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Current affairs summary for prelims

15 January, 2024

Voluntary freezing of trading accounts

Context: *Starting July 1, 2024, investors in India can freeze or block their trading accounts if they detect suspicious activity. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has mandated stock brokerages to establish a framework for this by April 1, 2024.*

SEBI's Proposal:

- **Introduction of Voluntary Freezing/Blocking:**
  - SEBI has proposed a framework for trading members to offer the option of voluntary freezing or blocking online access to trading accounts in case of suspicious activities.
  - The guidelines will be formulated by the Brokers' Industry Standards Forum (ISF) in collaboration with stock exchanges and under SEBI's supervision.
- **Timeline for Implementation:**
  - The guidelines are expected to be established by April 1, 2024.
  - Implementation is set to begin from July 1, 2024.

Rationale Behind the Facility:

- **Shift to Online Trading:** The move is prompted by the shift in the Indian stock broking industry from traditional call and trade to predominantly online trading.
- **Addressing Investor Concerns:** SEBI acknowledges that investors often encounter suspicious activities in their trading accounts and emphasizes the need for a mechanism akin to freezing/blocking ATM or credit cards.
- **Protecting Investors from Fraud:** The new facility aims to safeguard investors from potential fraudulent activities in their trading accounts.

Guidelines Overview:

- **Detailed Policy for Freezing/Blocking:** The guidelines will outline a comprehensive policy for clients to voluntarily freeze or block their trading accounts.
- **Request Modes and Processing Time:**
  - Modes through which clients can request freezing/blocking will be specified.
  - Timeframes for processing requests and implementing the freezing/blocking will be delineated.
- **Trading Member's Actions:**
  - Guidelines will detail the actions trading members must take upon receiving a request for freezing an account.
  - Processes for re-enabling clients for trading will be outlined.

Implementation Timeline:

- **Stock Exchange Responsibility:** Stock exchanges are tasked with ensuring that the guidelines are implemented by trading members from July 1, 2024.
- **Reporting Requirement:**
  - Stock exchanges are required to establish reporting mechanisms for trading members to enforce the system.
  - A compliance report on this implementation should be submitted to SEBI by August 31, 2024.

Understanding Trading Accounts:

- **Role in Securities Trading:** A trading account facilitates the buying and selling of securities in the stock market for retail investors.
- **Connection with Demat and Bank Accounts:**
  - It is linked between the demat account (for holding securities electronically) and the bank account.
  - Opened with a stock broking firm, it grants access to the trading platform of a stock exchange for executing trades on behalf of the account holder.

30 crore Ayushman Cards created

Context: *The Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana has generated 30 crore Ayushman Cards to date.*

- **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri - Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) Milestone:**
  - AB PM-JAY achieved the significant milestone of creating 30 crore Ayushman cards on January 12, 2024.
  - The scheme, executed by the National Health Authority (NHA), aims to provide Rs. 5 lakhs health cover annually to 12 Crore beneficiary families.
- **Ayushman Card Creation Drive:**
  - Ayushman card creation is a key initiative under AB PM-JAY.
  - More than 16.7 crore Ayushman cards were generated in the last two financial years.
  - In 2023-24 alone, over 7.5 crore Ayushman cards were created, translating to approximately 181 cards every minute.
- **On-Spot Services and Initiatives:**
  - Ayushman card creation is integrated into on-spot services during the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, launched on November 15, 2023.
  - The campaign expedited card creation at grassroots levels, with more than 2.43 crore cards created during the Yatra.
  - The Ayushman Bhava campaign, initiated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, further contributed with over 5.6 crore Ayushman cards.
- **Ayushman App for Last-Mile Connectivity:**
  - NHA introduced the 'Ayushman App' to facilitate Ayushman Card creation at the last mile.
  - The app allows self-verification in four simple steps, promoting Jan Bhagidari (public participation).
  - The app has been downloaded over 52 lakh times since its launch on September 13, 2023.

Face to Face Centres
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➢ **State-wise Ayushman Card Statistics:**
- Uttar Pradesh leads with 4.83 crore Ayushman Cards, followed by Madhya Pradesh (3.78 crore) and Maharashtra (2.39 crore).
- A total of 11 states have over 1 crore Ayushman cardholders.

➢ **Gender Parity and Empowerment:**
- Approximately 14.6 crore Ayushman cards have been created for females, aiming for gender parity.
- 49% of Ayushman Cards issued to female beneficiaries, with 48% of treatment availed by females.

➢ **Ayushman Card as a Symbol:**
- Ayushman Card symbolizes equity, entitlement, and empowerment.
- It assures protection against the burden of disease and catastrophic expenditure for poor and deprived families.

➢ **Healthcare Impact:**
- AB PM-JAY has facilitated 6.2 crore hospital admissions, saving more than Rs. 79,157 crores in out-of-pocket expenditure.
- Without the scheme, the total cost of treatment would have been nearly double, saving over Rs. 1.25 lakh crore for poor and deprived families.

Massive Reduction of Green Cover in the Cauvery Basin

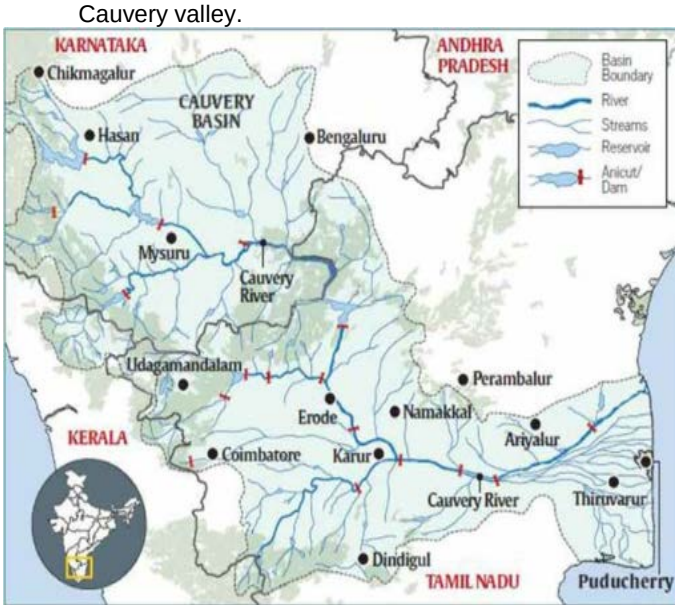
Context: *NGT issued notices to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala governments after an IISc report revealed a substantial reduction in green cover in the Cauvery basin over the past five decades.*

➢ **NGT Notices and IISc Report:**
- NGT issues notices to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala based on an IISc report.
- The report highlights a substantial loss of 12,850 sq. km of green cover in the Cauvery basin between 1965 and 2016.

➢ **Extent of Deforestation:**
- Massive reduction in greenery with agricultural and horticultural activities covering 73.5% of the basin.
- Only 18% remains as forested areas, and dense forests constitute just 13% of the region.
- Natural green areas reduced from 28,154 sq. km to 15,345 sq. km over the past 50 years.

➢ **State-wise Impact:**
- Karnataka lost 57% (9,664 sq. km), Tamil Nadu lost 29% (2,905 sq. km), and Kerala lost 27% (279 sq. km) of green cover.
- Prominent national parks like Bandipur and Nagarhole facing significant declines in forest cover due to human intervention and development.

➢ **NGT's Categorization and Urgency:**
- NGT categorizes the issue as a matter of environmental law.
- Urges prompt responses from the concerned states, and the case will be heard at the Chennai bench of the Tribunal.
- Emphasizes the urgency of addressing environmental challenges and safeguarding the ecosystems in the Cauvery valley.



➢ **Ecological Impact of Western Ghats Deforestation:**
- **Monsoon and Deforestation Connection:**
  - IIT-B study reveals a 35% loss (33,579 sq. km) of green cover in the Western Ghats since 1920.
  - Deforestation negatively affects monsoon patterns, influencing 25% to 40% of Tamil Nadu's monsoon bounty.
  - Simulations show a decline in daily rainfall and a 0.25-degree Celsius increase in surface temperature across Tamil Nadu.
- **Challenges Faced:**
  - Deforestation exacerbates water scarcity in regions like Tamil Nadu, impacting crucial Kharif crops.
  - Rising temperatures due to bare land exposure affect moisture buildup, hindering the natural rain cycle.
- **Environmental Conservation Efforts:**
  - Several projects, including Isha Foundation's "Rally for Cauvery," aim at safeguarding the Western Ghats through large-scale tree planting.

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- However, doubts are raised about the long-term impact, and critics emphasize addressing root causes like large dams disrupting water flow.

- **Holistic Approach Needed:**
  - Experts suggest a holistic approach, including urban pollution control, proper waste management, and restoring riparian ecosystems.
  - Sustainable agricultural practices like water-efficient crop selection and drip irrigation are crucial for long-term river conservation.
  - Addressing multifaceted challenges beyond afforestation is essential for sustainable river management.

NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Bhogali Bihu

Assam is celebrating the Magh Bihu, the vibrant harvest festival, also known as Bhogali Bihu and Maghor Domahi.

About the Bhogali Bihu:

- Bhogali Bihu, also **known as Magh Bihu**, is a **harvest festival** celebrated in **Assam** in the month of January.
- It is a festival of food that marks the end of the harvesting season.
- The eve of the festival is called **Uruka,** a night when family and friends gather to feast around a bonfire.
- The word Uruka comes from the **Deori-Chutia** word Urukuwa, which means "**to end".**
- During Bhogali Bihu, **people organize sports like cock fighting and buffalo fighting.**
- The Assamese celebrate Bihu three times a year to mark the different farming cycles.
- The other two Bihu festivals are **Rongali Bihu,** which is celebrated in **April** and **Kongali Bihu**, which is celebrated in **October**.

Ken-Betwa Link Project

Recently, a major dam project of the Madhya Pradesh government, a part of the Centre's marquee Ken-Betwa river interlinking project, was found to be in violation of environment clearance laws by an expert committee of the Union Environment Ministry.

About Ken-Betwa Link Project:

- The Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) is a **river-interlinking project** that aims to **transport excess water from the Ken River in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa River in Uttar Pradesh.**
- **Ken meets with Yamuna near Banda district of Uttar Pradesh and Betwa joins Yamuna in Hamirpur district of UP.**
- The project is the **first under the National Perspective Plan** for the interlinking of rivers.
- The project will reportedly generate **103 MW of hydroelectric power and 27 MW of solar power**.
- This Project comprises two phases, with Phase I will focus on the **Daudhan Dam complex** and its **subsidiary units**, while Phase II will involve the **Lower Orr Dam**, **the Bina Complex Project** and the **Kotha Barrage**.
- The main aim of this project is to address **water scarcity** and **enhance irrigation**.
- It will benefit the regions of **Chhatarpur**, **Tikamgarh** and **Jhansi**.

Tibetan Brown Bear

Recently, a rare Tibetan brown bear species has been found roaming in the high-altitude areas of North Sikkim.

About Tibetan Brown Bear:

- The Tibetan brown bear **(Ursus arctos pruinosus),** is a subspecies of the brown bear that lives in the **eastern Tibetan Plateau**.
- It is **one of the rarest bear subspecies in the** world and is rarely seen in the wild.
- It is different from the **more common Himalayan black bear in appearance**, habitat and behavior.
- It lives in **alpine forests**, **meadows** and **steppes above 4,000 meters**.
- Adult male Tibetan blue bears can **reach 1.8–2.1 meters (6–7 feet) long,** with a shoulder width of 1 meter (3 feet) while females are likely smaller.
- It is an omnivore that **eats marmots** and **alpine vegetation**.
- It is known as **Dom gyamuk** in Tibet.
- It has been accorded the highest protection status under the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** by listing it under Schedule-I.
- It is also listed in **Appendix I** of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (**CITES**) as a protected species.

Mount Marapi

Mount Marapi on the Indonesian island of Sumatra erupted again recently spewing volcanic ash that blanketed nearby villages and prompted more than 150 people to evacuate.

About Mount Marapi:

- Mount Merapi is an active volcano in **Central Java,** Indonesia.
- Its name translates to "**Mountain of Fire**" in Javanese.
- It is one of the **world's most active and dangerous volcanoes**, with a history of frequent and sometimes violent eruptions.
- It is the most active of Indonesia's 130 active volcanoes and erupted regularly since 1548.
- Indonesia is located on the subduction zone, part of the **Pacific Ring of Fire** and experiences frequent volcanic and seismic events.

Pacific Ring of Fire:

- The Pacific Ring of Fire, also known as the **Circum-Pacific Belt** is a horseshoe-shaped region around the Pacific Ocean that is known for its volcanic activity and earthquakes.
- The Ring of Fire also contains the **Mariana Trench**, the **world's deepest ocean** trench at 7 miles deep.

Place in News

Turkiye

Recently, Turkiye carried out airstrikes targeting Kurdish militants in Iraq and Syria following an attack on a Turkish military base in Iraq which killed nine soldiers.

Turkiye (Capital: Ankara)

Location: Turkiye also known as Turkey, is a transcontinental country located in both Southeastern Europe and Southwestern Asia.

Boundaries: Turkiye shares its border with **Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran** (East), **Mediterranean Sea and Aegean Sea** (Southwest and West), **Greece and Bulgaria** (Northwest), **Black Sea** (North), **Georgia** (Northeast) and **Iraq** (Southeast), **Syria** (South).

Physical Features:

- **Mount Ararat (Agri Dagi)** is a dormant volcano and the highest point in eastern Turkey.
- **Lake Van** is the largest lake in Turkey.
- **Pamukkale, meaning "cotton castle"** in Turkish, is a natural site in Denizli Province in southwestern Turkey. This area is **famous for a carbonate mineral** left by the flowing of thermal spring water.

Personality in News

Prabha Atre

Prabha Atre (13th September 1932-13th January 2024)

Prabha Atre, a legend classical singer and considered the doyen of the Kirana Gharana was born at Pune in Maharashtra.

Contributions:

- She invented new Raags such as **Apurva Kalyan**, **Darbari Kauns**, **Patdeep-Malhar**, **Shiv Kali**, **Tilang-bhairav**, **Ravi Bhairav** and **Madhur-kauns**.
- She was **influenced by Ustad Amir Khan** (Indore gharana) for khyal and Bade **Ghulam Ali Khan (Kasur gharana)** for **thumri**.

Awards and Honours:

- Prabha Atre won the **Padma Shri in 1990**, **the Padma Bhushan in 2002** and the **Padma Vibhushan in 2022**.

Personality in News

Munawwar Rana

Munawwar Rana (26th November 1952-14th January 2024)

Munawwar Rana, a renowned Urdu poet was born at Rae Bareli in Uttar Pradesh.

Contributions:

- One of his most celebrated works was the poignant poem **'Maa,'** which eloquently portrayed the virtues of motherhood within the traditional ghazal form.
- He used **Hindi and Awadhi** words and avoided Persian and Arabic which makes his poetry accessible to Indian audiences and explains his popularity in the poetic meets held in non-Urdu areas.

Awards and Honours:

- In **2012** he was awarded **Maati Ratan Samman by Shaheed Shodha Sansthan** for his services to Urdu literature.
- He was honoured with the **Sahitya Akademi Award in 2014 for Shahdaba**, a poem written by him.

POINTS TO PONDER

- What initiative did Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently launch to promote cleanliness at pilgrimage sites? **- Swachh Mandir Campaign**
- Which printing press recently published a book titled 'Modi: Energising A Green Future'? **- Pentagon Press**
- What is the name of the guideline issued by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India aimed at instilling human values and professional ethics in higher education institutions? **- Mulya Pravah 2.0**
- Who has recently been appointed as the Secretary of Railway Board? **- Aruna Nayar (IRPS)**
- Who has recently assumed the position of Chief of Staff at Southern Naval Command? **- Rear Admiral Upal Kundu**