Prelim Bits 22-09-2021 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

R Value

The R value, which reflects how rapidly the COVID-19 pandemic is spreading, dropped to 0.92 by mid-September after going over one in August-end.

- R-value or R-factor or R0 (R-naught) or Reproduction Rate refers to how many persons an infected person infects on an average.
- It indicates the speed at which the Covid infection is spreading in the country, along with the 'efficiency' of the spread.

  Higher the R-value number, the more contagious is the disease caused by the virus and the faster it will spread in the community.

- **Interpretation** - An R-Factor of 1 would mean that an infected person is giving the virus to 1 other person. An R-Factor of 5 would mean that 1 person is spreading the virus to 5 other people.
- A NITI Aayog member says that R number should be 0.6 or below. If it is above 1, it shows that it is a significant problem and the virus wants to spread.

Vishnuonyx

Recently, the fossil of Vishnuonyx neptuni (Neptune's Vishnu) species was found in the Hammerschmiede area, a fossil site in Bavaria, Germany.

- Between 12.5 and 14 million years ago, the members of the Vishnuonyx genus of otters lived in the major rivers of southern Asia.
- Fossils of these now extinct otters were first discovered in sediments found in the foothills of the Himalayas.
- This is the first discovery of any member of the Vishnuonyx genus in Europe; it is also its most northern and western record till date.
- **Vishnuonyx** were mid-sized predators that weighed 10-15 kg.
- They depended on water and could not travel long distances over land.
- Its travels over 6,000 km to Europe were probably made possible by the geography of 12 million years ago, when the Alps were recently formed.
- These Alps and the Iranian Elbrus Mountains were separated by an ocean basin, which would have made it easier for the otters to cross it.

ADB's GDP Growth Forecast

Asian Development Bank (ADB) has cut its forecast for India's GDP growth in 2021-22 to 10%, from 11% projected earlier, with downside risks dominating the economic outlook.

- The ADB also sees rising input costs fuelling inflation to a faster 5.5% pace, than the 5.2% previously estimated.
- But, it expects the economy to rebound strongly in the remaining 3 quarters of 2021-22 and grow by 10% in the full fiscal year before moderating to 7.5% in 2022-23.
- Still, the risks to the outlook tilt to the downside and depend mainly on the evolution of the pandemic.
- The main risk weighing on the outlook is if vaccination hasn't progressed widely, the health system gets strained and the government needs to put restrictions on mobility again.

The Reserve Bank of India expects 9.5% growth in 2021-22.

Low-Carbon Bricks

Researchers have developed energy-efficient low-carbon bricks using construction and demolition waste (CDW) and alkali-activated binders.

- These low-carbon bricks were developed from CDW waste through an alkali activation process using fly ash and ground slag.
- Low-carbon bricks do not require high-temperature firing, and avoid the use of high-energy materials such as Portland cement.
- The technology will be a solution to,
    1. Disposal problems associated with C&D waste mitigation,
    2. Conservation of mined raw material resources and
    3. Reduction of emission.

Annual consumption of bricks and blocks in India is about 900 million tonnes.

Construction industry generates 70–100 million tonnes per annum of CDW.

Simplification of Coffee Act

Ministry of Commerce & Industry decided to simplify the Coffee Act, 1942.

- The Coffee Act enacted in 1942 has some regulatory issues.
- **Registration** - Any person owning land with coffee plants planted on it, or divided amongst different estates has to apply for registration at the registration officer appointed by State Government.
- They have to do so within a month of the date when they became owner.
- Once registered, it can only become invalid if the registering officer cancels it.
- Punishment for non-compliance to above mentioned procedure is a fine of up to Rs. 1000 and a fine of up to Rs. 500 for each subsequent month.
- **Coffee Board of India** is a statutory organization constituted under the Coffee Act, 1942.
- It functions under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Curing means the application to raw coffee of mechanical processes other than pulping for the purpose of preparing it for marketing.

- **Selling** - All saleable coffee has to have been cured at licensed curing establishment or delivered to the buyer through a curing establishment licensed under the Act.
- It can also be sold in accordance to a license procured from the Coffee Board. Owners can also sell uncured coffee.
- Every establishment made with the purpose of curing coffee must get a license from the Board for the same.
- The Act states that Coffee cannot be exported from India by anyone except the Board or with the authorization of the Board.

Transport and Marketing Assistance Scheme

Several coffee exporters have asked the Government to hand hold the agri-exporters with increased assistance under Transport and Marketing Assistance Scheme (TMA) to maintain their competence in the global market.

- Announced by the Department of Commerce (Ministry of Commerce & Industry) in 2019, TMA Scheme aims to increase farm export from India.
- TMA scheme provides financial assistance for **transport & marketing** of certain agriculture products **by air and sea** to some European and North American countries.
- Assistance would be provided in cash through a direct bank transfer as part reimbursement of freight paid.
- Level of assistance would be different for different regions as notified from time to time for export of eligible products.
- All exporters, duly registered with relevant Export Promotion Council as per Foreign Trade Policy, of eligible agriculture products, shall be covered under this scheme.

Source: PIB, The Hindu, The Indian Express, India.com

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