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WEEKLY
CURRENT AFFAIRS**

WEEK-1

01st May - 07th May, 2021

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

01st MAY 2021

India-Russia 2+2 Dialogue

- India and Russia have agreed to establish a '2+2 Ministerial Dialogue' at the Foreign & Defence Minister level between the two countries. Russia is the 4th country and 1st Non-Quad member country with which India has established the '2+2 Ministerial dialogue' mechanism.

About 2+2 Dialogue

- India holds similar dialogues with the US, Australia and Japan.
- This dialogue is expected to boost the bilateral strategic partnership between India & Russia. Russia is the first non-QUAD member with which India is to hold the dialogue.
- In 2021, President Vladimir Putin is to visit India to hold the India-Russia bilateral summit. The summit is alternatively held in India and Russia.

New Soybean Variety: MACS 1407

- Recently, Indian Scientists have developed a high-yielding and pest-resistant variety of soybean, called MACS 1407. It was developed by the Agharkar Research Institute of Pune along with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

About MACS 1407:

- MACS 1407 is a high-yielding and pest-resistant variety of soybean.
- Cultivation: It is suitable for cultivation in the states of Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and North-Eastern states.

Key Features:

- MACS 1407 requires an average of 43 days for 50 % flowering. Further, it takes 104 days to mature from the date of sowing.

- It has white coloured flowers, yellow seeds and black hilum (a scar on a seed marking the point of attachment to its seed vessel). Its seeds have 19.81 % oil content, 41 % protein content and show good germinability (the ability of a seed to germinate).

Karen Rebels

- Myanmar's military has launched air strikes on a village and outpost near the Thai border, after ethnic minority Karen insurgents attacked a Myanmar army post in some of the worst clashes since a Feb. 1 coup. The post is located close to the border of north western Thailand.

Who are Karen Rebels?

- They are the oldest rebel group in Myanmar. They have formed the Karen National Union (KNU). The KNU is the dominant political organization representing ethnic minority Karen communities in Karen, or Kayin, State, bordering Thailand.
- Its aim is self-determination for the Karen people in a region of about 1.6 million people, roughly the size of Belgium, where they are the ethnic majority in the state.
- Marginalized in Burma's post-independence political process, the KNU started a rebellion in 1949, which it waged for nearly 70 years. One of its key grievances was the majority Bamar community's dominance of Myanmar's state and military,

2nd MAY 2021

State Disaster Response Funds

- The Centre Government has released the first instalment of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) to States, in the wake of the second wave of COVID-19 that has claimed thousands of lives since April.
- The total amount of SDRF to be released for 2021-22 is Rs 8,873 crores.

Key Points:

- SDRF has been constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- It is the primary fund available with the State governments for responses to notified disasters to meet expenditure for providing immediate relief.
- The Centre contributes 75% of the SDRF allocation for general category States and Union Territories and 90% for special category States and Union Territories (northeastern States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir).
- The annual Central contribution is released in two equal installments as per the recommendation of the Finance Commission.
- Disaster (s) covered under SDRF: Cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, frost and cold waves.

Lag B'Omer

- Lag B'Omer is an annual Jewish festival. It is celebrated in the Hebrew month of Iyar. The festival is celebrated on the thirtieth day of the Omer.
- Recently, more than forty-four people died here due to a stampede (in Meron of Israel). They were gathered at the reputed tomb of Shimon Bar Yochai for Lag B'Omer.

About Lag B'Omer

- It is an annual Jewish festival which is observed during the Hebrew month of Iyar.
- People pay homage to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a second century sage and mystic.
- It is celebrated on the 33rd day of the Omer that is the 49-day period between Passover and Shavuot. This is the only day during the 49-day period when the celebration is permitted.
- Jews usually schedule weddings on this day every year. The hair of young boys who reached at the age of three, is cut for the first time on this occasion.

- To mark the celebration every year, tens of thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jewish pilgrims reach the base of Mount Meron.
- The Lag B'Omer celebrations are associated with bonfires.

NOTE:

Rabbi is a Jewish teacher or scholar. He mainly teaches Jewish law. They are generally referred to as Mishnaic sage.

Special 301 Report

- The Special Report 301 of the United States Trade Representative was recently announced. According to the paper, India, along with eight other countries, has been included on the "Priority Watch List."

Key Points:

- Out of 100 trading partners being reviewed for this year's "Special 301 Report" by USTR, eight have been placed on Priority Watch List and 23 on the Watch List.
- Seven other countries on the Priority Watch list are Argentina, Chile, China, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Venezuela.
- The 23 trading partners on the Watch List are Algeria, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mexico, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Romania, Thailand, Trinidad & Tobago, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.
- According to the report, India has remained inconsistent in its progress on intellectual property (IP) protection and enforcement.

Report with Respect to India:

- India continues to be on the 'Priority Watch List' for lack of adequate intellectual property (IP) rights protection and enforcement.

- While India made “Meaningful Progress” to enhance IP protection and enforcement in some areas over the past year, it did not resolve recent and long-standing challenges, and created new ones. The same assessment was made in the 2019 Report.

3rd MAY 2021

Moderna’s mRNA vaccine

- Moderna's mRNA Covid-19 vaccine has been added to the World Health Organization's (WHO) basket of vaccines for emergency use. This makes it the fifth vaccine to receive emergency use validation from WHO.

How does the mRNA vaccine work?

- The mRNA vaccines function differently from traditional vaccines. Traditional vaccines stimulate an antibody response by injecting a human with antigens.
- mRNA vaccines inject a fragment of the RNA sequence of a virus directly into the cells, which then stimulate an adaptive immune response.
- mRNA fragment is a specific piece of the virus that carries instructions to build the antigen of the virus. An advantage of RNA vaccines is that they stimulate cellular immunity.

■ NOTE:

Unlike DNA vaccines, mRNA vaccines are more fragile as the molecules degrade within minutes when exposed to the outside environment, hence they need to be stored in extremely low temperature..

Tigray Crisis

- Ethiopia has designated Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and OLF-Shene as terrorist organisations.
- This came after several attacks from the organisations in different parts of the country that targeted civilians and public infrastructure over the past couple of years.

Background:

- In 2020, the feud bursted out in the open as the Tigray leaders disagreed to abide by the Central Government order to postpone the regional elections due to COVID-19. They conducted the elections as per the due date instead of postponing it.
- Following this, the Central Government stopped its funds to the Tigrayan administration. In response, the Tigrayan Administration labelled it as “Declaration of war”.

■ NOTE:

Tigray People’s Liberation Front is a political party. It was founded in 1975 in Ethiopia. Also, TPLF is an armed ethnic nationalist insurgent group. This conflict between the State Government of Tigray and the Ethiopian Government is going on for thirty years now. These conflicts have a huge impact on the Horn of Africa..

Operation Samudra Setu II

- Indian Navy has launched Operation Samudra Setu-II to augment the ongoing national mission for meeting the Oxygen requirements.

About the operation

- Seven Indian Naval ships viz. Kolkata, Kochi, Talwar, Tabar, Trikand, Jalashwa and Airavat have been deployed for shipment of liquid medical oxygen-filled cryogenic containers and associated medical equipment from various countries.
- Two ships, the INS Kolkata and INS Talwar, have entered the Port of Manama, Bahrain, to carry back 40 tonnes of liquid oxygen to Mumbai.
- The INS Jalashwa is enroute to Bangkok while the INS Airavat is on its way to Singapore on similar missions.

■ NOTE:

Indian Navy had launched Operation Samudra Setu in 2020 as part of the Vande Bharat Mission. It repatriated 3992 stranded and distressed citizens of India from Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Iran..

4th MAY 2021

Article 164

- West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee claimed a third term in the West Bengal State Assembly Elections 2021. The CM, however, lost her battle against TMC turncoat Suvendu Adhikari, she can still take over as the Chief Minister of the State. This is permitted under Article 164 (4).

About Article 164:

- The Article 164 lists the following:
- Article 164 (1):** The Chief Minister is appointed by the Governor of the state.
- Article 164 (2):** The Council of Ministers are collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly of the state.
- Article 164 (3):** The Governor administers the oaths of the minister.
- Article 164 (4):** A Minister who is not a member of the Legislative Assembly shall cease to be a minister at the end of six months.

NOTE:

According to Article 164 (4) and Article 75 (5), the CM and PM shall hold their offices even if they are not members of their respective houses. But She/he has to become the member of the State Legislature within six months..

Uranium-214- Lightest form of Uranium

- Scientists have discovered a new type of uranium that is the lightest ever known. The discovery could reveal more about a weird alpha particle that gets ejected from certain radioactive elements as they decay.
- The alpha particles are those particles that get ejected from radioactive elements as they decay.

About Uranium-214

- This isotope of Uranium features a greater number of neutrons than protons. The neutrons have mass. However, Uranium-214 found recently is far lighter than the opposite common Uranium isotopes. This includes Uranium-235 also. Uranium-235 is the most ordinarily used isotope. It's 51 extra neutrons.
- Uranium-214 was created at the Heavy Ion research center in Lanzhou, China.
- It had a half-life of just half a milli-second. The half lifetime of a radioactive sample is the time taken for half the radioactive sample to decay. The half lifetime of Uranium-238 is 4.5 billion years. This is often just about adequate to the age of the world.

Alpha Decay in Uranium-214

- The new isotope found also showed unique behaviours during its decay. This new finding will help scientists understand a radioactive process called Alpha decay.
- In alpha decay, the atomic nucleus loses two protons and two neutrons. They are collectively called alpha particles. Scientists are yet to find the answers on how these alpha particles are ejected.

Significant Economic Presence (SEP) principle

- India on Monday notified a revenue threshold of Rs 2 crore and a limit of 300,000 users for non-resident technology firms such as Google, Facebook, Netflix, to pay tax in India under new or revised bilateral tax pacts.
- This is part of the Significant Economic Presence (SEP) principle, which was introduced in the Finance Bill 2018-19.
- This threshold was notified for non-resident technology firms such as Netflix, Facebook, Google, to pay tax in India. The principle was first introduced in the Finance Bill 2018-19.

About SEP:

- The concept of Significant Economic Presence ('SEP') was introduced in the Income-Tax Act, 1961 ('the Act') from April 1, 2018 i.e. A.Y. 2019-20 to tax the income of the non-resident arising from transactions relating to any goods, services or property in India, including allowing download of data or software or carrying on business activities in India through digital means.

5th MAY 2021**Section 142 of Social Security Code**

- Section 142 of the Social Security Code, 2020 has been notified by the Ministry of Labour & Employment covering the applicability of Aadhar.
- The notification of section will enable the Ministry of Labour and Employment to collect Aadhaar details for the database of beneficiaries under various social security schemes.
- The National Informatics Centre is creating a National Database for unorganised workers. The portal aims to collect data of migrant workers as well.

About Social Security Code

- The Social Security Code was introduced in 2019. The main objectives of the code was to club the existing laws. It introduced universal social security for unorganised workers and also health and insurance benefits for gig workers.
- It merged eight existing laws. This included Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, Employment Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, Compensation Act, 1923.

SUTRA Model

- Questions are being raised by many scientists about a government-backed model, 'SUTRA' to forecast the rise and ebb of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The model can predict the future only if the virus dynamics and its transmissibility do not change. In

case of COVID-19, the nature of the virus has been changing continuously.

- The model was incapable to predict the future under different scenarios. However, its predictions till February 2021 fitted in perfectly.

About Model:

- SUTRA standing for Susceptible, Undetected, Tested (positive) and Removed Approach earlier gained a public eye when one of its expert members informed in October 2020 that India had crossed the COVID 19 peak. The prediction for the second wave, however failed and the rising number of cases are a standing proof of the same.
- This SUTRA Model is backed by Gol and was developed by professors from IIT Kanpur, IIT Hyderabad.

Mayflower 400

- A team of researchers claimed that the Mayflower 400 ship is the world's first unmanned vessel to navigate across the Atlantic ocean.
- The world's first artificial intelligent ship is the 50-foot (15-metre) trimaran, which weighs nine tonnes and navigates with complete autonomy, and is preparing for a transatlantic voyage.

Key features:

- It is 15 metres long and weighs nine tonnes. It is basically a trimaran.
- It navigates with complete autonomy.
- The ship is to study marine pollution and analyze plastics in water. The voyage is important because more than 80% of the underwater world remains unexplored.
- It has been taught on how to avoid collisions. Thus, the ship can correct itself. It has been trained with hundred hours of audio data. The training will help the ship to detect the presence of marine animals and thereby provide information about the population distribution of these animals in the ocean.

- Sophisticated cameras and radars will act as the eyes and ears of the ship. There are six cameras in the ship.

6th MAY 2021

DDoS Attack

- Belgian government has restored its service after a massive distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack that cut off Internet access to numerous government, public, scientific and educational agencies.

About DDoS:

- DDoS is a Distributed Denial of Service. It is a cyber threat that seeks to disrupt the normal traffic of a targeted server.
- A distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack is a malicious attempt to disrupt the normal traffic of a targeted server, service or network by overwhelming the target or its surrounding infrastructure with a flood of Internet traffic.
- DDoS attacks achieve effectiveness by utilizing multiple compromised computer systems as sources of attack traffic. Exploited machines can include computers and other networked resources such as IoT devices.
- From a high level, a DDoS attack is like an unexpected traffic jam clogging up the highway, preventing regular traffic from arriving at its destination.

Socially and Economically Backward Classes

- The Supreme Court by a majority declared that only the President (the Centre) can take decisions on declaring socially and educationally backward communities for granting reservation and upheld the 102nd constitutional amendment denuding the power of states in this regard.
- The State Governments have been expanding the list of Socially and Economically Backward Classes to entitle the recipient communities with quota benefits.

102nd Constitutional Amendments

- 102nd Constitution Amendment Act, 2018 provides constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).
- It has the authority to examine complaints and welfare measures regarding socially and educationally backward classes.
- Previously NCBC was a statutory body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

NOTE:

Article 366 and Article 342 says that only the President shall identify SECC.

UDID Project

- The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Government of India has made it mandatory for all States/UTs to grant certificate of disability through online mode only using UDID portal from 1st June
- The UDID project has been under implementation since 2016. The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities recently made it mandatory for all states and Union Territories to issue a certificate of disability only using the UDID portal.

About UDID Project

- UDID is a Unique ID for Persons with Disabilities Project. The project aims to provide a Universal ID And disability certificates for persons with disabilities.
- The UDID project is being implemented with a view of creating a National Database for PwDs, and to issue a Unique Disability Identity Card (UDID) to each person with disabilities.
- **It includes -**
 - Online availability of data of Person with Disabilities across country through a centralized web application
 - Online filing and submission of registration application form for disability certificate/ Universal ID card; Offline applications may also be accepted and subsequently digitized by agencies

- Quick Assessment process for calculating the percentage of disability by the hospitals/ Medical Board
- Non-duplication of PwDs data
- Online renewal and update of information by Person with Disabilities/ on their behalf
- MIS reporting framework
- Effective management including interoperability of the benefits / schemes launched by the Government for PwD
- To take care of additional disabilities in future. Number of disabilities at the moment is seven and shall be subject to increase as per the new Act/ notification which can be up to 19 or more.

7th MAY 2021

Glyphosate

- The Telangana Government imposed a total ban on herbicide called as Glyphosate.
- Herbicide is an agent, usually chemical, for killing or inhibiting the growth of unwanted plants, such as residential or agricultural weeds and invasive species.

About Glyphosate

- First developed in 1970, glyphosate is scientifically N-(phosphonomethyl) glycine under the IUPAC system of nomenclature.
- The Glyphosate is a controversial herbicide usually used to kill weeds in cotton farms. The usage of Glyphosate is banned because it is carcinogenic. Also, it is being banned to control the illegal cultivation of HTBt cotton.

Issues:

- Around eight to ten lakh acres of land in Telangana are under herbicide tolerant HTBt cotton. These cultivations have not received proper permission for commercial use. The Genetic Appraisal Engineering Committee (GEAC) has not yet approved HTBt cotton.
- In 2015, the WHO study found that glyphosate is “probably carcinogenic to humans”. Since then

activists have been campaigning against glyphosate-based products.

Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)

- The European Union recently accepted Norway's, Canada's, and the United States' proposals to join the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) defense initiative.
- This is the first time that the European Union has approved a third country to join the PESCO programme. The countries will now take part in the European Military Mobility Project.

Key Points:

- The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is the part of the European Union's (EU) security and defence policy (CSDP) in which 25 of the 27 national armed forces pursue structural integration.
- Based on Article 42.6 and Protocol 10 of the Treaty on European Union, introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, PESCO was first initiated in 2017.
- The initial integration within the PESCO format is a number of projects which launched in 2018.

Military Mobility Project

- It is to aid the free movement of military units in the European Union through improvement of infrastructure and removal of bureaucratic barriers.
- It mainly revolves around two areas namely bureaucratic barriers (like passport checks) and requirement of advance notice. During NATO emergencies, the troops can move freely and fastly.

Osteocytes mapped for the first time

- The researchers from the Garvan Institute of Medical Research have mapped the Osteocytes for the first time. The researchers have outlined the genes that are switched on and off in osteocytes. This will help in diagnosing bone diseases that have genetic components.

About Osteocytes

- Osteocyte, a cell that lies within the substance of fully formed bone. It occupies a small chamber called a lacuna, which is contained in the calcified matrix of bone.
- Osteocytes derived from osteoblasts, or bone-forming cells, and are essentially osteoblasts surrounded by the products they secreted.
- The Osteocytes do not divide. Their average half life is twenty-five years.
- The skeleton of the humans keeps changing structurally throughout his life. Osteocytes are the most abundant cell present in bones. These osteocytes form a network similar to the neurons in the brain. There are more than 23 trillion connections between 42 billion osteocytes. This network is responsible for monitoring bone health.

