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-Yinkiong 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 Yinkiong.

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

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