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MADE EASY WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEK-4

22nd May - 31st May

Targeted Examinations:

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

Current Affairs MADE EASY

(22nd May to 31st May 2020)

<u>22nd May 2020</u>

International Day for Biological Diversity

- International Day for Biological Diversity is marked on May 22 every year by the United Nations to highlights the biodiversity issues. This date was chosen to commemorate the adoption of convention at Rio Earth Summit held in 1992.
- This year, the day is being celebrated under the theme *Our Solutions are in Nature*. The theme emphasizes on solidarity, hope and importance of working together to build future of life in harmony with nature.
- The year 2020 is called Super Year for Biodiversity.
- To celebrate the International Day for Biological Diversity, 2020, following five initiatives on conservation of biodiversity have been launched:
    - **Biodiversity Samrakshan Internship Programme:** It aims at engaging 20 students in post graduate programme for a period of 1 year. The programme will engage creative students that are willing to learn about biodiversity conservation and natural resource management.
    - **Illegal Trafficking of Endangered Species Campaign:** It was launched by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
    - **Not All Animals Migrate by Choice Campaign:** It was launched by Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.
    - **Biodiversity Conservation and Biological Diversity Act, 2002:** A Webinar series was launched on the Act.
    - **World Wildlife Fund Model Conference of Parties:** It includes younger generation to engage them towards imprint of humanity towards biodiversity.

RBI: Recent Economic Measures

- The Monetary Policy Committee recently met in an emergency meeting to review the current economic outlook and impacts of COVID-19.
- **Key Decisions Taken:**
    - Repo rate reduced from 4.4% to 4%.
    - Reverse repo rate reduced to 3.35%.
    - RBI will provide another 90-day extension to offer loan facilities.
    - The term loan moratorium has been extended till August 31.
    - Rs. 15,000 crore line of credit allocated to EXIM banks.
    - RBI has increased export credit period from 12 months to 15 months.
    - The rules of Consolidated Sinking Funds have been relaxed. This will enable states to meet 45% of redemption of their market borrowing.

General Financial Rules

- The Union Government has amended General Financial Rules (GFR) to make sure the goods and services that are of value less than Rs 200 crores are procured from domestic firms. This amendment was announced in Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.
- The General Financial Rules are set of rules that deal with matters that involve public finances. They were first issued in 1947 bringing together all the existing orders. They are instructions that pertain to financial matters.
- The GFR was last revised in 2017 to make sure that any organization can manage its business without compromising its flexibility.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-III

- The Phase III of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana was launched in December 2019, which focuses on consolidation of 1,25,000 km of road routes. It mainly includes major rural links.
- The scheme aims to connect the Gramin Agricultural markets, hospitals and higher secondary schools.
- **Context:**
    - Under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, the Coir Geo Textiles are to be used in rural road development. This is to be done by the National Rural Infrastructure Development Agency.
    - Coir Geotextiles are made of coir and last up to 3 to 5 years. The coir geotextiles degrades into humus. This enriches the soil.
    - Geotextiles are permeable fabrics that have the ability to filter, separate, reinforce, drain and protect. They are made from polypropylene. Their main applications are in the civil engineering industry. They are used in airfields, embankments, reservoirs, canals, dams, silt fences, etc. They have widened uses in erosion control, especially in hill slopes.

23rd May 2020

Treaty on Open Skies

- The Treaty on Open Skies is an international treaty established for an aerial surveillance system for its participants. The observation is allowed over the territories of the signatories. It enhances mutual understanding and gives confidence to all participants.
- There are currently 34 members that are part of the treaty. It was signed in 2002.
- The treaty is considered as one of the most wide-ranging arms control effort that promotes transparency and openness amongst military forces.
- **Context:**
    - The USA President Donald Trump recently announced that USA will withdraw from Treaty on Open Skies, accusing that Russia has not stuck to its part of the

deal. This is the third international arms pact the USA has pulled out from since Donald Trump became the president.

- **Note:** India is not a part of this treaty, though India has open sky agreement with Japan, which it signed in 2017.

Status Paper on Government Debt 2018-19

- The Ministry of Finance has released Status Paper on Government Debt 2018-19, according to which the overall debt of Centre and states declined by 68.7% in March 2018 to 68.6% in March 2019.
- The Status Paper on Government Debt is being produced by the Ministry of Finance since 2010.
- **Key Findings:**
  - The debt of Central Government dropped marginally from 45.8% in 2017-18 to 45.7% in 2019.
  - The Average Interest Cost of the Union Government remained unchanged in the year 2018 to 2019. Around 94% of centre's liabilities were of domestic debts.
  - The external debt was 2.7% of GDP.
  - The tenure of the longest security was 37 years.

24th May 2020

KHUDOL Initiative

- The United Nations has listed the KHUDOL initiative of Manipur as one of the top 10 global initiatives to fight against COVID-19.
- KHUDOL is an initiative of a NGO called Ya_All. Under the initiative, the NGO provides food, hygiene and health of LGBTQ community, daily wage workers, and people with AIDS.
- The organization mobilized network of 100 volunteers. Through the volunteers the organization distributed health kits and sanitary pads.
- Manipur has been creating inclusive safe space for the transgender community. The state has been taking extra care towards the transgender community as compared to other states. Separate rooms and toilets were established for the transgender community.

Employment State Insurance Scheme

- The Employment State Insurance Scheme (ESIC) was launched in 1952 under the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948. The act was the first legislative social security step for workers in India.
- The scheme was designed to help employees fight against their sickness, disablement, maternity and death due to employment.

- **Context:**
  - The payroll data of the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) has been released, which says that around 821,000 new members have joined ESIC social security scheme.
  - The data was released by National Statistical Office (NSO). According to the data the subscribers to the scheme in 2018-19 were 14.9 million and it increased to 38.3 million in March 2020.
  - **Recent Developments:** Recently, Government of India reduced the rate of contribution under the scheme. The employer contribution was reduced from 4.75% to 3.25% and Employee contribution was reduced from 1.75% to 0.75%. Also, the employees that are earning Rs 137 or less per day are exempted from payment of their contribution.

25th May 2020

ANITA

- The Antarctic Impulsive Transient Antenna (ANITA) experiment has been designed to study ultra-high-energy (UHE) cosmic neutrinos by detecting the radio pulses emitted by their interactions with the Antarctic ice sheet.
- The neutrinos in the ice produce radio pulses due to Askaryan effect (The phenomenon where a particle travelling at a velocity faster than light in a dense electric medium, produces shower of secondary charged particles).
- **Context:** The NASA researchers have found high energy particles erupting from ice in the Antarctic region. The researchers believe that these particles are proof to parallel universe.

World Steel Report

- The World Steel Association released the World Steel Report, according to which the crude steel report of India declined by 65%. During April 2020, the steel output of India was 3.13 million tonnes.
- **Key Highlights**
  - In March 2020, India faced a decline of 14% steel output as compared to March 2019.
  - In April 2019, the global steel output was 157.67 million tonnes, whereas in April 2020, the output declined to 137.09 million tonnes.
  - The report also says that the global steel output declined by 13%.
  - China has reported 1.7% fall in steel production, whereas USA and South Korea's steel production declined by 32% and 8.4% respectively. The other global steel producers such as European Union, France, Italy, Turkey, Spain, Russia, Ukraine and Brazil also faced decline in their output.
  - India is currently operating under its National Steel Policy 2017, under which India is to increase its steel production to 300 million tonnes by 2030.

26th May 2020

Human Challenge Trial

- Human Challenge Trial involves infecting volunteers intentionally with COVID-19 virus to speed up the process of vaccine development.
- **Phases of Vaccine Development**
  The three phases of clinical trials of Vaccine Development include:
  - **Phase-I:** During this phase, small groups of people receive the vaccine.
  - **Phase-II:** Vaccine is given to those people whose characteristics are similar to those for whom the new vaccine is intended.
  - **Phase-III:** Vaccine is given to several thousands to test the safety and efficacy. During this phase, the participants either receive placebo or vaccine. Placebo is something that looks like treatment but is not in reality. It can be a sugar solution or saline.
- **Context:** The World Health Organization (WHO) recently announced eight candidates to enter human trials for COVID-19 vaccine.

Mizoram: Industry Status to Sports

- The Mizoram State Government has recently provided industrial status to Sports. This has been done by the government to attract investment in the Sports industry.
- The Mizoram Government is framing new industrial policy under which the sports have been included as sports category.
- Mizoram is also known for wrestling and other indigenous games such as relay races using bamboo (Kalchhet kal), Insuknawra (rod pushing), Inarpathai (cock fighting), etc.

27th May 2020

Char Dham Pariyojana

- The foundation stone of Char Dham Pariyojana (Char Dham Highway Development Project) was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016. It is a two-lane National Highway project currently under construction in Uttarakhand with a total investment of around Rs. 12000 Crore.
- Originating from Rishikesh, Char Dham highway network will have four distinct routes connecting the four holy places in Uttarakhand viz. Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.
- **Context:** Nitin Gadkari, the Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways inaugurated the Chamba Tunnel under Chardham Pariyojana through video conference.

suo motu

- Suo motu is a latin phrase which means "on its own". This means that the court has taken the matter into cognisance on its own and without any plaintiff. A plaintiff is a person or entity which files a case or petition in the court.
- **Context:**
  - Recently, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of migrant workers issue and noted that there have been inadequacies and certain lapses on the part of the Central and State governments in dealing with the migrant workers crisis during the lockdown.
  - In the current matter, the apex court has taken suo motu cognisance on the basis of newspaper and media reports on helpless migrants forced to travel thousands of miles on foot or cycles.
  - The three judge bench of the Supreme Court has ordered the Centre and states to immediately provide transport, food and shelter free of cost to the stranded migrant workers.

28th May 2020

State Health Register

- The Karnataka State Government has announced that it will launch a State Health Register to collect data of all its domicile citizens. The register is first of its kind in the country.
- The need to maintain such a register has been raised by COVID-19 pandemic. The project is to be launched from Chikkaballapur district in Karnataka.
- The register is to be created in the future with 50% partnership from private hospitals.
- The State Government is to undertake a survey including every person of the state. The current population of Karnataka is 6.5 crores.
- The survey is to be conducted through ASHA workers, educational department staffs, staffs in primary health centre and revenue officials.

Pai

- The National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) has launched Artificial Intelligence based chatbot called Pai. It aims to increase financial inclusion in India.
- **Key Highlights**
  - The PAI can be accessed 24/7.
  - The queries can be sent by the users through text or voice.
  - In order to send queries, the users shall use websites of RuPay, NPCI and UPI.
  - The AI based chatbot was created by Bengaluru-based startup CoRover Private Limited.
- The other key services provided by NPCI are as follows:
  - BharatQR: It is a code developed for ease of payments and interoperability.
  - BHIM: A mobile application for unified payment interface

- IMPS (Immediate Payment Service): A real time inter-bank payment system
- National Common Mobility Card
- FASTag
- RuPay
- Unified Payment Interface (UPI)

Khelo India

- The Khelo India was launched to boost sports culture in India. The scheme is being implemented by Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. Under the Scheme, the Ministry conducts school level, college level and university level programmes.
- The Government of India under the scheme provides financial assistance of Rs 5 lakhs per annum to athletes over the period of 8 years.
- **Context:** The Sports Authority of India recently transferred Rs 30,000 to the accounts of Khelo India athletes. The authority has spent Rs 8.25 crores in all to achieve this. The sports allowance has been provided for the athletes to travel to their home town, to keep up their diet at home and to suffice other miscellaneous expenses.

29th May 2020

Agneeprastha

- The foundation stone for a missile park named Agneeprastha was laid at INS Kalinga.
- The INS Kalinga is an Indian Navy establishment that reports to the Eastern Naval Command. It is located in Vishakhapatnam.
- The Missile Park aims to provide information about the history of INS Kalinga. The Missile Park will also be a motivational arena for minds that are interested in missiles and missile technologies.
- The Park is to operate on solar power. A 2 MW Solar Photo voltaic plant was commissioned at INS Kalinga as well.

Rozgar Setu Scheme

- The Madhya Pradesh Government has launched Rozgar Setu scheme to help migrant workers.
- The scheme will provide employment to migrant workers that have returned to their homes. The scheme is to conduct a complete survey on population of the state.
- Along with the scheme, the Madhya Pradesh State Government is planning to implement Swamitva Scheme which was launched to map rural lands using drones.

United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2019 Award

- On the eve of International Day of UN Peacekeepers which was marked on May 29, Indian Army Major Suman Gawani and Brazilian Naval Officer Carla Monteiro de

Castro Araujo were presented with the United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the year 2019 award. For the first time, the award is being shared by two of the officers.

- The Award was created in 2016. The award recognizes the effort and dedication of military peace keepers that are involved in promoting peace and security in different parts of the world.
- Major Suman Gawani is the first Indian to receive the award.

Financial Stability and Development Council

- The Financial Stability and Development Council is an apex body constituted by Government of India. The idea was mooted in 2008 by the Raghuram Rajan Committee.
- The Council deals with issues such as financial sector development, financial stability, inter-regulatory coordination, financial inclusion, and financial literacy.
- The council composes of Governor of RBI, Chief Economic Advisor, Finance Secretary, chairman of SEBI, IRDA (Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority), PFRDA (Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority) IBBI (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India), among others. The Union Finance Minister chairs the meeting.
- **Context:** The Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman chaired Financial Stability and Development Council meet in which current domestic and global economic situation, financial vulnerabilities issues, liquidity of Micro financial institutions, Non-Banking Financial corporations, regulatory responses, were reviewed.

30th May 2020

Jal Jeevan Mission

- Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide good quality drinking water to all the households in the country by 2024. In order to achieve this, the Government of India has allocated Rs 3.6 lakh crores.
- **Context:**
  - The Union Government approved Rs 445 crores under Jal Jeevan Mission for Chhattisgarh for the year 2020-21.
  - The Funds will be used to help Chhattisgarh achieve its mission of providing tap water connection to all the households in the state by 2023-24.

National Career Service

- The National Career Service (NCS) mainly works to bridge gaps between the people searching for jobs and those that hire them. It aims to reach out to the youth that are in search of employment.
- The NCS also offers counselling from trained professional. They will act as a guide in job seeking.

- It provide employment related services to career counselling, job matching, vocational guidance, job search, information on skill development courses, etc. Around 1000 employment exchanges are integrated with NCS. This includes 200 model career centres as well.
- **Context:** The Ministry of Labour and Employment is to provide Career Skills Training under its National Career Service Project in partnership with TCS.

31ˢᵗ May 2020

Kerala Fibre Optic Network (K-FON)
- The Kerala Government has announced that the ambitious project of the state called the Kerala Fibre Optic Network (K-FON) project which is to be implemented by December 2020.
- It aims to link all the houses and offices in the state with optical fibre network. In order to achieve this, the State Government has allocated Rs 1548 crores. The project is to be implemented by the State IT Infrastructure Limited and State Electricity Board, both owned by the State Government.
- Around 30,000 government offices are to benefit from the project. It also includes educational institutions.
- Alongside, the project is to give a push to e-Health programmes of the state. The project will also benefit airports, seaports, IT parks, e-commerce platforms, etc.

Responsible AI for Youth

- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has launched an initiative called "Responsible AI for Youth" and an Artificial Intelligence Portal called www.ai.gov.in.
- The programme and the portal were launched to commemorate the first anniversary of second tenure of Narendra Modi Government.
- The Responsible AI for Youth was launched targeting the youth in the country. The programme aims to provide a platform to empower their new age technology skills especially AI based skills.