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Daily Current Affairs

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SOURCES



Date: 12-13 May 2024

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Important News Articles

GS II

1. Russia's killer Lancet drone are running on US AI' - Times of INDIA

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Prelims Takeaway

- World War II

News:

- In the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, **Russia's utilization of the Lancet Kamikaze drone, which incorporates American AI technology**

Key highlights

- Small, explosive drones called kamikaze drones, also known as Switchblade drones, can be flown into enemy targets like tanks or troops, detonating on impact.
- Named after World War II Japanese pilots who carried out similar suicide attacks, these modern drones offer a cheap and effective way to bypass defenses and hit targets.
- Advanced features like radar evasion and facial recognition allow some kamikaze drones to strike without human control.
- The United States is a leader in this technology, but other countries like Russia, China, Israel, Iran, and Turkey are also developing kamikaze drones.
- The Lancet-3 drone is a specific type of kamikaze drone known as a loitering munition.
- It uses a powerful Nvidia Jetson TX2 AI chip, making it very efficient.

GS III

2. Armed Forces' integrated commands structure plan looks at Vice CDS, Dy CDS with clear roles- The Indian Express

Relevance: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

News:

- The Armed Forces are looking at the appointment of a Vice Chief of Defence Staff and a Deputy Chief of Defence Staff.

Prelims Takeaway

- CDS
- Border Security

Highlights

- The **Vice CDS**, likely to be an officer of the rank of General, who will look after strategic planning, capability development and procurement-related matters.
- The **Deputy CDS**, likely to be an officer of the rank of Lieutenant General, will be responsible for operations, intelligence and will coordinate the allocation of assets between theaters.
- While the organizational structure plan may be finetuned after it gets government approval,
 - It would lead to creation of theater commands, (Jaipur, Lucknow, Coimbatore likely homes for theater commands)
 - The overall plan is to establish three adversary-based theater commands – one facing Pakistan,
 - Another opposite China, and
 - a maritime theater command to tackle maritime threats outside the coastal borders of the country.

3. Govt. to spend ₹2 cr. per km on roads along China border - The Hindu

Relevance: Security Challenges and their Management in Border Areas

News:

- Government is likely to spend over ₹2 crore on each kilometer of road to be constructed along the China under the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP)

Prelims Takeaway

- VVP
- Indo-China border

Highlights:

- In the past five months, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has sanctioned 113 roads under the VVP in Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim to **improve connectivity** in areas along the China border.

- There are at least **168 villages** along the border with China that **do not have any road connectivity**
- The Ministry has also asked State governments to **monitor construction activity by installing GPS-enabled vehicle tracking devices.**
- States shall ensure the installation of GPS system in key machinery and equipment engaged during the execution of road works under VVP

Vibrant Village Programme (VVP):

- The Union Cabinet approved the VVP programme on **February 15, 2023**
- One of the stated **objectives** of the VVP is to **stop migration** in the population residing along the border.
- Of the ₹4,800 crore budget allotted for the VVP for the financial years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26, more than half, that is, about ₹2,500 crore, is to be spent on road construction.

4. Shifting gears: India targets Australian lithium blocks after Argentina deal- The Hindu

Relevance: Effects of Liberalization on the Economy, Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth.

News:

- India is going to secure lithium blocks in **Australia** as it aims to finalize a deal “likely within this fiscal year” through state-owned Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL).

Highlights:

- Discussions are underway for **two lithium blocks** and three cobalt blocks in Australia.
- The due diligence process will involve evaluating potential exploration sites and assessing the likelihood of significant lithium deposits.
- Acquisitions in Australia will be slightly costlier than in Argentina, and financial requirements and details are being worked out.
- This fast-tracked effort underscores **India’s urgency** to secure a critical resource for its burgeoning electric vehicle industry and reduce its reliance on Chinese imports.
 - Lithium continues to be the corner-stone of India’s transition to green energy and reduction in its carbon footprint.
 - Called **‘white gold’**, lithium finds extensive usage across energy storage solutions, that include electric vehicles (EVs), car batteries and mobile phones, among others.
- Majority of the country’s lithium needs are imported.
 - According to data available with the Commerce Ministry, in FY23, lithium imports were worth ₹266 crore.
- Earlier this year, India made its first overseas acquisition for five lithium brine blocks in Argentina, namely Cortadera-I, Cortadera-VII, Cortadera-VIII, Cateo-2022-01810132 and Cortadera-VI,

Prelims Takeaway

- Lithium
- India-Australia

5. Measures in place to meet peak power demand in May, June - The Hindu

Relevance: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc

News:

- The power ministry has estimated around 260 GW of peak demand during this summer season

Highlights:

- The government has taken adequate measures to meet the estimated 235 GW peak power demand in May and 240 GW in June.
- The Indian Meteorological Department has predicted higher than normal maximum temperatures over most parts of the country till June 2024, further increasing demand.
 - Distribution utilities are advised towards minimizing supply disruptions due to India’s general elections in April and May, given that power supply is a politically sensitive issue.
- Elaborating on the measures, the ministry said section **11 directions** have been issued to gas-based power plants besides coal-based units to make full capacity available for electricity generation.

Prelims Takeaway

- Renewable Energy
- UDAY

- The optimisation of hydropower generation has made available an additional 4 GW for meeting the demand during May and June.
- Planned maintenance and minimisation of forced outages of thermal power plants have made available another **5 GW** for the summer season,
- Besides, power generated from **wind** is expected to increase by **4 GW to 5 GW** during May and June.

6. Encroachments, land diversions threaten Delhi Ridge, the national capital's lungs- The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

News:

- Over 308 hectares of the ecologically sensitive Delhi Ridge area have been encroached and another 183 hectares “diverted” for “non-forestry purposes”, a Central Empowered Committee (CEC) report informed the Supreme Court.

Highlights:

- The **Delhi Ridge** is the tail end of the ancient **Aravalli Hills**, which is around 1,500 million years old and stretches through Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- “Delhi Ridge”, the green lungs of the national capital, is under threat with five percent under encroachment, and 4% diversion
- These are official figures and actual encroachment can be much more and can be found out only after the entire boundary of Delhi Ridge is secured by geo-tagged pillars.
- challenges faced by the Delhi Ridge,
 - include rapid urbanization,
 - manifold increase in the population of Delhi and
 - rapacious exploitation of resources.
- The Delhi Ridge, a vital ecological and geographical feature, stands at a critical juncture marred by a myriad of challenges.

Prelims Takeaway

- Forest Conservation Act, 1980
- Delhi Ridge

7. Panel flags poor progress in reversing coal mining damage in Meghalaya - The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

News: A panel appointed by the High Court of Meghalaya has flagged the lack of progress in restoring the environment damaged by rat-hole coal mining in the northeastern State.

Highlights:

- Justice Brojendra Prasad Katakey underlined the non-utilisation of the **Meghalaya Environment Protection and Restoration Fund (MEPRF)**
- **Rat-hole mining** involves digging small tunnels large enough for a person to crawl through to extract coal.
 - **Rat-hole coal mining was banned in April 2014.**
- The panel said **necessary steps** need to be taken by the departments concerned for restoring the mining-affected ecology of Meghalaya
 - It said that the people living in areas around the mines, most of them **abandoned, continue to suffer due to continued acid mine drainage** from the mine pits that have not been closed yet.
- The committee also said that **auditing the source of coal** used in the coke oven, ferroalloy, and captive power plants of cement factories was under way and expected to be completed within three weeks.
- The **panel recommended** the conduct of the drone survey (to locate deposits of coal illegally mined) immediately after the completion of the transportation of re-assessed or re-verified inventoried coal to the Coal India Limited-designated depots.

Prelims Takeaway

- Rat hole coal mining
- NGT

8. Early warning systems and controlled burning for forest fire management in talks at UN Forum on Forests- Down to earth

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Prelims Takeaway

- UNSPF

News:

- Delegates at 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF19) on May 8, 2024 entered into informal negotiations over the draft texts of the High-Level

Key highlights

- Declaration. UNFF19 was held from May 6-10, 2024 in New York, United States.
- Created in 2000, the UNFF is a global discussion platform dedicated to protecting and managing the world's forests.
- Every year, UN member countries and forest experts meet at the UN headquarters in New York.
- They alternate between technical discussions on forest management and policy decisions for forest protection.
- The UNFF is inclusive, with all UN member states participating.
- India is a founding member.
- At its recent 19th session, the UNFF aimed to secure strong political commitments from countries to protect forests.
- These commitments will guide specific actions to implement the UNSPF
- The UNSPF is a roadmap for global action on forests. It outlines steps for sustainable management of all forests and trees, aiming to stop deforestation and forest damage.
- It also helps ensure that forest conservation efforts contribute to broader UN goals on sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity, and desertification.
- The UNSPF serves as a guide for UN agencies and partners working on forests, promoting better collaboration and joined-up action.

Editorials, Gists and Explainers

9. What is DigiLocker and does it keep your data and documents safe? - The Hindu

Relevance: Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology.

Context:

- The DigiLocker platform, launched in 2015, operates as an app to store users' digital records.
- The app is part of the Indian government's paper-free initiative letting users access, verify, and store essential documents in a digital wallet so that they are easy to retrieve and present to officials when required.
 - The app has over 270 million registered users, while nearly 6.7 billion documents like Aadhaar, insurance policy papers, PAN records, and driving licenses have been retrieved through it.
 - The issued documents in DigiLocker system are deemed at par with original physical documents as per Rule 9A of the Information Technology Rules, 2016

<p>How secure is DigiLocker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) under the Digital India programme.. • According to DigiLocker's website, it has standard security measures in place like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SSL encryption, multi-factor authentication (OTP verification), consent systems, timed log outs, and security audits. • However, any government database that stores citizens' information and documents is inevitably an attractive target for hackers who steal user data and sell it on the dark web. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In 2020, DigiLocker posted a notice about a "potential vulnerability in the sign-up flow," that could have led to accounts being compromised. ○ However, due to a CERT-In alert, DigiLocker said that the vulnerability was patched within a day of getting the alert, and that user data was safe. • Google stated, no DigiLocker data is shared with third parties Apps and data is encrypted in transit. 	<p>Issues with DigiLocker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who are not used to operating smartphones or those who find it difficult to navigate apps may struggle to download DigiLocker, without assistance. • Another hurdle is that people with multiple names, aliases, inconsistent spellings, or even slightly mismatched certificates may not be able to smoothly fetch their documents via DigiLocker. • Furthermore, there is no uniformity in how different government authorities and law enforcement bodies in India review official documents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While some insist on being shown virtual documents through DigiLocker, others claim the original hard copies are mandatory.
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10. Investment lessons from the India-EFTA trade deal - The Hindu

Relevance: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

News:

- India clinched a historic trade deal with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

Highlights:

- **The newly minted Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement between India and EFTA** is expected to give a much-needed leg-up to the low levels of extant trade between the two sides.
- The FTA between India and EFTA is also important because India has agreed to include issues such as environment and labour, which it has traditionally opposed incorporating in trade agreements.

<p>Detailed investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another reason sets this FTA apart from those India signed recently is detailed investment chapter • This chapter focuses on investment facilitation issues, not investment protection. But it has a remarkable and unprecedented characteristic. • India has managed to extract a promise from the EFTA countries that they shall aim to increase foreign direct investment in the succeeding five years. • Likewise, Article 7.1(3)(b) of the investment chapter provides that the EFTA states shall aim to facilitate the generation of one million jobs in India. • In legal terms, these articles codify what is known as an obligation of conduct, an obligation to make an honest endeavor towards achieving a goal, notwithstanding the outcome or the result. 	<p>Way Forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is critical at a time when foreign direct investment levels in India have dropped. • India needs a clear FTA policy, especially in dealing with international trade and foreign investment laws. • Two critical elements must be incorporated into its FTA policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ First, India should negotiate trade and investment as part of one comprehensive economic treaty. ○ Second, India should consider expanding the scope of investment issues from mere facilitation to effective protection, with an efficacious dispute settlement mechanism under international law. • Providing enforceable legal protection to foreign investors under international law will boost their confidence.
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Quick Look

1. Auroras

- These are essentially natural lights that appear as bright, swirling curtains in the night sky and can be seen in a range of colours, including blue, red, yellow, green, and orange.
- These lights primarily appear near the poles of both the northern and southern hemispheres all year round but sometimes they expand to lower latitudes.
- These are called aurora borealis in the north and in the south, it is known as the aurora australis.

2. Deadbots

- These are also known as griefbots, are AI-enabled digital representations of departed loved ones.
- These chatbots simulate their language patterns and personality traits using their digital footprint, like emails, social media posts and even voice recordings, to create a conversational AI that reflects their personality.
- Researchers have warned that these chatbots, while potentially comforting, could lead to psychological distress if not designed with safety in mind.

3. Kawasaki Disease

- Kawasaki disease is a rare heart condition that causes a high fever and inflammation of the blood vessels.
- It usually affects children under the age of 5.
- It's one of the leading causes of heart disease in kids.
- The condition causes the immune system to attack blood vessels, which become inflamed and swollen.
- It tends to affect the coronary arteries, which carry blood to the heart muscle.
- It can also cause problems with lymph nodes, skin, and the lining of a child's mouth, nose, and throat.
- Clinical signs include fever, rash, swelling of the hands and feet, irritation and redness of the whites of the eyes, swollen lymph glands in the neck, and irritation and inflammation of the mouth, lips, and throat.

4. Theaterisation of Armed Forces

- It is a concept which seeks to integrate the capabilities of the three services - army, air force and navy - in order to optimally utilise their resources for wars and operations.
- A theatre command/unit will be created by integrating elements/assets from all the three services.
- Simply put, a theatre command deploys elements of the three services under a single, unified command structure.
- Each command is assigned a specific geographical region for operational roles.
- Almost all major countries like China, Russia, US, UK and France work on a theatre command concept

Prelims Track Question

Q1. Which of the following groupings have India, China and Russia together as its members-

1. G-20
2. Shanghai Cooperation Organization
3. BRICS
4. IBSA
5. G-7

Select the correct answer code given below:

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2 and 4 only
- D. 3, 4 and 5 only

Q2. Consider the following Statements:

Statement 1: CDS was created in 2019 on the recommendations of a committee of defense experts headed by Naresh Chandra Committee

Statement 2: His core function will be to foster greater operational synergy between the three service branches of the Indian military

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- A. Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I
- B. Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I
- C. Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect
- D. Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct

Q3. Consider the following Statements regarding Vibrant Village Programme (VVP)

1. It is a Central sector scheme
2. It will cover the border areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Ladakh.
3. There will be overlap between Border Area Development Programme and VVP

How many of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q4. Consider the following Statements about Lithium:

1. It is a delicate, white-silver alkali metal.
2. It is one of the most dense metal
3. Due to its solubility as an ion, it is present in ocean water.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q5. With reference to coal-based thermal power plants in India, following statements:

1. None of them uses seawater.
2. None of them are set up in water-stressed districts.
3. None of them is privately owned.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only One
- B. Only Two
- C. All Three
- D. None

Q6. Consider the following Statements about Forest:

1. Protected Forests has more protection than Reserve Forests
2. bamboo is a minor forest produce.
3. forest dwellers have the right to cut the bamboo grown on forest areas.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only One
- B. Only Two
- C. All Three
- D. None

Q7. Consider the following Statements regarding rat hole mining

1. It is a hazardous method of mining, which involves digging small tunnels.
2. This technique of coal mining is, generally, prevalent in the Southern states
3. The National Green Tribunal banned this practice in 2014.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q8. Consider the following statements about the International Seabed Authority (ISA):

1. It was established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
2. Its primary function is to regulate the exploration and exploitation of mineral resources in international waters.
3. India is not a member of the ISA.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q9. Consider the following Statements regarding Digi Locker

1. It is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
2. It has standard security measures like SSL encryption, multi-factor authentication.
3. Digi Locker data is shared with third parties Apps

How many of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q10. Consider the following Statements regarding European Free Trade Association

1. It is an intergovernmental organization of European Union members
2. It was founded by the Stockholm Convention in 1960.
3. It aims to promote free trade and economic integration to the benefit of its Member States.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Prelims Track Answer

Answer 1 Option A is correct

Explanation

- Members of G20: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the European Union, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States
- Members of G7: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- Members of SCO: Republic of India, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.
- Members of BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- Members of IBSA: India, Brazil, South Africa.

Answer 2 Option D is Correct

Explanation:

- In 2012, the Naresh Chandra Committee recommended the appointment of a Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee as a midway
- Finally, the post of CDS was created in 2019 on the recommendations of a committee of defence experts headed by **Lt General DB Shekatkar**. **Statement 1 is incorrect.**
- His core function will be to foster greater operational synergy between the three service branches of the Indian military and keep inter-service frictions to a minimum. **Statement 2 is correct.**

Answer 3 Option A is correct

Explanation:

- The Vibrant Village Programme aims at comprehensive development of the select villages in mission mode and through multi-pronged strategy.
- It is a Centrally sponsored scheme, announced in the Union Budget 2022-23 (to 2025-26) for development of villages on the northern border, thus improving the quality of life of people living in identified border villages. **Statement 1 is incorrect.**

- It will cover the border areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Ladakh. **Statement 2 is correct.**
- There will not be overlap with the Border Area Development Programme. **Statement 3 is incorrect.**

Answer 4 Option B is Correct

Explanation:

- It is a delicate, white-silver alkali metal. **Statement 1 is correct.**
- It is the least dense metal and the least dense solid element under typical conditions. **Statement 2 is incorrect.**
- Due to its solubility as an ion, it is present in ocean water and is commonly obtained from brines. **Statement 3 is correct.**

Answer 5 Option D is Correct

Explanation

- The Mundra Thermal Power Plant employs a cooling water system that utilizes seawater. Seawater is drawn from the Gulf of Kutch. In addition, purified seawater from a reverse osmosis plant is utilized by various supplementary systems. **Statement 1 is incorrect**
- According to research by WRI (World Resources Institute), 40 percent of India's thermal power plants are situated in regions experiencing significant water stress. This poses a challenge as these plants rely on water for cooling purposes. **Statement 2 is incorrect**
- India has a total of 269 Thermal Power Plants, with 138 of them being owned by the public sector and the remaining 131 owned by the private sector. **Statement 3 is incorrect**

Answer 6 Option A is Correct

Explanation:

- Reserved Forests has more protection than Protected Forests **Statement 1 is incorrect**
- The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, recognises bamboo as a Minor Forest Produce, **Statement 2 is correct**
- forest dwellers have the right to cut the bamboo grown on **non-forest areas**. **Statement 3 is incorrect.**

Answer 7 Option B is correct

Explanation:

- Rat-Hole Mining is a hazardous method of mining, which involves digging small tunnels, which are just large enough for a person to crawl through, to extract coal. **Statement 1 is correct.**
- The practice of mining is generally prevalent in the Northeastern states, especially Meghalaya. **Statement 2 is incorrect.**
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned this practice in Meghalaya in 2014 due to various concerns caused by it. **Statement 3 is correct.**

Answer 8 Option B is correct

Explanation

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The International Seabed Authority (ISA) was established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982. UNCLOS is an international treaty that sets out the legal framework for all matters relating to the seas and oceans.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** The ISA is the intergovernmental organization responsible for regulating the exploration and exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, which is the seabed and ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. This includes resources like polymetallic nodules, cobalt crusts, and sulfides.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** India is a member of the International Seabed Authority. In fact, India was the first country to receive the status of a "Pioneer Investor" in 1987, granting it exclusive rights to explore a specific area of the seabed in the Central Indian Ocean Basin for the development of polymetallic nodules.

Answer 9 Option A is correct

Explanation:

- DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) under the Digital India programme. **Statement 1 is incorrect.**
- According to DigiLocker's website, it has standard security measures in place like: SSL encryption, multi-factor authentication (OTP verification), consent systems, timed log outs, and security audits. **Statement 2 is correct.**
- Google stated, no DigiLocker data is shared with third parties Apps and data is encrypted in transit. **Statement 3 is incorrect.**

Answer 10 Option B is correct

Explanation:

- The EFTA is the intergovernmental organization of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland
- All four of these countries are not a part of the EU. **Statement 1 is incorrect.**
- It was founded by the Stockholm Convention in 1960. **Statement 2 is correct.**
- It aims to promote free trade and economic integration to the benefit of its four Member States and their trading partners around the globe. **Statement 3 is correct.**



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