NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC

Greenfield Expressway To Amritsar

Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways announced the development of a new Greenfield connectivity to Amritsar City from Nakodar via Sultanpur Lodhi, Goindwal Sahib, Khadoor Sahib as part of Delhi-Amritsar Expressway.

About:

- Under it, the road from Amritsar to Gurdaspur will also be fully developed and made completely signal free. With this, there will be options to travel to Gurdaspur onwards from Nakodar either via Amritsar or via
- This greenfield alignment will not only provide shortest and alternate express connectivity to Amritsar city but also to other religious centres of Sultanpur Lodhi, Goindwal Sahib, Khadoor Sahib as well as the recently developed Dera Baba Nanak/Kartarpur Sahib International Corridor in Punjab.
- Once the project is completed, the travel time from Amritsar to Delhi International airport will reduce by about four hours.
- Ministry of Road Transport & Highways have taken up development of Delhi Amritsar Katra Expressway under Bharatmala Pariyojana.

GEOGRAPHY- PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC

Amery Ice Shelf (AIS)

The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) predicts that there would be a 24% increase in the expansion of Ameri Ice Shelf (AIS) boundaries by 2021 and another 24% expansion by 2026 from its 2016 positions.

About:

- The floating sheets of ice called the ice shelves play a multi-faceted role in maintaining the stability of a glacier. Ice shelves connect a glacier to the landmass.
- The ice sheet mass balance, sea stratification, and bottom water formation are important parameters for the balancing of a glacier. Latent and sensible heat processes do play important roles here.
- The Ameri Ice Shelf (AIS) is one of the largest glacier drainage basins in the world, located on the east coast of Antarctica, at about 70ºS Latitude, 70ºE Longitude. The AIS dynamics and mass balance help in understanding the changes in the global climate scenario.

Related Info :

- The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, (NCPOR) is an autonomous Institution of the Department of Ocean Development (DOD), Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India. It was established in 1998 and is situated in Vasco da Gama, Goa.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

WEF Davos Summit 2021

The World Economic Forum (WEF) will adopt a new twin-summit format for its next annual Davos meeting in January 2021, by bringing together leaders from across the globe for in-person as well as virtual dialogues with a theme of 'The Great Reset'.

About:

- The gathering of the world's rich and powerful, held every year in Davos, the Swiss ski resort town, will also open its doors virtually for everyone across the world online and through a network of more than 400 hubs globally.
- 'The Great Reset' will be the theme of this unique twin summit in January 2021. In the run-up to the main annual meeting, the WEF will also host a virtual series, The Great Reset Dialogues.

Related Info :

- The World Economic Forum (WEF), based in Cologny-Geneva, Switzerland, is an NGO, founded in 1971. The WEF hosts an annual meeting at the end of January in Davos, a mountain resort in Graubünden, in the eastern Alps region of Switzerland.

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Agriculture Sector

The Union Cabinet in its meeting held on 3rd June, 2020 took several landmark decisions for helping India's farmers while also transforming the agriculture sector.

Cabinet approved historic amendment to the Essential Commodities Act

- With the amendment to Essential Commodities Act, commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes will be removed from list of essential commodities.
- This will remove fears of private investors of excessive regulatory interference in their business operations. The freedom to produce, hold, move, distribute and supply will attract private sector/foreign direct investment into agriculture sector.
- But in situations such as war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity, such agricultural foodstuff can be regulated. However, the installed capacity of a value chain participant and the export demand of an exporter will remain exempted from such stock limit imposition so as to ensure that investments in agriculture are not discouraged.

Cabinet approved 'The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020'.

- Under it, farmers and traders will enjoy freedom of choice of sale and purchase of agri-produce.
- It will also promote barrier-free inter-state and intra-state trade and commerce outside the physical premises of markets notified under State Agricultural Produce Marketing legislations.
- The ordinance also proposes an electronic trading in transaction platform for ensuring a seamless trade electronically.
- The farmers will not be charged any cess or levy for sale of their produce under this Act.
- It will thus pave the way for creating One India, One Agriculture Market.

Cabinet approved 'The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020'.

- It will empower farmers for directly engaging with processors, wholesalers, aggregators, wholesalers, large retailers, exporters etc., on a level playing field without any fear of exploitation. This eliminates intermediaries resulting in full realization of price for Farmers.
- Sale, lease or mortgage of farmers' land is totally prohibited and farmers' land is also protected against any recovery.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

World Environment Day

World Environment Day is being observed on June 5, 2020.

About:

- Objective of the day: World Environment Day is the United Nations day for encouraging worldwide awareness and action to protect our environment.
- Date of observance: Every year on 5th of June.
- To mark the first day of The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which was held in Stockholm, Sweden from June 5–16 in 1972.
- First year of observance of WED:
- The host: Every World Environment Day has a different host country, where the official celebrations take place. This year's host is Colombia in partnership with Germany.
- Theme: In 2020, the theme is biodiversity–a concern that is both urgent and existential.

International Day For The Fight Against Illegal, Unreported And Unregulated (IUU) Fishing

The International Day for the Fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing iss being observed on 5 June, 2020.

About:

- On 5 December 2017 the United Nations General Assembly declared 5 June as the International Day for the Fight Against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing which was celebrated for the first time on 5 June 2018.
- The date was selected because 5 June is the date, in 2016, when the first international treaty designed to end illegal fishing – the FAO Port State Measures Agreement – entered into force.
- The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the lead agency for the new international day.

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- This international day is an important opportunity to highlight efforts to combat illegal fishing.

Related Info:

- According to the FAO, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities are responsible for the loss of 11–26 million tonnes of fish each year, which is estimated to have an economic value of US$10–23 billion.
- To curtail this impact, Target 4 of Goal 14 of the Sustainable Development Agenda adopted in 2015, urges to "effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices" by 2020.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC

Arsenicum Album 30

Following an AYUSH Ministry advisory, several states have recommended Arsenicum album 30 for preventive use against Covid-19, although there is no evidence that it works.

About:

- Arsenicum album 30 is a homoeopathic drug.
- It is made by heating arsenic with distilled water, a process repeated several times over three days. It has less than 1% arsenic.
- It is considered to correct inflammation in body and takes care of diarrhoea, cough and cold.

The Covid-19 context

- There is no scientific evidence that the drug works against Covid-19, a fact stressed not only by medical scientists but also by some homoeopathic practitioners themselves.
- No clinical trial or large-scale study having been undertaken anywhere to scientifically validate the use of Arsenicum album 30 as a preventive medication.

Spacex Crew Dragon Demo-2 Mission

SpaceX's Dragon spacecraft with two NASA astronauts successfully docked with the International Space Station (ISS) after a historic launch from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, marking the dawn of a new age in commercial space travel.

About:

- The SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft, carrying astronauts Behnken and Hurley, lifted off atop the company's Falcon 9 rocket from Launch Complex 39A at NASA's Kennedy Space Center.
- The crew will be welcomed aboard the ISS, where they will become members of the Expedition 63 crew, which includes NASA astronaut Chris Cassidy.
- The rocket, named Falcon 9, which carried the spaceship into the orbit, was built by SpaceX, a company founded by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk who also heads Tesla Motors which produces new-age automobiles.
- The mission was called Demo-2, in keeping with the fact that it was still only a 'test flight', which if successful, would lead to more missions in the coming months.

Significance

- With the liftoff, SpaceX became the first private company to launch people into the orbit, a feat achieved previously by only three governments: the U.S., Russia and China.
- This is the first time that astronauts have been launched from US soil since the STS-135 mission on July 8, 2011, following which all astronauts were flown to the International Space Station in Russia's Soyuz Capsule.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Q. "Digital India requires strong focus on cyber security." Discuss the challenges faced by cyber security and suggest ways to increase cyber expertise in India.

Digital India aims to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. However, the transition to a Digital India comes with a new set of vulnerabilities.

Vulnerabilities of cyberspace in India:

- India ranks 3rd in terms of the highest number of internet users in the world after USA and China.
- The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) has reported a steep four-fold rise of cybersecurity incidents in a year (2017 to 2018).
- Some of the important examples of cyber-attacks are- Union Bank Of India Heist (2016), Wannacry Ransomware (2017), Data Theft At Zomato (2017), PETYA Ransomware (2017) etc.

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- Thus, Cyber Security becomes very significant in protecting our digital space from attack, damage, misuse and economic espionage.

'Digital India' dream requires a strong focus on cybersecurity more than ever before, however, our cybersecurity is marred by several challenges.

- Lack of national-level architecture for Cybersecurity: There is a lack of unified efforts to secure Critical Infrastructure of the public as well as the private sphere. This reduces the capability of security architecture to assess threats and tackle them effectively, in a coordinated manner.
- Shortage of trained workforce: Although India is rife with a young workforce with considerable IT prowess, there is a dearth of talent when it comes to specific niches, such as Cyber Security. The demand for talented and skilled labour far outgrows supply.
- Lack of high-end secured devices: In India, less than 1% of mobile phone users have access to mobile phones with higher security norms. With varying income groups in India, not everyone can afford high end secured phones and this increases vulnerability.
- Imported hardwares may increase cyber threats: Most equipment and technology for setting up Cyber Security infrastructure in India are currently procured from global sources and their embedded softwares may increase the cyber security threats.
- Lack of awareness: There is a lack of awareness about cyber fraud, cyber laws and regulations at both corporate levels as well as individual levels.
- Cyberspace, as it always keeps evolving, has inherent vulnerabilities that cannot be removed.

Measures to enhance cybersecurity expertise of India

- Updation of outdated policy: India needs to refresh its National Cyber Security Policy that must be in sync with present-day technological and ecosystem realities.
- India's cybersecurity framework should be able to protect against intrusions at all levels in the public and private sector.
- Whole of Government' Approach: It is needed to define roles and responsibilities for oversight and implementation across implementation agencies. This will enable strong intra-government coordination on cybersecurity issues.
- Also, there is a need to enhance cybersecurity capacity at the state level.
- Creating skilled Human Resource: Skilled and trained workforce is key to better cybersecurity in the country. They can be able to create a safe and secured cyber architecture.
- Cooperation with private sectors: It required budgetary allocations and opportunities for raising additional resources, through the involvement of the private sector, toward meeting the cybersecurity challenge.

Conclusion

- The digital economy today comprises 14-15% of India's total economy and is targeted to reach 20% by 2024. India's future economic prospects depend very much on cyber security. Thus, it is imperative that we take the necessary steps to make India's cyberspace safe and secured with expertise in cybersecurity.

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