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1. Varanasi to be first 'Cultural and Tourism Capital' of SCO (July 19, 2022)

Varanasi, the holy city that showcases India's culture and traditions for centuries, will be declared as the first "Cultural and Tourism Capital" of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Important facts

- Varanasi will become the "Cultural and Tourism Capital" of the SCO for 2022-23 under the eight-member organization's new initiative to promote people-to-people contact and tourism among member states.

- Each year the city of cultural heritage of a member country that takes over the presidency of the organization will be given this title to highlight its prominence.

- The new initiative will come into force after the Samarkand summit after which India will assume the presidency and host the next Heads of State Summit.

What is Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)?

- It is a permanent intergovernmental international organization.

- It was founded in 2001.

- The SCO Charter was signed in 2002, and came into force in 2003.

- It is a Eurasian political, economic and military organization.

- Its aim is to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.

- China, Russia and four Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – were founding members of the SCO.

- Official Languages - Russian and Chinese

- Chairmanship - On the basis of rotation for a year by Member States

2. Consultative Committee of Ministry of Civil Aviation discusses 'DIGI YATRA' project (July 19, 2022)

The Consultative Committee meeting of the Ministry of Civil Aviation was held in New Delhi on 18 July. The topic for discussion was 'DIGI YATRA'.

About 'DIGI YATRA'

- The project is envisioned to achieve contactless, seamless processing of passengers at airports based on Face Recognition System (FRT).

- The basic idea of this project is that any passenger can pass through various checkpoints without any paperwork or contact.

- For this, his facial features will be used, which will establish his identity, which will be directly linked to his boarding pass.

- Privacy issues have been taken care of in this system.

- It provides a decentralized mobile wallet based identity management platform which is also affordable and also addresses the privacy/data security issues in the implementation of Digi Yatra.

Objectives of DIGI YATRA

- Providing a simple and easy experience to all air travellers.

- Achieve better throughput through existing infrastructure using "Digital Framework".

- Result in lower cost operations.

- Digitizing the existing manual process and bringing in better efficiency

First Phase of DIGI YATRA

- In the first phase, Digi Yatra will be launched in August 2022 at two airports in Varanasi and Bengaluru.

- It is proposed to start at five airports of Pune, Vijayawada, Kolkata, Delhi and Hyderabad by March next year.

- AAI will identify the airports where Digi Yatra will be implemented in a phased manner.

3. NITI Aayog & WFP launched Initiative to promote millets in Asia & Africa (July 19, 2022)

On July 19, 2022, NITI Aayog and the World Food Program (WFP), India launched an initiative 'Mapping and Exchange of Good Practices' to mainstream millet in Asia and Africa.

Important facts

- NITI Aayog and WFP will prepare a set of good practices for increasing the production and consumption of millets in India and abroad.

- The Government of India has proposed to the United Nations to declare the year 2023 as the International Year of Millets (IYoM).

- It aims to generate domestic and global demand for millets.

International Year of Millets

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted India's resolution and declared 2023 as the International Year of millets in March 2021.

- India's proposal received the support of 72 countries.

- In 2021, NITI Aayog signed a letter of intent with the United Nations World Food Program (WFP).

- The partnership focuses on mainstreaming millets and helping India take a global lead in promoting its health benefits.

- The objective of this partnership is to build resilient livelihoods for smallholder farmers and to build adaptability to climate change and changing food systems.

Why is millet called a superfood?

- India is the 5th largest exporter of Millets globally.

- Millets are one of the oldest food items in the country.

- Known as a superfood, Millets can address issues related to nutritional security, food system security and farmers' welfare.

- These are a rich source of protein, fibre, minerals, iron, calcium and have a low glycemic index.

- They are known for their nutrient rich content and certain characteristics like drought tolerance, photo-insensitivity, resilience to climate change etc.

- They can be cultivated with less water and less cost.

- It can also grow well in dry areas or on land with low fertility.

What are Millets?

- They include jowar (sorghum), ragi (finger millet), korra (foxtail millet), arke (kodo millet), sama (little millet), bajra (pearl millet), chena/barr (proso millet) and sanwa (barnyard millet).

4. Wildfires and heat wave across Europe (July 19, 2022)

Europe, along with countries such as Spain, Greece and France, is battling fierce wildfires and heat waves and struggling to extinguish fires and prevent damage.

Important facts

- Thousands of hectares of forest land has been burnt to ashes amid the scorching heat.

- The fire has forced thousands to flee their homes and killed many relief workers.

Cause of the wildfires

- As far as Europe is concerned, the region has come under fire for being unusually dry and hot.

- Experts are citing climate change as the reason.

- They say that above-normal temperatures and drought conditions are causing fire incidents in some parts.

- Rising temperatures absorb moisture from plants, producing abundant dry fuel.

- Drought and extreme heat can kill plants and dead grass, and dry forest fires are more likely to occur.

- Lightning from the sky or sparks generated by the carelessness of the local population also causes fire.

Forest fires in India

- About 22 percent of the forest area in India comes under the highly fire prone category.

- Recently, there have been incidents of fire in Sariska Tiger Reserve of Rajasthan, Simlipal Wildlife Sanctuary in Odisha, Ladkui forests and forest areas of Mazhagawan region of Madhya Pradesh.

Impacts of wildfire

- Air pollution caused by forest fires is more intense than other types of air pollution.

- Wildfire smoke can affect the respiratory and cardiovascular systems.

- Forest fires not only destroy flora (trees, herbs, grasslands, meadows, etc.) and their diversity, but also have significant long-term negative effects on fauna, including wild endangered species.

- Forest fires destroy organic matter in the soil and expose the top layer to erosion.

- It can disrupt transportation, communications, electricity and gas services, and water supplies.

5. Microblogging platform Twitter launched an "Unmentioning feature" (July 18, 2022)

Microblogging platform Twitter has launched an "Unmentioning feature". This feature will allow users to remove themselves from any conversation.

Important facts

- This feature will allow users to disengage themselves from conversations they no longer wish to be a part of.

- It will help protect the peace of the people by removing themselves from unwanted conversations.

- Twitter was testing the unmanaging feature on a limited number of users so far. Now it has been launched for everyone.

- The feature has been launched amid the ongoing stir over the walkout of Elon Musk's USD 44 billion deal to buy Twitter.

Elon Musk's walkout

- In premarket trading, Twitter shares fell nearly 6 percent amid Elon Musk's recent walkout.

- Musk recently cancelled his $44 billion deal to buy Twitter.

- After this Twitter announced the prosecution of Elon Musk.

About Twitter

- Twitter was founded in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, Noah Glass and Evan Williams.

- It is an American communications company headquartered in San Francisco, California.

- Twitter is a microblogging and social networking service on which users post and interact with messages called "tweets".

- CEO - Parag Agarwal

6. International Nelson Mandela Day (July 18, 2022)

International Nelson Mandela Day is celebrated across the world on 18 July every year to mark the birth anniversary of Nelson Mandela, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former President of South Africa.

Important facts

- The observance of this day seeks to celebrate the idea that every individual has the power to change the world, the ability to make an impact.

- It aims to inspire individuals to take action to help change the world for the better.

- In November 2009, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) officially declared 18 July as "International Nelson Mandela Day" in honour of the former President of South Africa's contribution to a culture of peace and freedom.

- It also reflects the anti-apartheid icon's commitment to promoting the values of democracy, racial justice and human rights in the field of racial relations, and his dedication to serving humanity.

About Nelson Mandela

- Nelson Mandela was born on 18 July 1918 in Mvezo, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

- On 5 August 1962, he was arrested for inciting the workers to strike and leaving the country without permission.

- He was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment on 12 July 1964.

- He was released on 11 February 1990 after spending 27 years in prison.

- On 10 May 1994, Mandela became the first black president of South Africa.
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- Nelson Mandela is called the Gandhi of South Africa.

Prize

- Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 jointly with Frederick Willem de Klerk, former President of South Africa

- order of lenin

- Bharat Ratna (1990)

- Nishan-e-Pakistan

- Gandhi Peace Prize (2008)

7. Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation Seminar in New Delhi (July 18, 2022)

Two-day Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO) Seminar -Swavlamban held in New Delhi on 18-19 July.

Important facts

- The seminar was organised at Dr Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the seminar.

- The Prime Minister unveiled the 'Sprint Challenge', which aims to promote the use of indigenous technology in the Indian Navy.

- As a part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', NIIO in association with Defence Innovation Organization (DIO) aims to induct at least 75 new indigenous technologies/products into the Indian Navy.

- The name of this collaborative project is SPRINT (Supporting Pole-Vaulting in R&D through iDEX, NIIO and TDAC).

- Sessions dedicated to innovation, indigenization, armament and aviation will be organized in the symposium.

- The second day of the symposium will witness access to the Indian Ocean region in line with the government's vision of SAGAR (Security and Development for All in the Region).

- As a part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, NIIO, in association with Defense Innovation Organisation, aims to induct at least 75 new indigenous technologies and products into the Indian Navy.

Aim of the seminar

- The seminar aims to engage Indian industry and academia towards achieving self-reliance in the Defence sector.

- The seminar will provide a platform for leaders from industry, academia, services and government to come together on a common platform with ideas and recommendations for the defence sector.

8. Two-Day Meeting Of The BIMSTEC Expert Group On Cyber Security (July 16, 2022)

The National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), Government of India, has hosted a two-day meeting of the Expert Group of BIMSTEC on Cyber Security on 14 and 15 July 2022 in New Delhi.

Important facts

- The meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Cyber Security Cooperation is based on the agreement reached during the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs' Meeting held in Bangkok in March 2019.

- The meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Cyber Security in person was chaired by the Indian National Cyber Security Coordinator Lt Gen Rajesh Pant.

- Representatives of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand are participating in this meeting. All these representatives are cyber security experts of their respective government organisations.

- India, as a leading country in the security sector in the BIMSTEC Forum, has taken the initiative to organise this meeting on cyber security cooperation and to develop an action plan on cyber security.

BIMSTEC action plan to tackle cyber security challenges

- Main Objective- The main objective of this meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group is to prepare an action plan.

- It will promote coordination and cooperation among BIMSTEC member states to strengthen cyber security in the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

- **Scope of Expansion -** This action plan will cover the mechanisms for the following-

- cyber, exchange of information related to cyber crime,

- protection of critical information infrastructure,

- International developments related to cyber incident response and cyber standards.

- Implementation - The Action Plan is proposed to be implemented within a time frame of 5 years after which the Expert Group on Cyber Security will review the Action Plan.

About BIMSTEC countries

- BIMSTEC was established in 1997 to provide an exclusive link between South and South-East Asia with five countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka from South Asia and two countries in South-East Asia – Myanmar and Thailand.

- **Areas of Cooperation -**All these countries came together as a platform for cooperation in 14 major economic and social sectors of the economy.

- **Headquarters-** Kathmandu, Nepal.

- **General Secretary-** Tenzin Lekfell.

- **BIMSTEC 2022 Summit-** The 5th BIMSTEC summit was hosted in virtual form (in virtual mode) by the current BIMSTEC President Sri Lanka.

Theme of BIMSTEC 2022- The theme of the 5th BIMSTEC Summit is "Towards a Resilient Region, Prosperous Economies, Healthy People" .

9. PM Modi inaugurates Bundelkhand Expressway in U.P. (July 16, 2022)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on July 16, 2022 inaugurated the 296-km-long Bundelkhand Expressway, which passes through seven districts of Uttar Pradesh and has been constructed at a cost of around ₹14,850 crore.

Important facts

- The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for the construction of the expressway on February 29, 2020 and it was completed in about 28 months.

- The 296 km long, four-lane Bundelkhand Expressway passes through seven districts, Chitrakoot, Banda, Mahoba, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Auraiya and Etawah.

- It extends from NH-35 at Gonda village near Bharatkup in Chitrakoot district to Kudrail village in Etawah district, where it meets with the Agra-Lucknow Expressway.

- The expressway will have four railway bridges, 18 major bridges and 286 minor bridges.

- Provision has also been made for rain water harvesting at every 500 meters on the expressway.

Significance

- Apart from improving connectivity in the region, the Bundelkhand Expressway will boost economic development and generate thousands of jobs for the local people.

- The project is also significant as most of it was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- It was one of the major sources of employment to the migrant laborers returning to the state.

- The work of making industrial corridors in Banda and Jalaun districts next to the expressway has started.

10. Ministry of Women and Child Development issues Detailed Guidelines for 'Mission Shakti' (July 16, 2022)

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has issued detailed guidelines for the 'Mission Shakti' scheme.

About Mission Shakti

- It was launched by the Ministry of Women Child Development during the 15th Finance Commission period 2021-22 to 2025-26.

- It is an integrated women empowerment programme for the safety, security and empowerment of women.

Objective of the scheme

- Care and protection of all women and girls including disabled, socially and economically disadvantaged and vulnerable groups with short term and long term services for their overall development and empowerment.

Components of Mission Shakti

1. **Sambal**

It is for Safety and Security of Women.

This includes schemes of One Stop Center (OSC), Women Helpline (WHL), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) along with a new component of Nari Adalats.

1. **Samarthya**

It is for Empowerment of Women.

In this, the earlier Ujjwala schemes, Swadhar Greh and Working Women Hostel have been included with amendment.

The existing schemes of National Creche Scheme for children of working mothers and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) under Integrated Child Development Services ICDS have now been included in Samarthya.

A new component of Gap Funding for Economic Empowerment has also been included in the Samarthya Scheme.