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Current affairs summary for prelims

8 May, 2024

Religion-based Reservation in India

Context: *During the election season, India is engaged in discussions about fundamental constitutional matters regarding reservation.*

➢ **Constitutional Framework and Affirmative Action:**

- The Indian Constitution focuses on equity rather than formal equality, allowing for special provisions to address historical disadvantages.
- Articles 15(4) and 16(4) enable the state to provide reservations for socially and educationally backward classes, Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

➢ **Religion-Based Reservations in Legislation:**

- Article 15 prohibits discrimination based solely on religion, caste, sex, race, or place of birth.
- Reservations are considered an extension of equality rather than an exception to non-discrimination clauses.
- Special provisions are allowed for any group considered socially or educationally backward, regardless of religion or caste.

➢ **Examples of Religion-Based Reservations:**

- In Kerala, Muslims were included in the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, forming a sub-quota within the OBC quota.
- Karnataka implemented a 4% reservation for Muslims within the OBC quota in 1995.
- Tamil Nadu provided a 3.5% reservation for Muslims within the OBC quota in 2007, excluding upper-caste Muslims.
- Andhra Pradesh attempted to provide a 5% reservation for Muslims based on their social backwardness, but it was struck down due to procedural issues.

➢ **Legal Challenges and Recommendations:**

- Various commissions and committees, such as the Sachar and Misra panels (Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee in 2006 and Justice Ranganath Misra Committee in 2007), have recommended reservations for Muslims based on their backwardness compared to other communities.
- - Legal challenges have arisen regarding the identification of socially backward Muslims and the constitutionality of specific reservation laws.

➢ **Key judgments include:**

- **E P Royappa vs State Of Tamil Nadu (1973):** The Supreme Court held that equality is a dynamic concept and cannot be confined within traditional limits.
- **State of Kerala vs N M Thomas (1975):** Reservation is considered an extension of equality rather than an exception to non-discrimination clauses.
- **Indra Sawhney vs Union of India (1992):** The Supreme Court laid down guidelines for reservations, including that any social group, regardless of its identity, if found backward, is entitled to be treated as a backward class.
- Despite efforts to address the backwardness of certain religious communities through reservations, legal and procedural challenges persist, highlighting the complex nature of affirmative action in India..

Recipe for a Liveable Planet report

Context: *The report offers actions for countries to ensure food security, strengthen resilience against climate change, and support vulnerable populations during the transition to net zero emissions in the agrifood system.*

➢ **Impact of Replacing Diesel Irrigation Pumps with Solar Pumps:**

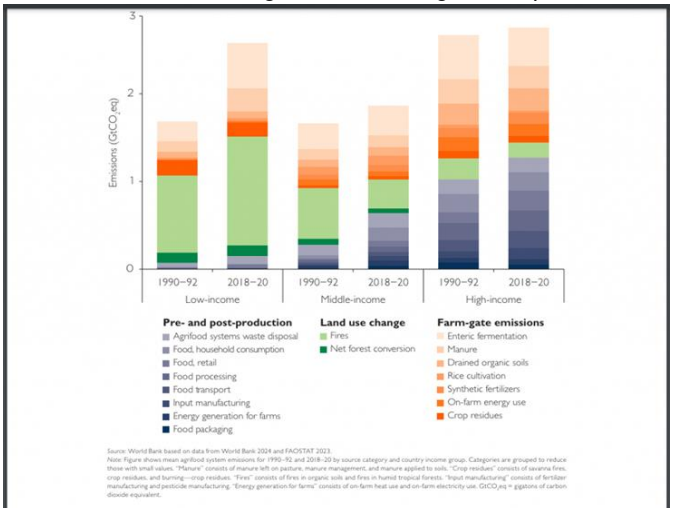
- Replacing a quarter of India's 8.8 million diesel irrigation pumps with solar pumps could reduce agrifood emissions by 11.5 million tonnes annually.
- This reduction surpasses the emissions prevented globally by electric vehicles and solar panels in 2020, as per a new World Bank report.
- The world's agrifood system emits around 16 gigatonnes of greenhouse gases (GHG) annually, constituting about one-third of global emissions, with projected growth.

➢ **Emission Sources in India's Agrifood System:**

- In India, 60% of agrifood emissions originate from the farm gate, with enteric fermentation being the largest

contributor, mainly due to livestock sector inefficiencies.

- While India's rice production has low emission intensity globally, its considerable emissions (4%) result from being the second-largest rice producer.



➢ **Renewable Energy Adoption in India's Agrifood System:**

- India has deployed over 272,000 solar-powered irrigation systems as of December 2020, showcasing the potential for significant emissions reduction in the sector.
- - The report indicates that 80% of agriculture sector mitigation potential in India could be achieved through cost-saving measures alone.

➢ **Top Emitters in Agrifood Systems:**

- China, Brazil, India, United States, and other populous countries are among the top agrifood system emitters.
- High-income countries (HICs) have the highest per capita agrifood system emissions, with historical emissions also significant, like in the case of the US.

➢ **Investments and Solutions for Emission Reduction:**

- Annual investments of $260 billion are required to halve agrifood emissions by 2030 and achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050.
- Solutions include low-emission farming methods, forest conservation programs, and shifting subsidies away from high-emission food sources.

➢ **Different Paths for Climate Goals:**

- High-income countries can support low- and middle-income countries in adopting low-emission farming methods and shifting subsidies.
- Middle-income countries can curb significant emissions through sustainable land use and greener practices.
- Low-income countries can focus on avoiding past mistakes and embracing climate-smart opportunities for greener economies, including forest preservation and restoration.
- **Benefits of Investments:** Investments would yield over $4 trillion in benefits, including improved human health, food security, job quality, and carbon retention in forests and soils.

India-Australia ECTA

Context: *Amidst trade negotiations between India and Australia, an Australian parliamentary committee raised concerns about child labor in India in a recent report to lawmakers.*

➢ **Key Features of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA):**

- The first Free Trade Agreement (FTA) India has signed with a major developed country in over a decade.
- - Encompasses cooperation across various economic and commercial aspects between the two countries.

➢ **Covered Areas in the Agreement:**

- Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin
- Trade in Services
- Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)
- Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures
- Dispute Settlement, Movement of Natural Persons
- Telecom, Customs Procedures
- Pharmaceutical products, and Cooperation in other Areas
- **Institutional Mechanism for Trade Improvement:** ECTA provides an institutional mechanism to enhance trade between India and Australia.

➢ **Tariff Line Coverage:**

- The agreement covers almost all tariff lines dealt with by India and Australia respectively.
- India gains preferential market access on 100% of its tariff lines from Australia, benefiting labor-intensive sectors like Gems and Jewellery, Textiles, leather, footwear, furniture, etc.
- Australia gains preferential access on over 70% of its tariff lines from India, including raw materials and intermediaries such as coal, mineral ores, and wines.

➢ **Visa and Work Opportunities:**

- Indian STEM graduates receive extended post-study work visas.
- Australia initiates a program granting visas to young Indians for working holidays.
- An annual visa quota of 1800 is established for Indian Yoga teachers and Chefs.
- **Job Creation Estimate:** The ECTA is estimated to create 10 lakh jobs as a result of increased economic activity.

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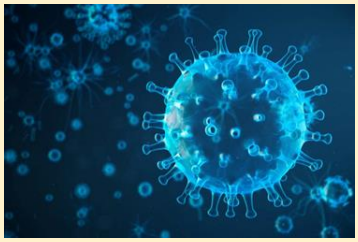
NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Superplasticizers

About Superplasticizers:

- Superplasticizers, **also known as high range water reducers**, are **chemical compounds** that allow for the **production of concrete with about 15% less water.**
- They are effective **water-reducing admixtures used in concrete** to enhance workability and **reduce water content** while maintaining desired properties.
- They are commonly **sulphonated melamine formaldehyde** or **sulphonated naphthalene formaldehyde** condensates.
- They aid in the production of '**flowing' concrete**, particularly beneficial for placing in inaccessible locations.
- They **enable the production of high-strength concrete** with normal workability and low water/cement ratios, reducing the heat of hydration in mass concrete structures.
- They reduce **inter-particle attraction** between cement particles, allowing for better dispersion with less water.
- They are widely used in various construction projects including **bridges**, **tunnels**, **dams** and **high-rise buildings** to improve concrete performance and durability.
- They play a crucial role in modern concrete technology, enabling the production of high-performance concrete with superior properties and reduced environmental impact.

H5N1



Recently, new data has revealed that bird flu, specifically the H5N1 strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), has been spreading among cows in the United States for nearly five months.

About H5N1:

- H5N1 is a **highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus strain** that primarily **affects birds** but can also infect humans and other mammals.
- It has caused outbreaks in **poultry and wild birds** in many countries, resulting in significant economic losses and posing a potential threat to public health.
- The virus primarily **spreads through contact with infected birds** or **their feces**, **saliva**, or **respiratory secretions.**
- **Human-to-human transmission is rare but possible**, typically occurring in close contact with infected individuals.
- In birds, H5N1 infection can cause severe **respiratory illness**, **decreased egg production** and high mortality rates.
- In humans, symptoms may include **fever**, **cough**, **sore throat, muscle aches**, **pneumonia**, and **acute respiratory distress syndrome** (ARDS).

Black Sea

Recently, Ukraine's exploding drone boats have been observed targeting smaller, high-speed vessels in the Black Sea.

About Black Sea:

- The Black Sea, also known as **the Euxine Sea** is located at the southeastern tip of Europe, between Europe and Asia.
- It is a large inland sea that borders six countries including **Georgia** (East), **Romania** (West), **Ukraine** (North), **Russia** (Northeast), **Turkey** (South) and **Bulgaria** (Southwest).
- It's located between eastern Europe and western Asia and is also known as the Euxine Sea. The Black Sea is **connected to the Mediterranean Sea by the Bosporus Strait**, **the Sea of Marmara** and **the Dardanelles Strait**.
- It is also connected to the **Sea of Azov by the Strait of Kerch**.
- It receives freshwater inflows from the **Danube**, **Dniepr** and **Dniestr rivers**.
- It has numerous islands, with the biggest ones including **Snake Island** (Ukraine), **Giresun Island** (Turkey) and **St. Ivan Island** (Bulgaria).
- Due to its unique geological and hydrological conditions, the **deeper waters of the Black Sea exhibit lower oxygen levels**, creating one of the **world's largest anoxic basins** with distinct environmental conditions.

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Place in News

Scotland

Recently, Scotland got its second leader in as many years, as parliament approved political veteran John Swinney to lead the country as First Minister.

Scotland (Capital: Edinburgh)

Location: Scotland is a country in the United Kingdom, located in the northern third of Great Britain and 790 surrounding islands.

Boundaries: Scotland shares its borders with the **Atlantic Ocean** (North & West), **the North Sea** (East & North-east) and **the Irish Sea** and **England** (South).

Physical Features:

- The highest point in Scotland is **Ben Nevis**, which is located near the town of Fort William in the Scottish Highlands.
- Some of the major rivers in Scotland include the River **Tay**, **River Clyde**, **River Spey**, **River Dee** and **River Tweed**.
- Scotland has various mineral resources including **coal**, **oil**, **natural gas**, **limestone**, **sandstone** and **granite**.

POINTS TO PONDER

- Recently, where was the 26th ASEAN-Indian Senior Officials' meeting held? **– New Delhi**
- What is 'MQ-9B Predator', recently seen in the news? **– High Altitude Unmanned Aerial Vehicle**
- Recently, which country clinched Men's AFC U-23 Asian Cup 2024 by defeating Uzbekistan? **– Japan**
- Recently, José Raúl Mulino has been elected as the new President of which country? **– Panama**
- Which asset management company has recently launched India's first Nifty Non-Cyclical Index Fund? **– Groww Mutual Fund**