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MADE EASY WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEK-3

15th December - 21st December

Targeted Examinations:

CSE, ESE, PSUs, State Exams, SSC and Banking Exams

15th DECEMBER 2020

Miyawaki Method of Afforestation

- The Punjab State Police are establishing Miyawaki forests. Also, Bengaluru Hennagara Lake is going to have a new life with the Miyawaki Woods.

Key Points:

- The Miyawaki forest is a method of forestation established in Japan. It includes planting saplings in a specific field, resulting in the creation of thick forests within a relatively short period of time.
- It's also called the Potted Seedling Process. The technique is used to establish thick multilayer woods. It's named after the Japanese botanist who invented the system.
- It involves planting saplings in small areas, making them fight for resources and grow ten times quicker.
- The Kerala Forest Department has adopted the Miyawaki Afforestation Method to be used in government schools, offices and in waste lands.

About Miyawaki Afforestation Method:

- There's a hole dug. The size of the pit depends on the space available. The pit is then filled with one layer of compost, a layer of natural waste, such as coconut shells, bagasse, etc., and a top layer of red dirt. The saplings are then cultivated and managed on a daily basis for a year.
- The method would cost Rs 20,000 per 600 square feet of land.
- The method is ideal to turn backyards into mini-forests and hence is ideal for urban afforestation.
- The method blocks the sunlight from reaching the ground as the trees are planted as close as possible. This will prevent growth of weeds.

CAATSA

- The United States recently imposed sanctions on Turkey according to section 231 of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Sanctions were imposed for the acquisition of Russian anti-Missile S400 devices.
- The United States has reiterated its warning to India and other countries over the procurement of equipment from Russia.

Key Features of CAATSA:

- Section 231 of the CAATSA states that at least 12 sanctions, as defined in section 235, shall be enforced on an individual or country who, knowingly, participates in or operates for or on behalf of the Russian security or intelligence business.
- The following of the five sanctions is imposed under section 235 of the Act:
  i. Prohibition on the issuance of a US export licence for moved products or technologies.
  ii. Prohibition on deposits or loans by the United States Financial Institutions worth more than USD 10 million for a 12-month period.
  iii. Ban on assistance from the United States export-import Bank.
  iv. Requirement for the United States to oppose loans from International Financial Institutions.
  v. VISA restrictions.

■ NOTE:

S400 is an air defence Missile system capable of destroying hostile Jets, missiles and drones at a range of 380 kilometres.

San Isidro Movement

- The San Isidro Movement (MSI) is a persistent uprising against the oppressive government in Cuba.
- Cuba, the Caribbean republic, has been under Communist rule for more than 60 years.

About The Movement:

- The campaign against the state suppression of artistic works started in September 2018 in Cuba. The censorship was enforced by Decree 349.

- In opposition against the law, writers, artists and journalists assembled in San Isidro.
- San Isidro is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

K.V. Kamath Committee

- The Reserve Bank of India has constituted a five-member expert committee under K.V. Kamath. He was the former chief executive officer of ICICI Bank.
- The RBI recently said that it will cover twenty-six industries under the TLTRO (Targeted Long-Term Repo Operations) scheme.

Key Highlights:

- The Reserve Bank of India has advised the banks to use funds from two schemes, namely ECLGS 2.0 (Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme) and TLRO, to provide credit support to the sectors under stress.
- Under the TLRO scheme, banks can invest in corporate bonds, non-convertible bonds and commercial bonds issued by companies in particular sectors.
- The Government of India introduced ECLGS 2.0 to offer 100% collateral free additional credit to the twenty-six sectors under stress.

ICGS Saksham

- Goa Shipyard Limited has recently launched the fifth and final Offshore Patrol Vessel ICGS (Indian Coast Guard Ship) Saksham. It is expected to be commissioned by October 2021.

About the Offshore Patrol Vessels:

- These Patrol Vessels are armed with 30-mm guns.
- They weigh 2,350 tonnes.
- The hull of these vessels is designed to provide high fuel efficiency, sea-keeping qualities and crew comfort.
- The OPVs are to be equipped with Quick Response Boats for anti-piracy and rescue operations.

- The ICGS Saksham was constructed under the Indigenous Offshore Patrol Project.
- These ICGS are to be deployed in protecting the Exclusive Economic Zone of India.

16th DECEMBER 2020

Himgiri

- The Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) has recently unveiled a new Project 17A ship named Himgiri for the Indian Navy. The boat was launched into the waters of the Hooghly River. It's the Nilgiri Stealth Frigate class.

About Project 17A:

- The project was approved in 2015 by the Government of India. A total of seven advanced frigates are to be supplied to the Indian Navy under the programme. Four of these are to be designed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited and three are to be launched by GRSE.
- The cost of the project was estimated at USD 7 billion. The project has created job opportunities for more than 2,000 Indian businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises.
- The Project 17A ships are guided missile frigates. Each of these ships are 149 metres long. They have displacement of approximately 6,670 tonnes and a speed of twenty-eight knots. The ships being built under the project use the latest integrated construction methodology.

About Himgiri:

- It's the first of three ships constructed by GRSE. Project 17A ships are fitted with advanced sensors, indigenous weapons and are equipped with gas turbine propulsion.
- Earlier, Himgiri was commissioned by the Indian Navy in 1974 and decommissioned in 2005.

Human Development Report, 2020

- The United Nations Development Programme issued a study on human development. According to the survey, India ranked 131th among 189 countries in the Human Development Index.

Key Points:

- India's human development index was 0.640. India was 129 in 2019. This year's index adopted new metrics, including CO2 pollution and material footprint, and introduced a Planetary Pressure – Modified Human Development Index (PHDI).

- Life expectancy at birth in India was 69.9, though maternal mortality was 174. The maternal mortality rate is one in hundred thousand live births. Women's share of seats in Parliament in India was 11.6 per cent (as of 2017).

- Norway, Ireland and Switzerland occupied the top 3 ranks in the report. These countries were followed by Hong Kong, Iceland and Germany at 4th, 5th and 6th places respectively.

- China was ranked at 85th position and Pakistan was ranked at 154th position.

About Index:

- The Human Development Report was first released in 1990 by Indian Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen and Pakistani economist Mahboob Ul Haq.

- The Human Development Index is prepared on the basis of factors such as life expectancy at birth, women's political participation and maternal mortality.

- A study on human evolution was produced in 2020 under the theme "Human Development and Anthropocene."

Brand India Mission

- The Government of India is launching the Brand India Mission to promote the quality of goods made in India. The mission is being piloted by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Brand India mission:

- Under the Brand India Project, both Indian and foreign customers need to be informed about goods manufactured in India.

- Brand India will sell tags to manufactured products made in India. In order to obtain the sticker, the imported products shall conform with the health and safety requirements set down in the Regulations.

- The mission is to initially focus on the tyre and Rubber Industry ecosystem. For this rubber plantations are to be encouraged through support from private investment.

Regional Climate Centre

- India is to create a Regional Climate Centre in the mountainous area of the Himalayas.

- The centre will offer weather-related services to India and to its neighbours as well.

Key features:

- The centre will assist in understanding the physical processes that are happening in the Himalayas.

- Apart from the centre, the Himansh located at high altitude of the Himalayas is already undertaking weather research activities in the Himalayas.

17th DECEMBER 2020

India's First Maritime Theatre Command

- India's first Maritime Theater Command (MTC) will be launched in 2021. The MTC will take control of the 7,516 km long coastline, the whole Indian Ocean area and 1,382 islands.

About Maritime Theatre Command:

- The MTC would subsume the Western Naval Command (Mumbai), the Andaman Tri-Service and the Nicobar Command (Port Blair), the Eastern Naval Command (Vizag) and the Southern Air Command (Thiruvananthapuram).

- The MTC will report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the CDS (Chief of Defence Staff).
- The key goal of the Maritime Theater Command is to incorporate the capabilities of the Indian Air Force, the Indian Navy, the Army and the Coast Guard.
- It is the first geographical theatre command being created as a part of the biggest ever military restructuring plan.
- Similar theatre commands are to be launched for the land borders with China and Pakistan.

Background:

- India currently has 17 single-service commands. It comprises seven commandos of the Army, three commandos of the Navy and seven commandos of the Indian Air Force. Just two current Tri-Service Commands appeared during the Kargil War of 1999.
- The command of Andaman and Nicobar was formed as a geographical command in October 2001. The command of the nuclear arsenal was initiated in January 2003.
- One of the main roles of the CDS is to ensure the convergence of the three services.

DakPay

- DakPay is an application initiated by India Post Payment Bank as part of its ongoing efforts to provide the country with digital financial inclusion.

Key features:

- The customers of India's Post Payment Bank and the postal service can now run their banking services digitally through the DakPay mobile app.
- The programme also helps consumers to order and make use of postal financial services at their doorstep.
- Customers can submit money via an application by carrying out domestic money transfers and scanning the QR code and making payments to dealers.
- It provides interoperable banking services to the utility bill payment services and also to the customers of any banks.

Maharashtra Shakti Bill

- The Maharashtra Government recently enacted the Maharashtra Shakti Criminal Law (Maharashtra Amendment) Act 2020 and the Special Court and Machinery for the Enforcement of the Maharashtra Shakti Criminal Law in 2020.

Key Features of the Bill:

- The bill aims to add a third clarification to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, which is about rape. It speaks of the 'Projection of Consent.'
- Compensation of ten lakhs of rupees for cosmetic surgery and facial reconstruction shall be given to the victims of the acid attack.
- The court could be sentenced to death if the perpetrator is charged with gang kidnapping, rape or child abuse.
- The bill aims to finish the trial within 30 days, which is 60 days currently.

Old Enigma Encryption Machine

- Recently, divers uncovered the Enigma decoding machine used by the Nazis in the Baltic Sea. The divers found the system while scanning the seabed with sonar instruments for discarded fishing nets that could damage the life of the shore.

About Enigma:

- Enigma is an encryption device used by the German Nazis during the Second World War to encode coded messages.
- The use of these computers made it very difficult for the Allied Powers to decrypt and decipher the encoded German messages.
- The plugboard of the Enigma machines was similar to that of the telephone switchboard. Each letter to be substituted for another at regular intervals creating a ciphertext. Every time a letter is pressed the movable parts in the machine will change positions.

18th DECEMBER 2020

Vision 2035

- NITI Aayog recently published a white paper entitled Vision 2035: Public Health Surveillance in India. It is part of the work to improve the health services of India.
- The paper calls for the integration of three-tier healthcare programmes in India viz. Primary, secondary and tertiary Ayushman Bharat.

Objectives:

- To make the public health monitoring system more predictive and sensitive and to improve preparedness for intervention at all levels.
- Improving processes for the exchange of data between the Center and the States.

■ NOTE:

- According to the White Paper, 75 percent of re-emerging or emerging illnesses are zoonotic and 61 percent of deaths and 55 percent of injury are caused by non-communicable diseases of existing health conditions.

Digital Voter ID Card

- The Digital Voter ID card is the electronic version of the EPIC or the Elector's Photo Identification Card. This will make the ID card available on the people's phone.
- It can be downloaded via OTP authentication.
- This will allow the Election Commission to reduce the costs of copying and shipping hard copies. At present, EPIC is only available as a hard copy and must be created by the electors on the day of the referendum.
- At the time of application for enrolment in the voters list, an elector must provide his or her mobile number to the electoral commission system. When the name of the voter is included in the electoral register, he or she will be intimated by e-mail or SMS.

COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network (Co-WIN)

- The Union Government recently announced that people can self-register for COVID-19 vaccine through the new mobile application called Co-WIN.

Key points:

- COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network (Co-WIN) is a multimedia portal for the Covid-19 Vaccination Distribution programme established by the Government of India.
- As per the COVID Operating Guidance provided by the Ministry of Health, the COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network (Co-WIN) framework will be used to monitor registered recipients and COVID-19 vaccines on a real-time basis.
- The Co-WIN application will have its own components.

About Co-WIN-20:

- 'CoWin-20' is also a mobile application being developed to record data on vaccines, to compile a database of healthcare staff and to log a Covid-19 vaccine.
- The CoWin-20 app can also submit real-time data from cold storage facilities that hold Covid-19 vaccines.

19th DECEMBER 2020

Western Sahara Dispute

- Recently, US President Donald Trump supported Morocco's claim to the Western Sahara. Morocco is opening diplomatic ties with Israel in exchange.
- Israel is the fourth nation to have a stable relationship with Israel after the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan. The UAE has reached an Abraham Deal with Israel to normalise its relations with Israel. The arrangement was brokered by the United States.

Background of Western Sahara Conflict:

- The war in Western Sahara is a conflict between the Polisario Front and the Kingdom of Morocco.

- Polisario Front is a Saharawi rebel national liberation movement that seeks to end Morocco's involvement in the Western Sahara.
- Since the Territorial withdrawal of Spain in 1975-76, there were three territories: Mauritania, Morocco and the Polisario Front. In 1976, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). SADR in the Western Sahara is recognised by the African Union, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), as well as the European Union.

Moroccan Wall:

- It is a 2,700-kilometre-long structure made of sand flowing across Western Sahara. It divides the Moroccan areas to the west from the Polisaro-controlled areas.
- According to the United Nations Referee Mission in Western Sahara, the wall is also applied to the internationally recognised territory of Mauritius.

Young Champions of the Earth

- The United Nations Environment Programme recently named seven dynamic Environmentalists as its Young Champions of the Earth.
- The Young Champions of the Earth prize is awarded every year to seven entrepreneurs under the age of thirty. These entrepreneurs should have bold ideas for sustainable environmental change.
- The winners of the award receive mentoring, seed funding, communications support to amplify their efforts.

Prize winner from India:

- **Vidyut Mohan (India):** He is the co-founder of Takachar. He has built affordable and portable biomass upgrading equipment. It allows farmers to prevent open burning by converting crop to fuels, activated carbon and fertilizers.

Himalayan Serow

- The Himalayan Serow has been recently seen for the first time in the harsh desert of the Himalayas. The Himalayan Serow was considered to be extinct in the Himalayas.

About Himalayan Serow:

- The Himalayan Serow is an exceptionally shy species that can only be seen during the winter as it migrates to lower elevations.
- It is a medium-sized animal with a thick body, a large head, small arms, mules like ears and a coat of dark fur.
- It is typically located at altitudes between two thousand and four thousand metres. They are found only in the eastern, western and central Himalayas. They're not found in the trans Himalayas.

Conservation Status:

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature had listed the Himalayan Serows as 'Near Threatened'. The IUCN has now changed their status to 'vulnerable'.
- It has been listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Also, it has been included in CITES Appendix-I.

20th DECEMBER 2020

Project Loon

- Project Loon, a division of Google, has recently announced that the balloons have been in the stratosphere for almost a year.
- The balloons are packed with helium and span a distance of 2.1 lakh kilometres. Project Loon seeks to provide Internet access in rural areas of the world.

About Project Loon:

- Project Loon seeks to access the Earth's stratosphere to link the Internet to distant areas of the planet. The mission entails helium-filled balloons staying in the stratosphere and developing airborne broadband networks. The project has partnered with a variety of countries and their infrastructure providers to provide Internet access.
- At present, the Internet communication system consists of only two simple means of supplying a link, namely a Space Signal and a Ground Signal.

Green Ammonia

- Context: The Government of India has recently invited tenders for Green Ammonia Schemes to reduce the country's reliance on imports.
- Under the jurisdiction of the Union and the Ministry of New and Clean Energies, SECI will be bidding for Green Ammonia schemes (Solar Energy Corp. of India Ltd).

About Green Ammonia:

- Green ammonia refers to ammonia produced by a process that is 100% sustainable and carbon-free.
- One way to make Green Ammonia is by using hydrogen from the electrolysis of water and nitrogen isolated from the air. These two elements are then integrated into the Haber process. In the process, nitrogen and hydrogen react together at high pressure and temperature to create ammonia.

■ NOTE:

- Currently, ammonia making is not a green process. It is now made from methane. It is called the Steam Methane Reforming (SMR) process. Around 90% of carbon dioxide is produced from the SMR process.

Western Disturbances

- The recent Western Disturbance is responsible for an increased amount of snowfall in J&K, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and the rapid dip in Delhi's temperature.

About Western Disturbances:

- It travels from the west to the east of the planet. Disturbance is a region of decreased (disturbed) air pressure.
- Western Disturbances are tropical storms that originate in the Mediterranean region. Winds fly at a speed of 43 km/h. These Western Disturbances continue to fly until they are inhibited by the Himalayas.

- The Western Disruptions are being driven by the Westerlies (prevailing winds that blow from the west to east).
- The Western Disturbance is a low-pressure system responsible for precipitation, snowfall and fog in northwestern India.
- On average, four to five western disturbances occur per season. The atmospheric conditions created by one western disturbance, such as a foggy atmosphere or flooding, prevail before the next western disturbance approaches.

Significance:

- These Western Disturbances bring mild to strong rainfall to the north-west of India. Rainfall is critical for rabi crops that help to meet the food security of the country. The volume and distribution of rainfall varies with each western disturbance.
- Western disruptions often cause heavy rainfall, causing crop destruction, flooding and avalanches.

Gujarat's Billimora-Waghai Rail Service

- Billimora Waghai Line is one of 11 such routes to be abandoned by Western Railways due to feasibility problems. The Railway Board recently accepted the plan by the Western Railways to permanently close its narrow-gauge sections and other uneconomic branch lines in its system.
- Billimora-Waghai Line is a 107-year-old narrow gauge railway line in Gujarat. In 2018, it was one of the five routes laid out by the Indian Railways for preservation as a 'industrial heritage'.

About Billimora-Waghai line:

- The line began with the Gaekwad Dynasty, which ruled the Princely State of Baroda in 1913. It was built by the British and run by the Gaekwad Baroda State Railway owned by Sayajirao Gaekwad III. The GBSR was owned by the Princely State of Baroda.
- The kingdom was governed by the family of Gaekwad. It was used by the Gaekwad rulers to move precious sag wood from the forest.

21ˢᵗ DECEMBER 2020

CMS-01 Communication Satellite

- Includes frequencies ranging from 4 GHz to 8 GHZ. These frequencies are commonly used for networking, Wi-Fi, weather radar systems and monitoring purposes.

Key Points:

- It is a communications satellite designed to offer services in the expanded C frequency spectrum range and will cover the Indian mainland and the Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands, the ISRO.
- It is estimated that the satellite will have a life of more than seven years.
- It was injected precisely into its pre-defined sub-geostationary transfer orbit (GTO).
- CMS-01 is considered to be a replacement of the aged satellite GSAT-12. It provides services like tele-education, tele-medicine, disaster management support and Satellite Internet access.

About C-Band:

- It contains frequencies from 4 GHz to 8 GHZ. These frequencies are commonly used for communication, Wi-Fi, weather radar and monitoring purposes.

NETRA

- The Indian Space Research Organization has recently set up a dedicated Space Situational Awareness Control Center (SSA) in the region, named NETRA.

Key points:

- NETRA is the Space Object Network Monitoring and Review (NETRA). The goal of the project is to control, map and secure India's space properties.
- A few nations, such as Russia, have their own Space Situational Awareness Centres. The ISRO SSA Control Center has been set up on the ISTRAC campus in Bengaluru.

About NETRA

- In essence, NETRA can detect both natural and man-made phenomena in satellite orbits. Tracking artefacts of this type is called Space Situational Awareness (SSA). It is the science of monitoring objects to send warnings about collisions. This is really important as space is getting over crowded with private and government satellites. They pose significant threats to the Earth's orbital satellites.
- The key components of NETRA are the optical telescope, the radar and the control room.
- It will act as a hub of all the SSA activities within India.
- It will conduct concurrent processing of data from the upcoming observational facilities for space objects' orbit determination, catalogue generation and correlation.

RuPay Contactless Feature

- National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has recently launched the RuPay Contactless (Offline) feature. The RuPay prepaid card was launched by NPCI in 2014 to include a one-card feature for all payments. Since then, several enhancements have been introduced to the card.

Key Features:

- The new feature called "RuPay Contactless (Offline)" is a reloadable wallet feature where consumers can store money to ensure fast and smooth transactions. Money can be used from this feature at Points of Sale, including during bad internet connectivity.
- The NCMC (National Common Mobility Card) offline wallet can be used for payment of tickets in transit, including taxi fares, metros, bus tickets, etc., allowing instant cashless payments.
- It uses 'Near Field Communication (NFC)' technology and thereby reduces the time taken for doing physical payments.

G7 Summit 2021

- Prime Minister Modi was invited by his British counterpart, Boris Johnson, to attend the G7 summit in the United Kingdom to be held in 2021.

- India is one of the three guest nations in South Korea and Australia. Following its extension to cover 10 democracies, the grouping is expected to become a D10 this year.

D10 Group of Countries:

- The D10 Group of Countries has been suggested by the United Kingdom. Britain has suggested the development of the D10 by adding the G7 nations, India, Australia and South Korea.

- D10 accounts for the ten greatest democracies in the world. D10 is being developed as an alternative to 5G equipment and hardware to avoid depending on China's Huawei. It seeks to create alternative providers of 5G equipment and other technology, avoiding dependency on China.

About G7

- The G7 was formed to address the political and economic issues posed by the 1973 oil crisis.

- It is a community comprising the seven most developed countries in the world, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada. It was dubbed the G8 earlier.

- It was renamed the G7 after Russia pulled out of the party in 2014. These countries have the highest gold deposits and are the largest donors to the United Nations Finances.

Chilahati-Haldibari Rail Link

- After more than 5 decades, India and Bangladesh are expected to reopen the Chilahati-Haldibari rail link to improve communication between the two countries.

- This is part of the commitment to restore and operationalize the six rail connections between the two countries prior to 1965. The connection between Chilahati and Haldibari was broken during the war between India and Pakistan in 1965.

Key points about link:

- It is a broad gauge route from Kolkata to Siliguri. The rail route would improve the connectivity of West Bengal, Assam and Bangladesh. The rail link would also help to improve bilateral trade between countries.

- India and Bangladesh have been focused on rail connectivity and have made a lot of progress lately. In July 2020, countries promoted the launch of parcel train and container services.