

## Prelim Bits 05-01-2023| UPSC Daily Current Affairs

### Asian Pacific Postal Union

*India will take over the leadership of the Asian Pacific Postal Union (APPU) and Dr. Vinaya Prakash Singh will take over the charge of Secretary General of the Union for a tenure of 4 years.*

*This is the first time an Indian is leading an international organization in the postal sector.*

- Asian Pacific Postal Union (APPU) is an intergovernmental organization of 32-member countries of the Asian-Pacific region.
- APPU is headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand.
- APPU is the only Restricted Union of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in the region, which is a specialized agency of the United Nations.
- **Goal** - To extend, facilitate and improve postal relations between member countries and to promote cooperation in the field of postal services.
- **Functions** - APPU is the regional center for various UPU projects.
- It ensures that the region is integrated into the global postal network in the best possible way by fulfilling UPU projects in the region.
- Secretary General leads the activities of the Union.
- Secretary General is also the Director of the Asian Pacific Postal College (APPC).

*Asian Pacific Postal College is the largest intergovernmental postal training institute in the region.*

### References

1. [PIB - India takes over leadership of the Asian Pacific Postal Union](#)
2. [Asia Pacific Postal Union](#)

### Bad Loans

*The Scheduled Commercial Banks had written off bad loans worth Rs.10.1 lakh crore during the last five financial years.*

- A bad loan is that which has not been 'serviced' for a certain period and with time, becomes less and less certain to be paid back in full.
- Such loans are [written-off](#) by banks to reduce the burden of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).

- **Recognising NPAs** - In 2009, the RBI brought out norms to categorise and recognise NPAs.
- Categories of NPAs based on the period for which the asset has remained non-performing.

Sub-standard Assets	NPA for a period less than or equal to 18 months.
Doubtful Assets	NPA for a period exceeding 18 months.
Loss Assets	Uncollectible

- If an asset has been 'doubtful' for a certain period, the value of that asset must be provided for in parts, as the asset ages.

### Status of Bad loans in last 5 years

- In the last five years loans written off by scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) totalled Rs.10.1 lakh crore.
- Significantly, only Rs.1.32 lakh crore (13% of write-offs) has been recovered.
- **Need** - For the government and regulatory authorities to have a good view of the financial system.
- To prevent 'ever greening' of loans (i.e., lending more to an already stressed asset in the hope that it could be brought back to its feet).
- **Impacts** - With strategy of recognition, resolution, recapitalisation and reforms NPAs had since declined to 5.9% by March 2022.

### References

1. [The Hindu - Has India tided over the problem of bad loans?](#)
2. [RBI - Master Circular](#)

### XBB.1.5

*India's first case of the XBB.1.5 subvariant of Omicron was confirmed in Gujarat by the National Genome Sequencing consortium.*

- XBB.1.5 subvariant sub-lineage of Omicron, mutated from XBB strain which itself is a recombinant.
- XBB.1.5 is nicknamed as Kraken (a mythological sea monster), by an evolutionary professor on Twitter.
- Covid variants are currently officially named by an expert group convened by the WHO which follows the Greek alphabet for variants of concern.
- The last Greek-named variant is omicron
- **Recombinant** - Recombinant means its genome is the product of the genomes of two different strains spliced together.
- Recombinant can happen in 2 ways
  1. When two strains infect a person at the same time; a recombinant variant is produced as they replicate together.
  2. When existing recombinant strains mutate, a recombinant strain arises.

- Previous recombinants of COVID-19 are - XD (Delta + Omicron), XE (BA.1 + BA.2) and XBB (BA.2.10.1 + BA.2.75)
- The XBB strain mutated further and became XBB.1.5.

*XBB.1, which also descended from XBB, accounted for 14% of new cases in India around mid-December 2022.*

- The defining mutation of XBB.1.5 is F486P, which is a part of the virus's receptor-binding domain (the part of the spike protein that attaches the virus to a cell).
- Receptor-binding is an important site that antibodies against the Omicron variant target.
- Thus, XBB.1.5 is more immune-evasive and more transmissible.
- The original vaccines still continue to be effective as it doesn't appear to cause severe disease.

*Original Antigenic Sin - A phenomenon whereby repeated boosting 'saturates' the immune system and mitigates its response to future shots.*

## References

1. [The Hindu - A new coronavirus variant on the block](#)
2. [Live Mint - Omicron's XBB.1.5 Sub-variant explained](#)

## Deepor Beel

*The Assam Cabinet approved the construction of elephant underpasses in 7 jumbo corridors between Azara and Kamakhya railway stations along the boundary of Deepor Beel.*

- Deepor Beel is a permanent freshwater lake in Kamrup district, Assam.
- The 4,014-hectare beel is located to the south-west of Guwahati city.
- It is a riverine wetland, lying in a former channel of the Brahmaputra River, it lies to the south of the main river channel.



- It was designated as a Ramsar site in 2002 for sustaining a range of aquatic life forms besides 219 species of birds.
- Deepor beel is the only Ramsar site in Assam.
- In 2021, the Environment Ministry notified it as Eco-sensitive zone.
- Deepor Beel is also a bird sanctuary and an Important Bird Area.
- It is home to various native and migratory birds which flock in the winter.

## References

1. [The Hindu - Assam approves road underpasses in jumbo corridors](#)

## Siyom Bridge

*The Union Defence Minister inaugurated the Siyom Bridge in Arunachal Pradesh, along with 27 other infrastructure projects.*

- A strategically important bridge over the Siyom River in Arunachal Pradesh by the Border Roads Organisation.
- The bridge will hugely augment India's border infrastructure, mostly along the Chinese border, from Ladakh to Arunachal.
- The Siyom Bridge on the Along-Yingkiong Road is a 100-meter 'Class-70' steel arch superstructure.
- The Along-Yingkiong road shares over 3,000-km long border with China — the Line of Actual Control (LAC).



- **Significance** - The bridge can withstand movement of armoured columns along with artillery.
- It will facilitate faster induction of troops, heavy equipped and mechanised vehicles to forward areas of the Upper Siang district - Tuting and Yingkiong.

## References

1. [The Hindu - Arunachal Pradesh gets a strategic bridge](#)

2. [Times of India - Crucial bridge to LAC in Arunachal Pradesh](#)
3. [The Print - Bridge opened in Arunachal Pradesh](#)

