23 December 2024

National and International News

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)	**Why in news?**
	● External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that the central government has adopted a cautious approach to free trade agreements (FTAs) to protect the interests of farmers and MSMEs.
	
	Key Points:
	● Free Trade Agreements are comprehensive trade deals between two or more countries, aimed at reducing or eliminating trade barriers such as tariffs and import/export restrictions.
	● These agreements provide preferential access to markets by offering tariff concessions and lowering non-tariff barriers.
	● **Key features:**
	  ○ FTAs cover trade in goods (agricultural and industrial products) and trade in services (banking, IT, construction).
	  ○ Advanced FTAs may include chapters on investment, intellectual property rights (IPRs), government procurement, and competition policy.
	● **Types of Trade Agreements:**
	  ○ **Partial Scope Agreements (PSA):** Focus on a limited number of goods.
	  ○ **Free Trade Agreements (FTA):** Reduce tariffs between member countries while retaining individual tariff policies with non-members.
	  ○ **Customs Union:** Includes a common external tariff for non-members.
	  ○ **Common Market:** Facilitates free movement of goods, services, and factors of production.
	  ○ **Economic Union:** Coordinates macroeconomic and exchange rate policies among member nations.
	● **Major Trade Agreements of India:** India-ASEAN FTA, India-South Korea CEPA, and proposed agreements like India-UK and India-EU.
	
	Discuss:
	About **MSME**

AIMC (Automated & Intelligent Machine-aided Construction)	**Why in news?** ● Given the concerns over delays in the completion of many National Highway projects across the country, the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) has expedited the use of Automated & Intelligent Machine-aided Construction (AIMC) systems.

Key Points:

- AIMC (Automated & Intelligent Machine-aided Construction) is an advanced system being implemented by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) for efficient National Highway construction.
- It integrates intelligent machines and real-time data sharing to expedite construction and enhance road quality.
- **Objective of AIMC**
  - To increase productivity, ensure durable and long-lasting roads, and reduce dependency on traditional surveys post-construction.
  - To tackle challenges such as outdated technologies, uncoordinated data, and poor contractor performance that lead to project delays.
- **Types of AIMC Machines**
- **GPS-Aided Motor Grader (3D Machine Control Technology):** It uses Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) data and angle sensors to position the grader's blade with precision.
  - Processes data in real-time to ensure alignment with digital design plans.
- **Intelligent Compaction Roller (IC Roller):** It assists in minimizing post-construction consolidation.
  - Reduces air pockets or water voids in materials, preventing damage to roads.
- **Single Drum/Tandem Vibratory Roller:** This ensures proper soil and base layer compaction for road stability.

India State of Forest Report 2023	**Why in news?**

Why in news?
- Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav released the 'India State of Forest Report 2023 (ISFR 2023).
- The **ISFR is brought out by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) on a biennial basis** since 1987.
- FSI carries out an in-depth assessment of the forest and tree resources of the country based on interpretation of **Remote Sensing satellite data and field based National Forest Inventory (NFI), and the results are published in the ISFR.**

Key Points:
- **Major Findings:**
  - The **Forest and Tree cover of the country is 8,27,357 sq km which is 25.17 percent of the geographical area of the country, consisting of 7,15,343 sq km (21.76%) as forest cover and 1,12,014 sq km (3.41%) as tree cover.**
    As compared to assessment of 2021, there is an **increase of 1445 sq km in the forest and tree cover of the country which includes 156 sq km increase in the forest cover and 1289 sq km increase in tree cover**.
  - **Top four states** showing maximum increase in forest and **tree cover** are **Chhattisgarh (684 sq km) followed by Uttar Pradesh (559 sq km), Odisha (559 sq km) and Rajasthan**

	(394 sq km). ○ **Top three states** showing maximum increase in **forest cover** are **Mizoram (242 sq km) followed by Gujarat (180 sq km) and Odisha (152 sq km).** ○ **Area wise top three states having largest forest and tree cover** are **Madhya Pradesh (85,724 sq km) followed by Arunachal Pradesh (67,083 sq km) and Maharashtra (65,383 sq km).** ○ **Area wise top three states having largest forest cover** area **Madhya Pradesh (77,073 sq km) followed by Arunachal Pradesh (65,882 sq km) and Chhattisgarh (55,812 sq km).** ○ In terms of **percentage of forest cover with respect to total geographical area**, **Lakshadweep (91.33 percent)** has the highest forest cover followed by **Mizoram (85.34 percent) and Andaman & Nicobar Island (81.62 percent).** ○ **The total mangrove cover is 4,992 sq km in the country.**

National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) scheme	**Why in news?**
	 ● Government is implementing the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) scheme wherein online trading of Agriculture and Horticulture commodities is done for transparent price discovery for farmers for their produce through a competitive online bidding system.
	
	 Key Points:
	 ● National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) is an **electronic trading site that connects the current Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis to form a unified national market for agricultural commodities.**
	 ● The **Central Government fully funds e-NAM, which is implemented by the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.**
	 ● It is an innovative agricultural marketing initiative that sought to improve farmers' digital accessibility to a large number of markets and buyers, as well as to increase transparency in trade transactions.
	 ● **Features:**
	     e-NAM provides a digital platform for farmers, traders, and purchasers to undertake agricultural commodity trading online.
	     By connecting different agricultural mandis across the country, e-NAM aspires to create a unified national market.
	     The platform enables **transparent price discovery by giving real-time information on commodity prices and arrivals** in various markets.
	     The platform offers agricultural commodities quality testing and grading services.
	     The **e-NAM portal** serves as a **one-stop shop for all APMC-related information and services.**
	     This comprises commodity arrivals, quality and pricing, buy and sell offers, and e-payment settlement directly into farmers' accounts.

55th GST Council	**Why in news?**
	● **55th GST Council meeting: Announcements on tax rate adjustments and compliance reforms.**
	
	Key Points:
	● GST was added in the constitution under **Article 279A by 101st Constitutional Amendment Act in 2016** and came into effect in 2017.
	● **Article 279A (1)** – The GST Council has to be **constituted by the President within 60 days of the commencement of Article 279A.**
	● **Quorum –** The Constitution states that one-third of the total number of GST Council members shall constitute the quorum.
	● **The objectives of the GST Council are:**
	  ○ To ensure a smooth implementation of the GST, regulate the goods and services tax regime in India.
	  ○ To harmonize tax laws across states, to simplify the tax structure, eliminate cascading taxes, and reduce compliance costs.
	  ○ To monitor all the taxation processes to avoid fraudulent processes.
	● **Functioning of GST Council**
	  ○ **Article 279A(7):** One-half of the total number of Members of the Goods and Services Tax Council shall constitute the quorum at its meetings.
	  ○ **Article 279A(9):** Every decision of the Goods and Services Tax Council shall be taken at a meeting, by a majority of not less than three-fourths of the weighted votes of the members present and voting, in accordance with the following principles, namely:
	    ■ the vote of the **Central Government shall have a weightage of one-third of the total votes cast.**
	    ■ the votes of all the **State Governments taken together shall have a weightage of two-thirds of the total votes cast in that meeting.**