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VOCABULARY

1. Bolster: To support, strengthen, or reinforce.
 - Synonyms: Support, reinforce, strengthen
 - Antonyms: Weaken, undermine, diminish
 - Sentence: The government has introduced new policies to bolster economic growth.
2. Virtuous Cycle: A positive feedback loop where beneficial results reinforce each other.
 - Synonyms: Positive loop, self-sustaining growth, beneficial cycle
 - Antonyms: downward spiral, negative loop
 - Sentence: Increased employment leads to higher consumer spending, creating a virtuous cycle of economic growth.
3. Catalyse: To cause or accelerate a process.
 - Synonyms: Accelerate, trigger, stimulate
 - Antonyms: Hinder, obstruct, delay
 - Sentence: The new infrastructure projects will catalyse economic development in rural areas.
4. Consonance: Agreement or harmony between different things.
 - Synonyms: Harmony, accord, coherence
 - Antonyms: Dissonance, conflict, discord
 - Sentence: The Budget's focus on employment is in consonance with the government's long-term economic goals.
5. Sine Qua Non: An essential condition or prerequisite.
 - Synonyms: Essential element, necessity, prerequisite
 - Antonyms: Non-essential, optional, superfluous
 - Sentence: A stable economy is a sine qua non for sustainable development.

6. Bumps: Obstacles or setbacks.
 - Synonyms: Obstacles, hurdles, setbacks
 - Antonyms: Advantages, boosts, advancements
 - Sentence: Despite a few bumps along the way, the project was completed on time.
7. Demoting: To reduce to a lower rank or grade.
 - Synonyms: Downgrading, declassifying, reassigning
 - Antonyms: Promoting, elevating, advancing
 - Sentence: Due to his repeated mistakes, he was demoted from manager to assistant.
8. Acrimonious: Angry and bitter, especially in speech or debate.
 - Synonyms: Hostile, bitter, harsh
 - Antonyms: Amicable, friendly, mild
 - Sentence: The debate turned acrimonious as the candidates began attacking each other's past decisions.
9. Skeptical: Doubtful or uncertain about something.
 - Synonyms: Doubtful, dubious, cynical
 - Antonyms: Trusting, confident, assured
 - Sentence: Despite the promises, she remained skeptical about the new policy's effectiveness.
10. Revamp: To improve or renovate something, especially to make it more modern or effective.
 - Synonyms: Overhaul, renovate, update
 - Antonyms: Neglect, ignore, deteriorate
 - Sentence: The company decided to revamp its marketing strategy to better reach its target audience.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

3rd February, 2024

1. Indian-origin astronaut **Sunita Williams** set a new record for the **longest spacewalking** time by a **woman**, surpassing Peggy Whitson. With a total of 62 hours and 6 minutes across nine spacewalks, she achieved this milestone during an EVA with Butch Wilmore on the ISS.
2. The **Andhra Pradesh** government recently launched the "**Mana Mitra**" initiative. This programme aims to enhance governance through WhatsApp.
 - Nara Lokesh, the Minister for IT, Electronics, and Communication, introduced the service in Guntur district. The initiative will allow citizens to access 161 civil services via WhatsApp. This move is part of a broader effort to make government services more accessible and efficient.
3. Supreme Court modified its April 2021 judgment on Article 224A, allowing more flexibility in appointing ad hoc judges in High Courts.

What is Article 224A?

- Allows Chief Justice of a High Court, with President's consent, to appoint retired judges as ad hoc judges to address judicial vacancies and case backlogs.

Appointment Process

- Retired judges get allowances, powers, and privileges of a High Court judge, but are not permanent judges.

April 2021 Judgment

- No strict 20% vacancy rule for invoking Article 224A. – 2 to 5 ad hoc judges per High Court based on case pendency. – Allowed Division Benches of only ad hoc judges for old cases.

Supreme Court's October 2023 Modifications –

- Removed 20% vacancy rule, limited ad hoc judges to 10% of sanctioned strength. – Ad hoc judges must sit with a sitting judge, not in exclusive benches. – Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) must be followed for transparent appointments.

Significance of Article 224A

- Helps clear case backlogs and reduce vacancies. – Provides flexibility while ensuring judicial integrity. – Brings expertise of retired judges to handle complex cases.

4. Niger has officially become the first African country to eliminate onchocerciasis, commonly known as river blindness. Niger now joins four other countries globally (Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Guatemala) that have been verified by WHO as free of onchocerciasis after successfully implementing elimination activities for decades.
 - This historic milestone is not only a triumph for Niger but also provides hope and a clear pathway for other African countries still battling this devastating disease.
5. The Centre announced the addition of four new Ramsar sites in India, taking the tally to 89.
New Sites:
 - Sakkarakottai Bird Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu
 - Therthangal Bird Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu
 - Khecheopalri Wetland in Sikkim
 - Udhwa Lake in Jharkhand
6. The 32.78 hectare area of Guneri village in Lakhtar tehsil of Kutch district, which is a natural inland mangrove site, has been declared as the first Biodiversity Heritage Site of Gujarat.

7. The ₹6.8 lakh crore defence allocation in the FY2025-26 Union Budget marks a significant rise, prioritizing modernization, domestic procurement, and operational readiness. With ₹1.8 lakh crore set for new weapons and equipment, the focus remains on indigenous manufacturing to boost self-reliance.
8. India has sent a shipment of medical supplies, including bronchodilators, inhalers, and ventilators, to support the residents of the Kurdistan region in Iraq. The assistance reflects India's approach to foreign policy focused on global cooperation and humanitarian efforts.
 - The humanitarian assistance to the semiautonomous region once again spotlights India's people-centric foreign policy and New Delhi's commitment to the making of a 'Vishwabandhu Bharat', or a global friend.
9. India will host the BRICS Youth Council Entrepreneurship Working Group Meeting from March 3 to 7, 2025, focusing on youth entrepreneurship for sustainable growth. Around 45 representatives from BRICS nations will discuss strategies to boost entrepreneurial collaboration.