IMPORTANT NEWS

India, Israel, UAE, and US Form I2U2 Consortium for Collaborative Space Venture

Inside Story of the News:

The I2U2 consortium, consisting **of India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, and the **United States**, has announced an ambitious collaborative space project. This joint endeavor seeks to develop an innovative space-based tool with diverse applications for policymakers, institutions, and entrepreneurs.

- In September 2020, the **Abraham Accords** were inked, facilitated by the United States, bringing Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain into a historic agreement.
- I2U2 was originally established in October 2021, following the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE, to address matters related to **maritime security, infrastructure**, and **transportation** in the region.
- During its inception, it was known as the **'International Forum for Economic Cooperation**,' often referred to as the **'West Asian Quad**.'
- In the nomenclature of this coalition, **'I2' represents India and Israel**, while **'U2' represents the USA and the UAE.**
- The collaboration in security will enable these nations to explore security cooperation opportunities within the framework of these new partnerships.
- These countries have the potential for cooperation across multiple domains, encompassing technology, commerce, climate action, the fight against COVID-19, and even security.
- Food security is an area where these nations can join forces to mitigate the ramifications of food scarcity challenges.

The Significance of the I2U2 Consortium

- India stands to leverage the opportunities presented by the Abraham Accords to strengthen its relationship with Israel while maintaining its valuable connections with the UAE and other Arab nations.
- India boasts a substantial consumer market and is a significant producer of in-demand high-tech goods, making it poised to reap the benefits of this alliance.
- This collaboration will assist India in forging diverse alliances, encompassing both political and social spheres.

Understanding the Free Movement Regime with Myanmar

Inside Story of the News:

The Manipur state government has formally urged the **Central government to permanently terminate the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Indo-Myanmar border.** During a recent press conference, the Chief Minister of Manipur emphasized that the FMR has been the primary obstacle hindering Manipur's attempts to control the inflow of undocumented migrants from Myanmar via the porous border.

- The Free Movement Regime (FMR) is an agreement between India and Myanmar that permits residents of bordering tribes from either country to travel up to 16 kilometers into the other country without the need for a visa.
- FMR is considered a component of India's Act East policy.
- The rationale behind the Free Movement Regime (FMR) can be traced back to the historical context:
  - The boundary between India and Myanmar was delineated by the British in 1826, essentially dividing people of the same ethnicity and culture into separate nations without considering their opinions.
  - Consequently, there arose a need to facilitate the free movement of ethnically similar communities residing across these borders, allowing them to travel without the requirement of a visa.
  - Initially, the FMR was envisioned to stimulate local trade and business; however, it has faced criticism for inadvertently facilitating illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling.
- Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the agreement has been waning since 2020, initially due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Subsequently, considering the military coup in Myanmar in 2021 and the ongoing escalation of the refugee crisis, India suspended the FMR in September 2022.

The Indo-Myanmar Border: A Strategic Overview

- The Indo-Myanmar border spans a considerable distance of 1,643 kilometers.
- Several Indian states share this border with Myanmar, including Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km).
- Both India's borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar are intricate and multifaceted in nature.
- The border between India and Myanmar was demarcated by the British in 1826, without soliciting the opinions of the region's inhabitants.
- This border division effectively separated people of the same ethnicities and cultures into two nations without their consent, a legacy that continues to influence the current Indo-Myanmar border.

- The movement advocating for Greater Nagaland, which encompasses areas in both India and Myanmar, has significantly disrupted the stability of this border.
- Many insurgent groups in the northeastern states of India have affiliations with Myanmar-based organizations, providing them with political support, economic assistance, logistical backing, military training, or arms supplies.
- The Assam Rifles, affectionately known as the "**Friends of the Northeast People**," are deployed in the northeastern region to safeguard the Indo-Myanmar border.
- To address issues related to infiltration, contraband smuggling, and illegal activities in the Indo-Myanmar border area, the Government of India has undertaken initiatives to erect fencing in the region.
- The Comprehensive Border Infrastructure Project has been launched to enhance border infrastructure along the India-Myanmar Border.
- **Integrated Check Posts (ICPs):** The Indian government has made the strategic decision to establish Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at key entry points along our land borders.
- **Border Area Development Programme (BADP):** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has initiated numerous developmental projects in border areas as part of a holistic approach to border management.

India and the United Nations Unveil Joint Capacity Building Initiative

Inside Story of the News:

Today, India and the United Nations unveiled a collaborative capacity-building endeavor targeting the Global South. The "India-UN Capacity Building Initiative" seeks to **disseminate India's development knowledge, exemplary approaches, and proficiency to partner nations in the Global South via capacity-building and training initiatives.**

- The term **'Global South'** initially emerged as a loose reference to countries that were excluded from the industrialization wave.
- It broadly encompasses nations situated in regions such as Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, Asia (excluding Israel, Japan, and South Korea), as well as Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand).
- When India assumed the presidency of the G20 on December 1, 2022, it outlined several objectives for its year-long leadership, with a focus on the Global South being one of them.
- India organized eight ministerial-level thematic segments to address the most pressing issues affecting the developing world.
- India actively raised Global South concerns in international forums and during UN meetings and conferences.
- Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, India distributed Made-in-India vaccines to approximately 100 countries, while around 150 nations imported medicines from India during this period, solidifying its role as the "**Pharmacy of the World.**"
- In January 2023, India hosted the Voice of the Global South Summit virtually, with participation from representatives of 125 countries.

- India ensured that the Global South remained <u>a focal point at the G7 Summit in Hiroshima</u>.
- Under India's presidency, the African Union attained <u>full membership status within the G20</u>.
- During the summit, Prime Minister Modi emphasized that the Global South is more than just a diplomatic term.
    - It represents a shared history among these nations in their struggles against colonialism and apartheid, serving as the foundation for reshaping modern relations.

Hoysala Temples Gain UNESCO World Heritage Status

Inside Story of the News:

Three temples from the Hoysala era in Karnataka, namely **Chennakeshava in Belur, Hoysaleswara in Halebidu, and Keshava Temple in Somanathapura, Mysuru**, have recently been included in **UNESCO's World Heritage List** as part of the joint entry titled **'Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas.'** This significant announcement was made by UNESCO during the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

- The Hoysalas, originally serving as provincial governors under the Western Chalukyas, held sway in Karnataka from the 10th century to the 14th century.
- Initially, the Hoysala capital was situated in Belur, but it was later relocated to Halebidu (also known as Dwarasamudra).
- This era marked a significant period in the advancement of South <u>Indian art, architecture, and religious practices.</u>
- The Hoysala Empire is renowned for its distinctive Hoysala architecture, with approximately 100 surviving temples scattered throughout Karnataka.
- These temples are celebrated for their <u>exceptional beauty and the exquisite craftsmanship displayed in their wall sculptures,</u> often likened to the intricate work of ivory artisans or goldsmiths.
- Typically, Hoysala temples are constructed atop star-shaped platforms and include multiple structures within the temple complex.
- A notable characteristic of Hoysala architecture is the harmonious blend of three distinct styles: **Dravidian, Vesara,** and **the North Indian Nagara style.**
- The three temples chosen for inclusion in the UNESCO list, dating from the 12th and 13th centuries, hold importance not only for showcasing the remarkable skills of their builders but also for reflecting the political events that influenced their construction.
- The **Chennakeshava temple** (also known as the Vijaya Narayana temple) was consecrated around 1117 AD by the formidable Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana, commemorating his victories over the Cholas.
- The Kesava temple, a Vaishnava shrine, was constructed in Somanathapura in 1268 by Somanatha, a general in the service of Hoysala King Narasimha III.
    - This temple takes the form of a 16-pointed star and features three shrines dedicated to **Keshava** (although the statue is now missing), **Janardhana**, and **Venugopala**.

The Ongoing Dispute in the South China Sea

Inside Story of the News:

The Philippines has taken action to remove a floating barrier that China had installed to prevent Philippine fishing boats from accessing a disputed area in the South China Sea. Manila alleges that China violated its fishing rights by placing a 300-meter (1,000-foot) barrier at the Scarborough Shoal.

- China asserts territorial claims over more than 90% of the South China Sea and took control of the shoal in 2012.
- The South China Sea is considered a marginal sea within the Pacific Ocean, covering a region from the Karimata and Malacca Straits to the Strait of Taiwan.
- The South China Sea is geographically located just south of mainland China and shares its borders with countries such **as Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan,** and **Vietnam.**
- Territorial disputes in this region have a long history, but recent years have witnessed a significant escalation in tensions.
- The South China Sea holds immense strategic importance, and China's pursuit of control in this area is a means **to exert greater influence over the broader region.**
- Given its economic and geopolitical significance, the South China Sea has become a focal point for numerous complex territorial disputes that have led to political and even military conflicts, creating tensions across the Indo-Pacific.
- China frequently references the so-called "**nine-dash line**" to assert its purported historical rights over a substantial portion of the South China Sea.
- Remarkably, this line continued to appear on official maps even after **the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) assumed power.**
- The region's seabed is estimated to contain vast energy reserves, with approximately 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas deposits lying beneath the South China Sea.

The Nature of the Nine-Dash Line

- The nine-dash line is used on Chinese maps to outline China's territorial claims within the sea.
- Originally, it was the "eleven-dash line," but in 1953, the CCP-led government simplified it by removing the portion encompassing the Gulf of Tonkin, reducing it to nine dashes, as noted by CFR (Council on Foreign Relations).
- This demarcation extends up to 2,000 kilometers from the Chinese mainland and comes within a few hundred kilometers of the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam.
- In recent years, China has sought to assert control over the South China Sea by attempting to prohibit other nations from conducting military or economic activities without its consent, asserting that the sea falls within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The Significance of the South China Sea: A Key Geopolitical and Economic:

- According to estimates from the United States Energy Information Agency,
    - there are substantial reserves beneath the South China Sea,
    - including approximately 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.
- Additionally, the South China Sea boasts abundant fishing grounds, which <u>serve as a primary source of income for millions of people throughout the region.</u>
- It's worth noting that more than half of the world's fishing vessels operate in this area.
- Beyond its economic resources, the **South China Sea holds immense strategic importance as a vital trade route.**
- The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has reported that in 2016, over 21% of global trade, equivalent to $3.37 trillion, passed through these waters.

The 78th United Nations General Assembly: Key Highlights

Inside Story of the News:

During the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar delivered an address. This session convened world leaders and prominent stakeholders to deliberate on global challenges, with the overarching goal of advancing peace, security, and sustainable development.
- A significant focal point of the discussions revolved around the "digital revolution."
- It emphasized both the opportunities and challenges associated with artificial intelligence (AI), as well as the continued importance of bolstering global cybersecurity measures.
- The theme for the 78th UNGA session's theme was "**Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress, and sustainability for all.**"

Key Highlights from EAM Jaishankar's Speech:

- He emphasized that <u>responses to terrorism, extremism, and violence should not be dictated by political convenience.</u>
- We <u>should never allow a situation like vaccine apartheid to occur again, where</u> access to vaccines is unjustly distributed.
- Climate action <u>should not permit the evasion of historical responsibilities.</u>
- The power of markets <u>should not be harnessed to divert essential resources like food and energy from those in need to the wealthy.</u>
- When actions <u>do not align with stated intentions, we must have the courage to acknowledge and address this discrepancy</u>.
- India played a pivotal role in granting the African Union permanent membership in the G20, providing a voice to an entire continent that had long been overlooked.
- This significant reform <u>should serve as an example for the United Nations, an organization with a much longer history, to modernize the Security Council.</u>
- Broad representation is essential for both effectiveness and credibility.

- India has transitioned from the era of non-alignment to that of being a **'Vishwa Mitra'** or a friend to the world.
- This transformation is evident in the rapid growth of QUAD, the expansion of the BRICS group, and the emergence of I2U2.

Law Commission Opposes Reducing Age of Consent under POCSO Act

Inside Story of the News:

The Law Commission has recommended that the government retain the current age of consent specified in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, which is 18 years. This recommendation comes with the recognition that lowering the age of consent could potentially have negative consequences on efforts to combat child marriage and child trafficking.

- The POCSO Act, enacted in 2012, is **the first comprehensive law in India dedicated to addressing the issue of sexual abuse of children.**
- It falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- It was designed **to safeguard children from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornographic violations.**
- It established Special Courts for the purpose of conducting trials related to these offenses.
- In 2019, the Act underwent amendments aimed at strengthening penalties for specific offenses to act as a deterrent against abusers and to promote a more dignified upbringing for children.
- Notably, the Act adopts a gender-neutral approach, defining a child as "any person" under the age of 18.
- It places responsibility on individuals in charge of institutions (excluding children) to report instances of sexual offenses involving subordinates, with penalties for non-compliance.
- Importantly, victims have the right to report an offense at any time, even years after the abuse has occurred.
- Moreover, the Act prohibits the disclosure of the victim's identity through any form of media unless authorized by the special courts established under the Act.

Project Udbhav: Exploring Ancient Texts for Rediscovering the Indic Heritage of Statecraft

Inside Story of the News:

The Indian Army, in collaboration with the United Service Institution of India, a defense think-tank, launched Project Udbhav in 2021.
- Project Udbhav is an endeavor aimed at rediscovering the profound Indic heritage related to
  o statecraft and strategic thinking,
  o drawing insights from ancient Indian texts on matters such as statecraft, warfare, diplomacy, and
  o grand strategy.
- It encompasses a wide range of areas, including Indigenous Military Systems, Historical Texts, Regional Texts and Kingdoms, Thematic Studies, and detailed Kautilya Studies.

- This groundbreaking initiative reflects the Indian Army's acknowledgment of India's deep-rooted wisdom in the realms of statecraft, strategy, diplomacy, and military operations.
- Project Udbhav aspires to bridge the historical and contemporary aspects, integrating ancient wisdom into modern military pedagogy.
- Through the reintroduction of these classical teachings into contemporary military and strategic contexts, the Army has two primary objectives:
    o To cultivate its officers' ability to apply ancient wisdom in present-day scenarios.
    o To facilitate a deeper comprehension of international relations and foreign cultures

Asian Games 2023: A Glance at the Upcoming Sporting Event

Inside Story of the News:

India has dispatched a delegation of **655 athletes** to participate in the **19th edition of the Asian Games**, which **commenced on September 23 and will conclude on October 8, 2023, in Hangzhou, People's Republic of China.**

- The Asian Games, **also recognized as the Asiad**, are a quadrennial multi-sport event, ranking as the **second largest** of its kind globally, following the Olympics.
- The organization of the games is overseen by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), involving the participation of **45 countries or regions.**
- Hangzhou, China, is hosting the 19th installment of the Asian Games from September 23 to October 8, following the **18th Asian** Games held in **Indonesia in 2018.**
- In the previous edition of the Asian Games in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2018, India fielded a team of **570 athletes** and secured its best-ever **medal tally of 70 medals**, comprising **16 gold, 23 silver,** and **31 bronze medals.**
- Notably, India is making its **debut** in the Asian Games **cricket competition**, with both **men's and women's teams** participating for the first time.
- The Hangzhou Asian Games offer 74 Paris 2024 Olympic quotas across various sports, providing athletes with a chance to qualify for the upcoming Olympic Games.