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1. RBZ Launches Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG) Currency Backed by Gold and Foreign Reserves (April 9, 2024)

The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) has launched a new currency called "Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG)," which is backed by gold and foreign currencies, aiming to replace the local currency, Zimbabwe dollars (ZW\$) Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollar.

An Overview of the News

- RBZ has instructed banks to convert existing Zimbabwe dollar balances into ZiG starting from April 5, 2024.
- Circulation of ZiG notes and coins will commence on April 30, 2024.
- Banks will continue accepting ZW\$ deposits for 21 days after April 5, 2024.

About Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG):

- ZiG is backed by a combination of foreign currency and precious metals, predominantly gold.
- The initial exchange rate of ZiG is set at 13.56 ZiG per US dollar (USD).
- Denominations of ZiG notes and coins include 1ZiG, 2ZiG, 5ZiG, 10ZiG, 20ZiG, 50ZiG, 100ZiG, and 200ZiG.

Background on Currency and Economic Context:

- Zimbabwe adopted the US dollar in 2009 to combat hyperinflation.
- The new Zimbabwe dollar (Real-Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollar) was introduced in 2019.
- RTGS dollar experienced a significant devaluation, losing 75% of its value in 2024 and nearly 100% against the US dollar in 2023.

About Zimbabwe:

- President - Emmerson Mnangagwa
- Capital - Harare
- Currency - Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG)

2. Valerie Adams Named International Ambassador for TCS World 10K Bengaluru 2024 (April 8, 2024)

Valerie Adams, the renowned shot putter and multiple-time World Champion, has been appointed as the International Event Ambassador for the 16th edition of the Tata Consultancy Services World 10K Bengaluru.

An Overview of the News

- Adams, a four-time World Champion and two-time Olympic medalist from New Zealand, is celebrated as one of the most successful female shot putters in history.
- With a remarkable Olympic record, Adams has secured two gold medals (2008, 2012), one silver (2016), and one bronze medal (2020) across five appearances.

The World 10K Bengaluru:

- The World 10K Bengaluru, also recognized as the TCS World 10K Bengaluru due to sponsorship from Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), is an annual road running event held in Bangalore, India.
- Established in 2008, this 10-kilometer competition typically occurs towards the end of May each year.
- Initially sponsored by Sunfeast, a brand under ITC Limited, the event has evolved over the years.
- Participants from various backgrounds come together to compete in this renowned race, showcasing their endurance and athleticism.

3. Peter Pellegrini wins in Slovakia's Presidential Election (April 8, 2024)

Peter Pellegrini, a candidate backed by Slovakia's nationalist-leftist government, won the presidential election, strengthening the influence of Prime Minister Robert Fico, who holds pro-Russian views.

An Overview of the News

- Fico, serving his fourth term as prime minister, has shifted Slovakia's foreign policy toward Russia and reformed criminal law and media regulations, raising concerns about the rule of law.
- Pellegrini received 53.26% of the vote, while his pro-West rival Ivan Korčič received 46.73%, with almost all voting districts reporting.
- Although the powers of the Slovak President are limited, he can veto laws and nominate judges to the Constitutional Court, which could potentially influence political conflicts over Fico's reforms, especially regarding corruption penalties.
- Fico's coalition, which also includes Pellegrini's party, halted official arms shipments to Ukraine, reflecting their stance against Western involvement in the conflict.

About Slovakia

- It is officially known as the Slovak Republic, located in Central Europe.
- It is bordered by Poland to the north, Ukraine to the east, Hungary to the south, Austria to the west and the Czech Republic to the northwest.
- Slovakia is a landlocked country, meaning it has no direct access to the sea.

- Its neighboring countries create a diverse geopolitical landscape within Central Europe.
- The borders with Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic define the territorial extent of Slovakia.

Capital - Bratislava

Official language - Slovak

Prime Minister - Robert Fico

Currency - Euro

4. Romania unveils world's most powerful laser (April 6, 2024)

Developed by a research center in Romania as part of the EU Infrastructure Extreme Light Infrastructure (ELI) project.

An Overview of the News

- Operated by French company Thales, this laser claims to have revolutionary potential in a variety of fields, from healthcare to space exploration.
- At the core of this groundbreaking laser technology lies chirped-pulse amplification (CPA), a method developed by Mourou and Strickland.
- CPA facilitates the amplification of laser power while ensuring safe intensity levels by stretching and compressing the ultra-short laser pulse.
- This innovative technology achieves unprecedented levels of intensity, opening the door to myriad applications such as corrective eye surgery and advanced precision instruments in industrial operations.

Nobel Prize Winner Contribution:

- Gerard Mourou and Donna Strickland were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2018 for their pioneering work in laser technology.
- His inventions have led to revolutionary advancements by enabling precision instruments and applications.

Possible Applications:

- Nuclear waste treatment: Laser technology can reduce the radioactivity period of nuclear waste, increasing the safety and manageability of disposal.
- Space debris removal: Laser technology can be deployed to clear space debris, reducing the risk of collisions with satellites and spacecraft.
- Medical Advances: The precision of lasers promises breakthroughs in medical treatments, including targeted cancer treatments and advanced surgical techniques.

Involvement of the ELI Project and Thales Group:

- Part of the European Union Infrastructure Extreme Light Infrastructure (ELI) project, which aims to push laser technology boundaries.
- Operated by Thales Group, a leading global provider of aerospace, defense and security solutions, headquartered in France.

5. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi Sworn in for Third Term (April 4, 2024)

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was sworn in for his third term as Egypt's president in the country's new capital.

An Overview of the News

- Sisi won the December election by a wide margin, winning 89.6% of the vote without any significant competition.

Economic Reforms and Financial Assistance:

- Egypt allowed its currency to devalue after securing a \$35 billion lifeline from the Emirati Wealth Fund, eliminating chronic currency shortages.
- A commitment to reforms, including reducing state interference in trade, facilitated an expanded \$8 billion deal with the IMF.

Military-led infrastructure projects:

- Since 2014, Egypt has undertaken extensive infrastructure development, primarily led by the military.
- These projects aim to promote economic growth and accommodate population growth, with the \$58 billion New Administrative Capital Project being the largest.

Criticism of mega-projects:

- Critics argue that these projects increase economic challenges by diverting resources and increasing the national debt.
- Projects such as the Suez Canal expansion and new cities have faced scrutiny for their impact on Egypt's financial stability.

Global role amid regional crisis:

- Egypt's involvement in the Gaza crisis has enhanced its global reputation, serving as the primary aid vehicle and mediator for ceasefire talks.
- Sisi came to power in 2013 after ousting Mohammed Morsi, underscoring his background as a former intelligence general.

Human rights concerns and government response:

- Rights groups estimate that thousands of people, including activists and Islamists, have been detained since Morsi's ouster.
- Sisi's administration defends these actions, emphasizing stability and security while promising efforts toward providing social rights such as housing and employment.

6. Judith Suminwa Tuluka becomes the first female Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (April 4, 2024)

Judith Suminwa Tuluka has been appointed as Congo's first female Prime Minister under President Félix Tshisekedi on April 1, 2024, amid a political realignment following the resignation of Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde.

An Overview of the News:

- In January 2024, President Tshisekedi was sworn in for a second five-year term. After this Prime Minister Tuluka was appointed.

Constitutional Mobility:

- According to the Constitution of the DRC, the President cooperates with the Prime Minister, who is elected from the largest legislative party.

Challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC):

- The DRC, which is endowed with abundant natural resources such as copper, uranium, cobalt and diamonds, is struggling with ongoing violence and instability, particularly in its eastern provinces.
- The situation is worsened by tensions with neighboring Rwanda, which is accused of providing support to militia groups such as the March 23 Movement, which has led to mass displacement of civilians.

About the Democratic Republic of Congo:

- Central Africa is the second largest country in Africa after Algeria. Known as the Republic of Zaire until 1971, it gained independence from Belgium in 1960.
- Kinshasa, the capital, is located next to the Congo River, the second longest river in Africa after the Nile River.
- Congo is the only river in the world that crosses the equator twice.
- Its currency is the Congolese franc.

7. Romania and Bulgaria's Schengen Accession (April 1, 2024)

On March 31, Romania and Bulgaria formally joined, at least partially, Europe's visa-free Schengen travel area.

An Overview of the News

Statements from political leaders:

- Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov called the event a "big victory" for Bulgaria, emphasizing its historical significance.
- Despite his resignation, Denkov remains in office, highlighting the achievement as Bulgaria's "greatest success" since joining the EU.
- Deputy Prime Minister Maria Gabriel echoed this sentiment, calling it a "historic moment" with benefits for various sectors.
- Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu qualified the achievement with plans for full Schengen accession by the end of the year.

European Commission Perspective

- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen praised the development as a "great success" for both countries and a historic moment for the Schengen area.
- They emphasized the shared goal of building a stronger, more united Europe.

Implications and Challenges

- Free movement for flights and boats is allowed, land routes are restricted due to Austrian objections.
- Both countries aim to open land borders by the end of 2024, awaiting the opportune political moment for full integration.
- The Schengen area, established in 1985, covers 29 European countries and allows more than 400 million people to travel freely without internal border controls.

Reactions and Concerns

- While welcome, ongoing border checks on the roads have caused frustration among truck drivers, leading to calls for urgent measures for full Schengen integration.
- Long wait times at the border have caused significant financial losses to Romanian carriers, leading to calls for faster progress.
- Bulgarian businesses also express disappointment at the slow progress, especially concerning land transport.

Romania:

- Southeastern European country.
- Known for the forests of Transylvania and the Carpathian Mountains.
- It includes well-preserved medieval cities such as Sighisoara.
- Famous for fortified churches and castles, including Bran Castle associated with Dracula.

- Capital: Bucharest, home of the communist-era Palatul Parlamentului government building.

Bulgaria:

- The Balkan nation with diverse geography.
- It includes the Black Sea coast, the mountainous interior and rivers such as the Danube.
- Cultural diversity with influences from Greek, Slavic, Ottoman and Persian civilizations.
- Capital city: Sofia, located at the base of Mount Vitosha, dates back to the 5th century BC.

8. Thailand Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage, Promotes Equality and Tourism (March 28, 2024)

Thailand's lower house of parliament approved a landmark bill legalizing gay marriage, making the country a leader in Southeast Asia in promoting equal rights.

An Overview of the News

- The bill, amending the Civil and Commercial Code, received overwhelming support in the House of Representatives.

Major Provisions of the Bill:

- The "Marriage Equality" bill has received overwhelming majority approval from the 500-member House of Representatives.
- 400 MPs voted in favour, while 10 opposed it, and after three hours of debate, five MPs abstained.
- The law allows same-sex partners aged 18 and over to register their marriages, giving them inheritance, tax benefits and child adoption rights.
- It modifies the legal definition of marriage from "one man and one woman" to "two persons" and changes the status from "husband and wife" to "married couple".

Impact and Importance:

- Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin's administration is leading the bill, which aims to strengthen Thailand's reputation as an LGBTQ-friendly destination.
- Thailand joins Taiwan and Nepal as one of the few Asian regions to recognize same-sex marriage, joining around 40 other countries globally.
- Despite previous obstacles, such as a 2021 Constitutional Court decision and failed attempts at civil partnership recognition, LGBTQ activists have persisted in their quest for equality.

Tourism Promotion and Economic Implications:

- Legalizing same-sex marriage is expected to have a positive impact on tourism, which contributes significantly to Thailand's economy.
- Before the pandemic, LGBTQ tourism in Thailand generated approximately \$6.5 billion, underscoring the potential economic benefits of this progressive legislation.

9. Bassirou Diomaye Faye wins in Senegal's Presidential Election (March 28, 2024)

Faye, known as an anti-establishment figure, won the initial round with 54.28% of the vote.

An Overview of the News

- At 44, Faye is poised to become Africa's youngest democratically elected head of state.
- His victory marked the first time an opposition candidate had won in the first round since Senegal gained independence from France in 1960.
- Recognition of Faye's victory awaits confirmation from Senegal's Constitutional Council in the coming days.

Defeat of the governing coalition candidate:

- Faye won a decisive victory over the ruling coalition's candidate, former Prime Minister Amadou Ba, who won 35.79% of the vote.
- Aliou Mamadou Dia is in third place among 19 contenders with just 2.8% of the votes.
- Voter turnout stood at 61.30%, surpassing the 2012 figure but lower than the previous 2019 election.

Departure from the status quo:

- Faye, who was released from prison just 10 days before the election, advocates a departure from the current political landscape.
- He promised to restore national "sovereignty" and launch a program focused on "leftist Pan-Africanism", potentially indicating a significant restructuring of Senegal's institutions.

About Senegal

- Capital - Dakar
- Currency - West African CFA Franc
- Official language - French

10. Rumi Alqahtani, the first Saudi contestant to participate in the Miss Universe Pageant (March 28, 2024)

Rumi Alqahtani, a 27-year-old Saudi Arabian model, was the first to reveal her participation in the upcoming Miss Universe pageant via Instagram.

An Overview of the News

- Riyadh-born Alqahtani has held previous awards including Miss Saudi Arabia, Miss Arab World Peace 2021, and Miss Woman (Saudi Arabia).
- Her participation marks the inaugural representation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the Miss Universe pageant, marking a significant milestone for the country.

Miss Universe Pageant (2024):

- The upcoming Miss Universe pageant for the year 2024 is scheduled to be held in Mexico.
- The current Miss Universe titleholder is Shanice Palacios, representing Nicaragua.

Highlights of other Beauty Pageants

- Kristina Piskova of Czech Republic won the title of Miss World 2024 in Mumbai, India on March 9, 2024.

About Saudi Arabia

- Capital - Riyadh
- King - Salman of Saudi Arabia
- Currency - Saudi Riyal