abell 370.

About Abell 370:

- It is a galaxy cluster located four billion light years away from the earth. The galaxy cluster is located in the constellation called Cetus.
- The core of Abell 370 is made of more than hundred galaxies.
- The Galaxy was catalogued by George Abell and hence the name.
- Abell 370 has several arcs of light. These arcs are the mirages caused by gravitational lensing of dark and

massive objects located between the observer and the distant galaxies.

- The Abell 370 galaxy cluster was first discovered in 2002 using the lensing effect.

NOTE:

As light emitted by galaxies (located in far distances) passes by massive objects, the gravitational pull from these objects tend to bend or distort the light. This is called Gravitational lensing.

18th JANUARY 2021

SAKSHAM Awareness Campaign

- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has initiated the SAKSHAM awareness drive. A campaign has been initiated to spread awareness about green energy.

Key Points:

- The initiative would spread awareness of clean energy. It's a one-month-long fuel conservation programme.
- The campaign is to be launched by the Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA). The campaign is to create awareness in seven key drivers namely greater reliance on domestic sources to drive biofuels, moving towards gas based economy, cleaner use of fossil fuels, achieving renewable targets with the set deadlines, increased use of electric vehicles to decarbonize mobility, increased use of cleaner fuels and digital innovation across all energy systems.

Green Energy Schemes by Government of India:

- **Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM):** The PM-KUSUM scheme covers grid connected renewable energy power plants, grid connected agriculture pumps and solar water pumps.

- **Grid Connected Rooftop Solar Programme:** The programme aims to achieve a cumulative capacity of 40,000 MW of Rooftop solar power projects by 2022. In a grid connected rooftop solar power project, DC power generated is converted into AC power using a power conditioning unit and is then fed into the grid.
- **National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy:** The main aim of the policy is to provide a framework to promote large grid connected wind-solar hybrid systems. It aims to encourage new technology and way-outs involving combined operation of solar and wind power plants.
- **National Offshore Wind Energy Policy:** The policy was notified in 2015. The main objective of the policy is to develop offshore wind energy in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone. The policy has identified eight zones that have cumulative offshore wind energy potential of 70 GW.

Article 19 of the UN Charter

- Iran and six other countries surrendered their right to serve in the United Nations General Assembly because they had not charged their dues.
- The other countries that lost their voting rights were Niger, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Congo Brazzaville, Central African Republic and Libya. On the other hand, three other countries such as Comoros, Somalia, Sao Tome and Principe will be allowed to vote despite their missing dues.
- The actions of suspending the members from voting has been taken under Article 19 of the United Nations Charter.

About Article 19 of UN Charter:

- Provided for In article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations, a member shall have no right to vote if he has arrears in paying his financial obligations to the United Nations.
- The Charter provided for a term of grace of two years. That is, if the arrears have been outstanding for longer than two years, the right to vote shall be revoked.

Open Skies Treaty

- Russia has also announced that it is withdrawing from the Open Skies Treaty. The Treaty requires the signatories to carry out unarmed observation flights over each other's territory. In 2020, the US declared that it would drop the Open Skies Treaty.

About Open Skies Treaty:

- The Treaty of Open Skies was concluded in 1992 after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It was first suggested by former US President Dwight Eisenhower in 1955 to de-escalate the Cold War.
- The deal was concluded by NATO members of the Non-Atlantic Treaty Organization and the countries of the old Warsaw Pact. In 2002, more than 35 countries ratified the pact.
- India is not a signatory of the Open Skies Treaty.

NOTE:

The US left the Open Skies Treaty accusing that Russia is non-compliant with the Open Skies Treaty. On the other hand, according to Russia, withdrawal of the US from the treaty has created imbalance in its implementation. This is the reason for Russia's withdrawal.

19th JANUARY 2021

GI tag for Guochi Mushroom

- The Jammu and Kashmir Government sought GI tag for Guochi mushroom. The Guochi mushrooms are highly expensive and are full of health benefits.
- Guochi mushroom is a species of fungus belonging to the family Morchellaceae. The Guochi mushrooms are locally called "Thuntoo".

Key Points:

- The Guochi mushrooms prefer soil with limestone base. They also grow in acid soils. The Guochi mushrooms are usually found in early spring.

- They grow in the conifer forests of Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. It takes months for the villagers to collect these mushrooms, dry them and bring them to the market.
- The Guchhi mushrooms cannot be cultivated commercially for their nature of germination. They germinate and grow in low temperature soil. They usually appear after fires.
- **Health Benefits:** The Gucchi mushrooms are rich in vitamins, potassium and copper. They are also rich in Vitamin-D. further they are rich in antioxidants that prevent health issues such as heart diseases and diabetes.

■ NOTE:

Recently, GI Tag was provided to Saffron of Jammu and Kashmir.

Mt Trishul

- The Indian Mountaineering Foundation recently approved a three-member team of mountaineers led by Arjun Vajpai for winter climbing expedition to Mount Trishul.
- For the first time, the Indian Mountaineering Foundation has approved the concept of winter mountaineering.

Mount Trishul

- Mount Trishul is a group of three Himalayan peaks that form the shape of a trident. The three peaks are named Trishul I, Trishul II and Trishul III. Mount Trishul is located at Massif.
- The massif runs north-south. Massif is a section of earth's crust demarcated with faults. The Mount Trishul was first scaled by a British mountaineer Tom George Longstaff.
- Mount Trishul is located in the western Kumaon of Uttarakhand.

■ NOTE:

Arjun Vajpai is the youngest Indian to climb Mount Everest at the age of 16 in 2010.

Ex-Desert Knight 21

- India and France are to hold Ex-Desert Knight 21 exercise. It is a bilateral air exercise to be held between Indian Air Force and French air and Space Force.

Key Points:

- Under the Indo-French Defence Cooperation, the French Air and Space force and the Indian Air Force have so far held six editions of air exercise called "Garuda".
- The main objective of the exercise is to provide operational exposure and share best practices. From the Indian Air Force, Su-30 MKI, Mirage 2000 and IL-78 flight refuelling aircraft are to participate in the exercise.

Other Defence Exercises between France:

- Exercise Shakti is held between the Armies of India and France
- Exercise Varuna is held between Indian Navy and French Naval Forces
- Exercise Garuda is held between the Air Forces of the two countries

20th JANUARY 2021

Apartheid State

- Israel has been banned the human rights groups in the country that called Israel to be an apartheid state.

Apartheid

- Apartheid is an institutionalised system of racial segregation.
- Analogy of Israel and the apartheid
- Israel is blamed for becoming an apartheid regime for its conduct against the Palestinians. Israel's policies in the West Bank region was criticised as apartheid.

Balfour Declaration

- It was a public announcement issued by the British Government after the First World War. In conjunction with the Balfour Declaration, the British expanded its support for the creation of a national Jewish home in Palestine.
- The Balfour declaration is the founding document of Mandatory Palestine, which later became Israel and Palestine.
- The Balfour Declaration is considered as the principal cause of the ongoing Israeli-Palestine conflict.

Israel-Palestine Conflict

- The establishment of Palestine as the national home of Jews by the Balfour declaration created tension in the region between the Jews and the Arabs.
- The conflict widened after the 1947-1949 Palestine war. It further increased after Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories in 1967 after a six-day war.
- The United Nations has called for "Two State Solution" to end the Israel-Palestine conflicts.

Keystone Pipeline Project

- US President-elect Joe Biden is likely to scrap the Keystone XL pipeline expansion.
- The keystone pipeline system is the oil pipeline system in the United States of America and Canada. It was commissioned in 2010 and is owned by the Government of Alberta and by TC Energy.
- The pipeline runs from the Western Canadian sedimentary basin in Alberta to the Refineries in Texas and Illinois.

About Oil Sand:

- Environmental organisations have objected to the proposal as a result of the shipment from Oil Sands. The oil sands are technically known as bituminous sands. There are unconventional oil fields.
- They naturally exist in a combination of sand, water, and clay. Petroleum in oil sands is very viscous.

Significant concentrations of natural bitumen deposits are found in Russia, Venezuela, Canada and Kazakhstan.

- The major concern of extracting Petroleum from oil sands is that it releases 17% more greenhouse gas emissions than the conventional oil extraction.

STARStreak Air Defence System

- Thales, a French Multinational Company has signed an agreement with the Bharat Dynamics Limited, a Government of India enterprise to jointly work on STARStreak Air Defence System.

Key Points:

- The STARStreak is a short-range surface-to-air missile. It was formerly named the Shorts Missile System. It flies at Mach 3 speed, that is, the speed of the rocket is three times the speed of the sound.
- STARStreak has been in the possession of the British Army since 1997.
- The minimum range of the system is 0.3 km and the maximum range is 7 km. The range of the STARStreak System II variant is more than 7 km.
- The surface to air missile installed in the STARStreak Air Defence System is currently the fastest short-range surface to air missile in the world.

Advantages:

- The STARStreak Air Defence System cannot be jammed by infrared countermeasures. It has been optimised to engage attack helicopters.
- The speed of the system makes it difficult for the pilots to evade.
- It cannot be suppressed with anti-radar missiles.

LongOps Project

- The LongOps Project is a collaboration between the UK and Japan. Under the operation, the scientists from Japan and the UK will develop new and safe technologies to dismantle old nuclear facilities such as the Fukushima that were severely damaged by tsunamis and earthquakes.

About LongOps Project

- The project is to use long-reach robotic arms and hence is called “LongOps Project”. The project will reduce the risks to human health and will speed up decommissioning of nuclear reactors that are non-operational.
- The LongOps project is to be implemented at a cost of 12 million Euros (Rs 120 crores).
- It will focus on fast decommissioning of nuclear sites.

About ITER Project

- ITER is an International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor. India is also a part of ITER. The other countries involved in ITER are China, Russia, Japan, European Union, US and South Korea.

■ NOTE:

Digital Twin Technology is a part of the LongOps Project. It will analyze data from decommissioning sites and predict operational and maintenance challenges.

21st JANUARY 2021

Dragon Fruit renamed as Kamalam

- The Gujarat Government is to patent the Dragon Fruit in the name of “Kamalam”. Kamalam is also the name of the BJP state party headquarters in Gujarat.

Key Points:

- The Dragon Fruit plants are raised on poles. One pole can support four plants. In an acre, more than 300 poles can be installed.
- Commercial planting is highly beneficial as they can be planted in clusters. Thus space consumption in dragon fruit cultivation is very minimal.
- They will require only one to two litres of water per day. This can easily be achieved through drip irrigation.
- Also, Dragon fruits fetch good rates. They are sold for Rs 300 to Rs 400 per kilogram.

- In India, Dragon fruits are consumed for their taste and health benefits.

About Dragon Fruits:

- The Dragon fruit is a cactus variety fruit. It is widely cultivated in South east Asia, United States, Australia, India, Caribbean islands and Mesoamerica.
- The total lifespan of a Dragon fruit plant is fifteen to twenty years. They grow in regions where summer temperatures rise above forty degrees Celsius.

1776 Commission

- The White House released the 1776 Commission report. The 1776 Commission was set up by President Trump when he was lagging behind the president elect Joe Biden during the US President Election 2020.

Key Findings:

- The commission has identified racism, progressivism and identity politics as the challenges to the United States of America.
- The report refers to John Calhoun as the leading forerunner of identity politics. John Calhoun was an American politician who held important positions including Vice President of the US (1825-1832). He strongly supported slavery.

About 1776 Commission:

- The 1776 Commission was a counter to the 1619 project. It was an eighteen-member commission. It did not include any historians. Rather, it consisted of conservative politicians and activists. It was an advisory commission. The commission recently released its report on Martin Luther King Day (January 18, 2021).

Ratle Hydropower Project

- The Union Cabinet approved the Ratle Hydropower Project of 850 MW. The project is located in River Chenab.

About the Ratle Hydropower Project:

- It is a joint venture of Jammu and Kashmir State Power Development Corporation and National Hydroelectric power corporation. The share of NHPC in the project is 49% and that of Jammu and Kashmir State Power Development Corporation is 51% respectively.
- The project is to be commissioned within sixty months.
- The project is expected to provide direct and indirect employment to more than four thousand individuals.

Section 32A of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

- The Supreme Court recently upheld the validity of Section 32 A of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.
- The SC said that it is important for IBC to attract bidders who will offer a fair value for the corporate debtor. This is essential to ensure timely completion of the corporate insolvency resolution process.

Section 32A of IBC

- Under the section the corporate debtor who has committed an offence prior to the commencement of the insolvency resolution process will not be prosecuted.
- The Section 32A provides immunity to the corporate debtor and its property. However, the protection is provided when there is an approval of a resolution plan that leads to change of management of control.
- The petitioner argued in the Supreme Court that this provision is constitutionally incorrect. This is because it provides an undeserved immunity to the property.

■ NOTE: _____

According to the SC, Section 32 A is essential to avoid delay in several big-ticket cases. For instance, take the case of Bhushan Power and Steel. The company became bankrupt and admitted to insolvency in 2017. It owed more than Rs 47,000 crores to banks and Rs 780 crores to creditors.

