Prelim Bits 16-05-2023 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

India and EFTA

India and EFTA take further steps towards a new Trade and Partnership Agreement (TEPA) in the Ministerial meeting held in Brussels.

- The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is a four-nation bloc founded by the Stockholm Convention in 1960.
- The inter-governmental organisation is for the promotion and intensification of free trade to benefit the member countries.
- It was founded as an alternative for states that did not wish to join the European Community.
- Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland are the EFTA States.
- The four EFTA countries are not part of the European Union (EU).



- **India and ETFA -** India is the ninth-largest trading partner of EFTA, accounting for about 2.5% of India's total merchandise trade in 2020-21.
- India's main exports to EFTA - Textiles, chemicals, gems, and jewellery, machinery, and pharmaceuticals.
- India's main imports from EFTA - Machinery, chemicals, precious metals, and medical instruments.
- **TEPA -** India and EFTA started negotiating a broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement in 2008.
- The free trade agreement between the two regions is officially dubbed as Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA).
- TEPA will enhance two-way commerce, investment flows, job creation and economic growth between India and EFTA countries.

References

1. PIB - India and EFTA take further steps towards a new TEPA
2. The European Free Trade Association
3. Live Mint - India and EFTA make progress in talks on TEPA

UPSC Chairman

Educationist Manoj Soni will take oath as the chairman of Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

- Mr. Soni joined the Union Public Service Commission as the member in 2017.
- Prior to his appointment in the UPSC, Soni has served three terms as Vice-Chancellor.

- **UPSC -** The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) is a Constitutional Body under Article 315-323 Part XIV of the Constitution.
- UPSC is the central recruiting agency of India.
- It conducts examinations for appointments to the All-India Services and various Group A and Group B Services of the Union.
- The Commission with maximum of 10 members is headed by a Chairman.
- **Appointment, Removal and Tenure -**The appointment of the Chairman and members of UPSC is given in the **Article-316** of the Constitution.
- The Chairman and other members of UPSC shall be appointed the President of India.
- The Chairmen and members can be removed only by the President.
- The chairman and members hold office for a term of five years or until they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- Their salary is charged from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- **Acting Chairman -** the President can appoint one of the members of the UPSC as an acting Chairman when,
    - The office of the Chairman falls vacant or
    - The Chairman is unable to perform his/her functions due to absence or some other reason.
- **Members -** The Commission can have a maximum of 10 members.
- The number of members is decided by the President under his discretion.
- The members of the commission are not eligible for the reappointment to the same commission.

References

1. The Hindu - Manoj Soni to take oath as UPSC chairman
2. UPSC - Appointment of Chairman and members

Rehabilitation Council of India

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) spearheads transformation in education with national workshop on inclusive learning.

- The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is a statutory body under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- It was established in 1986 as a society and became a statutory body in 1993 by Rehabilitation Council of India Act of 1992.
- Its main mandate is to standardize, regulate, and monitor training programs in the field of special education and disability.
- RCI is also responsible for maintaining the central rehabilitation register (CRR) and promoting research in this domain.
- The Council also prescribes minimum standards of education and training for 16 categories of professionals and personnel allocated to RCI.
- The RCI plans to initiate various national programs that promote flexible education, experiential learning, practical skill-based education, and ultimately, inclusive education.

References

1. PIB - Spearheads Transformation in Education with National Workshop on Inclusive Learning
2. Rehabilitation Council of India

Adhaar-enabled Payment System

Scammers are reportedly using the gaps in Aadhaar-enabled Payment System (AePS).

- AEPS is a bank led model which allows online interoperable financial transaction.
- These transactions are done at PoS (Point of Sale / Micro ATM) through the Business Correspondent (BC) of any bank using the Aadhaar authentication.
- AePS removes the need for OTPs, bank account details, and other financial details.
- It empowers the customers to use Aadhaar as their identity to access their respective Aadhaar enabled bank account and perform basic banking transactions.



- **Services provided under AePS -** Balance enquiry, cash deposit, cash withdrawal, remittances through a Business Correspondent and Aadhaar to Aadhaar Fund Transfer .
- **Requirement for transaction -** It allows fund transfers using only the
  - Bank name
  - Aadhaar number
  - Fingerprint captured during Aadhaar enrolment
- **Transfer Limit -** The banks define limit of fund transfer. The RBI does not have such limit.

References

1. IE - Gaps in AePS abused by cybercriminals
2. Cashless India - Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS)
3. NPCI - Aadhaar Enabled Payment System

Groundwater Extraction and Land Subsidence

The groundwater exploitation is silently sinking the ground beneath India's feet.

> *Aquifers are deep water channels that are stores of percolated water.*

- Agricultural practices in northwest India are heavily dependent on groundwater withdrawal.
- Over time, when the underlying aquifers aren't recharged, they run dry.
- The layers of soil and rock above the dry aquifers start to sink.
- The subsidence from groundwater extraction was gradual and barely visible annually.
- **Similar Activity -** soil settlement is seen in the mines where the soil sinks in to fill voids created from mining.
- **Government Measures -** The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) monitors water levels 4 times a year.

- However, CGWB does not analyse the consequences of 'over exploitation.'
- **Study -** A study by the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, reported land subsidence of nearly 7-12 cm per year and groundwater extraction rates of 46 cm to 236 cm annually in Punjab and Haryana.
- **Other areas -** A research paper linking groundwater extraction to subsidence in Gandhinagar, Gujarat published, shows that the issue was not specific to north India alone.
- Over exploited groundwater blocks and land subsidence has been reported in Kolkata and parts of eastern India too.

The Jakarta case
• Jakarta is the fastest-sinking city in the world and its core land subsidence problem is excessive extraction of groundwater.
• Excessive groundwater extraction, particularly from deep aquifers results in massive pumping of both the water and air.
• Jakarta has lost its hydraulic support in the soil.
• Extra pressure on the soil owing to the growing population and massive urban development, leads to compaction and land subsidence.
• This phenomenon is also seen in Semarang (Indonesia), Bangkok (Thailand), Yokohama (Japan) and Mexico City.
• The deep groundwater cannot be replenished immediately since the process is slow hence, the control of groundwater extraction crucial.

References

1. The Hindu - Groundwater exploitation is silently sinking the ground
2. DTE - Jakarta acts to stop being the next Atlantis

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