Significance of Gelephu project

Why in news?

Bhutan is launching the Gelephu Mindfulness City, an interconnected bridge of sustainable development between South and Southeast Asia.

What are the features of Gelephu Mindfulness City?

- **Location-** Gelephu is a town in southern Bhutan, near the India-Bhutan border.
- **Dynamic economic corridor-** The proposed land connection traverses Assam and Northeast Indian states, extends to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore, forming a dynamic economic corridor that bridges South Asia to Southeast Asia.
- **Integration with nature**- The city is designed to seamlessly integrate with the natural landscape of mountains, forests and rivers preserving Bhutan's rich biodiversity.
- **Environment sustainability**-The layout of the city takes inspiration from flow of rivers and streams, creating ribbon like neighbourhoods resembling paddy fields that cascade down from the hills to valley.
- **Biodiversity corridors**- To mitigate flooding during the monsoon season, paddy fields will be established along the rivers and tributaries, serving as biodiversity corridors for local flora and fauna while protecting existing and future development.
- **Sustainable design**- Local materials such as wood, stone, and bamboo will be used in construction, inspired by vernacular motifs and traditional Bhutanese architecture.
- **Cultural preservation**- The city aims to preserve and evolve Bhutanese culture, with cultural centres and landmarks incorporated into the design offering visitors a deeper understanding of the country's heritage.
- **Hydroelectric dam**- The *Sankosh Temple-Dam* serves as a symbolic and functional centrepiece of the city, embodying its foundational values of culture and nature.
- **Key destinations**- The city includes key destinations such as new airport, Vajrayana spiritual centre, health care centre, university, greenhouse, cultural centre and market.
- **Carbon neutral city-** Gelephu would include only non-polluting industries mainly IT, education, hotel and hospital sectors and would be promoted as investment destination and health and wellness hub in the middle of the region.
- **Special Administrative Region**-The city will have executive autonomy and legal independence, aiming to attract businesses that align with Bhutanese values and sustainability.

How the city will improve India-Bhutan ties?

The mega project is spread around 1,000-sq. km. green city along Assam border 'connecting South Asia to Southeast Asia.

- **Strategic location-** Gelephu's location positions it as a key node in India's "Act East" policy, which aims to strengthen economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asian nations.
- **Regional connectivity-** By facilitating trade, investment, and people-to-people exchanges, the city contributes to the realization of India's vision for enhanced connectivity and engagement with ASEAN countries and the broader Indo-Pacific region.
- **India-Japan cooperation**- The city plays a crucial role in India-Japan connectivity plans, including the development of infrastructure and trade corridors linking India's northeast through Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.
- **Indian Ocean region connectivity**- Gelephu's integration into connectivity networks like India-Middle East- Europe Economic Corridor and Trilateral Highway reinforces its role as a critical node in promoting trade, investment, and cultural exchange across the Indian Ocean region.

The India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway is a significant infrastructure project aimed at enhancing connectivity and trade within the ASEAN–India Free Trade Area

- **Supplement maritime flows**-Gelephu's strategic location complements maritime connectivity initiatives by providing *alternative land-based routes* for trade and transportation.
- **Economic cooperation**- India's involvement in the project, through measures such as direct flights, technology transfer, and encouraging Indian businesses to invest, can contribute to its success and foster socio-economic development in remote regions of West Bengal and Assam.
- **Foster connectivity**-India expressed its full commitment to improve and expand the major roads leading to Bhutan, they also pledged to connect two or three of our border towns with railway lines.
- **Neighbourhood first policy**- India's support to the Gelephu project reinforces India's commitment to bolstering Bhutan's economic development and sovereignty, particularly in the face of external pressures.
- **Hydropower cooperation**- It is bedrock of India's relation with Bhutan, India's cooperation in Gelephu project would further promote government to government cooperation.

Punatsangchhu-II hydropower project is expected to be completed in 2024.

- **Partnership for prosperity**- The partnership between India and Bhutan is based on

mutual benefits and respect for each other's priorities, it is visible with the support of India for the Gelephu project.

Quick facts

Bhutan- Landlocked country
• Bhutan is a small landlocked country situated in Southern Asia between China in the north and India in the south on the southern slopes of the Eastern Himalayas. • It is located both in the *Northern and Eastern hemispheres* of the Earth. • Bhutan is bordered by Indian States of *Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh*. • Bhutan is a ***constitutional monarchy*** with a king as the head of state and a prime minister as the head of government. • **Capital**- Thimphu, it is the 5th highest capital in the world in terms of altitude. • **Financial centre**- Phuntsholing. • **Gross National Happiness Index**- It is 1st conceptualized by Bhutan to measure the collective happiness and well-being of a population

References

1. The Hindu- India's neighbourhood first policy
2. The Hindu- Bhutan's opening move

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering