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1. Massive 'Talisman Saber' military exercise begins with 14 nations in Australia-US joint training (July 27, 2023)

Massive-'Talisman-Saber'-military-exercise-begins-with-14-nations-in-Australia-US-joint-training
The 10th edition of the multilateral military exercise, 'Talisman Sabre,' commenced on July 21, 2023, at HMAS Canberra in Townsville, involving Australia, the United States, and eleven partner nations.

An Overview of the News

- 'Talisman Sabre' is the largest military exercise of its kind, with over 30,000 military personnel participating. The exercise locations span across Queensland, Western Australia, Northern Region, and New South Wales in 2023.
- Notably, this year's exercise will feature practice sessions around Norfolk Island, marking the first time this location is included in the training.
- Alongside the United States and Australia, other participating countries include Canada, Fiji, France, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Korea, and Tonga.
- Germany is taking part in the 'Talisman Sabre' exercise for the first time, adding to the international collaboration.
- Additionally, personnel from India, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand will participate as observers, strengthening the exercise's cooperative and learning aspects.

Talisman Sabre:

- It is an exercise held every two years, commenced in 2005 from June 12 to June 27.
- It took place in Sholavatar Bay, Rockhampton, Townsville, and Coral Sea, involving the participation of 16,000 American and Australian troops.
- The upcoming Talisman Saber exercise will witness the involvement of 13 nations in a comprehensive multi-domain war encompassing sea, land, air, cyber, and space domains.
- The primary objective of this exercise is to foster closer cooperation and build strong relationships among the participating military forces.
- The activities planned for this exercise include force preparation and logistics operations, amphibian landings, ground force maneuvers, field training exercises, and simulations of air and maritime operations.

2. Russia implements comprehensive ban on sex change and transgender marriages (July 26, 2023)

Russia-implements-comprehensive-ban-on-sex-change-and-transgender-marriages
Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed new legislation that significantly affects the LGBTQ+ community in Russia.

The law, passed unanimously by both houses of Parliament, includes a comprehensive ban on sex change.

An Overview of the News

- Medical interventions aimed at changing a person's sex and changing sex on official documents or public records are strictly prohibited.
- The new law allows medical intervention only to treat congenital anomalies.
- The law also affects marriage and family planning, voids marriages where one partner has changed gender, and prevents transgender persons from becoming foster or adoptive parents.
- The ban is rooted in the government's pursuit of what they consider to be the nation's "traditional values".
- Lawmakers argue that the law is necessary to combat "**anti-Western family ideology**".
- The crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights in Russia has been ongoing for a decade, with a number of restrictive measures introduced over the years.
- The government's stance on promoting "traditional family values" was supported by the Russian Orthodox Church.
- Various laws were enacted to suppress LGBTQ+ rights, including banning "non-traditional sexual relations" between minors and banning same-sex marriage.
- Last year, a law was introduced to suppress the "promotion of non-traditional sexual relations" among adults, further tightening restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights in the country.

Key Points

- Estonia is the first Central European country to allow same-sex marriage.
- Edgars Rinkevic is the first openly gay head of state in the European Union.

3. India Bans Non-basmati White Rice Exports (July 25, 2023)

India-Bans-Non-basmati-White-Rice-Exports

India banned the export of non-basmati white rice to stabilise the volatility in retail prices within the country.

An Overview of the News

- This decision was taken by the **Ministry of Food and Consumer Affairs**.
- The ban applies to all exports of "**non-basmati white rice**".
- India's decision is significant as it is the world's leading rice exporter.
- An exemption from the ban will be granted to countries that request the export of white rice.

- Countries seeking exceptions must meet their own food safety requirements and obtain formal approval from their respective governments.
- The primary objective of the ban is **to stabilise the volatility of retail prices within India.**
- Two major challenges affecting India's rice production are global food prices affected by the war in Ukraine and unpredictable weather conditions, including heavy monsoon rains in northern rice-growing states and insufficient rainfall in other regions.

Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT):

- DGFT is an important agency under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry.**
- Its headquarter is in **New Delhi, India.**
- DGFT plays an important role in regulating and enforcing laws related to foreign trade.
- One of its major responsibilities is to formulate and implement foreign trade policy.
- The foreign trade policy aims to **promote India's export activities and create a conducive environment for international trade.**
- The current Director General of DGFT is **Amit Yadav.**

4. Admiral Lisa Franchetti becomes the first woman to lead the US Navy (July 23, 2023)

US President Joe Biden has nominated Admiral Lisa Franchetti to lead the US Navy.

If confirmed by the Senate, Admiral Franchetti would become the first female member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

An Overview of the News

- Currently serving as the **42nd Deputy Chief of Naval Operations from September 2022.**
- Previous roles include director of strategy, plans, and policies of the Joint Staff (2020-2022) and commander of the United States Sixth Fleet (2018-2020).
- Made history as the **second woman to be promoted to the rank of four-star admiral in the US Navy.**
- **Education:** Earned a Bachelor of Science degree with developmental honours in journalism and history from Northwestern University.
- **Further Education:** Master's degree in Organisational Management from the University of Phoenix.
- **Awards and Recognition:** Received numerous awards, including the Defense Vishisht Seva Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal (two awards), Vishisht Seva Medal, Legion of Merit (five awards), Meritorious Service Medal (five awards), Navy and Marine Corps

Commendation Medal (four awards), and Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal (two awards).

5. Cough syrup kills six children in Cameroon (July 21, 2023)

Cough-syrup-kills-six-children-in-Cameroon

Cough medicine has killed six children in the **African country of Cameroon** in the past months. In this context, the **World Health Organization (WHO)** has sought help from the Indian authorities to find out where it was prepared.

An Overview of the news:

- The UN health organization WHO issued a warning on 19 July 2023 that the recent deaths of six children in Cameroon may be linked to a cough syrup sold under the name Naturcold.

Toxic chemical called diethylene glycol:

- A large amount of a toxic chemical called **diethylene glycol** has been found in this cough syrup.
- According to the World Health Organisation, the amount of diethylene glycol in the medicine should not be more than **0.1 per cent**, but its quantity has been found up to **28.6 per cent in Naturecold**.

Fracon International (England) mentions:

- The manufacturer's name on the bottle of the drug is **Fracon International (England)**, but health officials in the United Kingdom have told the WHO that there is no company with that name in their country.
- After this WHO has contacted Indian authorities and requested to talk to Indian drug manufacturers and find out where this drug is being manufactured.

These medicines have also been related to India:

- Over the past few months, several cases of toxic chemicals in cough medicines have been reported, some of which have been related to medicines made in India.
- In the year 2022, more than 300 children in **Gambia, Uzbekistan and Indonesia** were reported to have died due to cough medicine. In most cases the drugs were manufactured by Indian companies.

Strict rules apply on these drugs in India:

- In May 2023, the Government of India had issued an order that cough medicine to be exported would have to take a certificate. Which will be issued after very stringent tests and this test will be done in a government laboratory.
- The Ministry of Commerce had issued this directive in May, which has been implemented from June 1.

India's \$41 billion pharmaceutical industry:

- The **\$41 billion pharmaceutical industry in India** is one of the largest drug manufacturers in the world.
- But for the past few months, India's pharmaceutical industry has been embroiled in international controversies as people have died due to drugs made in India in **Gambia, Uzbekistan and the US**.
- In the year 2023 itself, poisonous elements were found in some medicines in **Marshall Islands and Micronesia**, but there was no case of death.

India leading in manufacturing of cheap toxic chemicals:

- Many medicines of the world are manufactured by different companies of this type of cheap toxic chemicals, but in **three out of four cases**, the medicines are manufactured in India.

6. Ground water law implemented in 21 states and union territories (July 21, 2023)

Ground-water-law-implemented-in-21-states-and-union-territories

On 20 July 2023, the Union Ministry of **Jal Shakti** informed the Parliament that **21 states and union territories** have implemented the **Ground Water Act**.

An Overview of the news:

- In this law, provision has been made for rain water harvesting. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, Union Minister of State for **Jal Shakti Bishweshwar Tudu** informed that the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti has prepared a model bill to enable all states and union territories to enact appropriate groundwater laws.

States implementing rain water harvesting model:

- According to the ministry, the 21 states/UTs which have so far implemented groundwater laws on the lines of the Model Bill include Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

Tap water to 60% rural households in SC areas:

- Under this, tap water has been provided to 60 percent rural households in Scheduled Caste (SC) dominated areas.
- Out of 2,18,06,280 rural households in SC-concentrated/dominated habitations, 1,32,64,760 have been given tap water connections.

Extensive use of groundwater in agriculture:

- India is mainly dependent on groundwater for irrigation and it is using a major part of the total global amount of groundwater. Because about 70% of food production in the country is done with the help of tube wells.

Ground water crisis:

- This excessive dependence of agriculture on ground water is giving rise to the ground water crisis. There is a need for a comprehensive action plan for groundwater conservation.
- In this context, in the '**World Water Development Report**' in 2018, **UNESCO** had described India as the world's largest groundwater user.

7. Deliberations in the 19th CGRFA Session (July 20, 2023)

Deliberations-in-the-19th-CGRFA-Session

The 19th session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) is being held in Rome, Italy from 17-21 July.

An Overview of the News

- The meeting was held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome.
- Topics for discussion: Delegates and observers will focus on three main themes in the session: a review of work on the impact of biodiversity on nutrition and human health, access and benefit-sharing for food and agriculture, and digital sequence information for food and agriculture.
- **Director General of FAO - Qi Dongyu**

About CGRFA

- It is the only permanent intergovernmental body that addresses all components of biodiversity for food and agriculture.
- It was established in 1983 with the aim of reaching an international consensus on policies for the sustainable use and conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their use.
- The commission has 179 member states, making it a globally representative organisation.
- India is one of the member states actively involved in the initiatives of the Commission.
- The intergovernmental body guides the preparation of the Periodic Global Assessment of Genetic Resources and Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture.
- It is responsible for developing global plans of action, codes of conduct and other policy tools, and overseeing their implementation.
- Important achievements of the Commission include the establishment of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), which is an important step towards promoting sustainable agricultural practices and ensuring the equitable availability of genetic resources for future generations.

ITPGRFA:

ITPGRFA, or the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, was adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations on 3 November 2001. Its main objectives are as follows:

- Recognizing the important role of farmers in maintaining crop diversity, which is vital to feeding the world's population.
- To establish a global system that provides farmers, plant breeders and scientists access to plant genetic resources for agriculture.
- Ensuring that the benefits derived from the use of these genetic resources are shared by the recipients with the countries where the resources originated.

8. Events in China: Discussion on the conservation of the Hoolock gibbon (July 20, 2023)

Events-in-China-Discussion-on-the-conservation-of-the-Hoolock-gibbon

The meeting took place in Haikou, Hainan province of China from 7 to 9 July. It was organised by the Global Gibbon Network (GGN).

An Overview of the News

Hoolock Gibbon: The only ape of India

- Previously, scientists believed that there were two species of ape in India: the western hoolock gibbon and the eastern hoolock gibbon.
- A recent study by the Hyderabad-based Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology reveals that India is home to only one ape species, the Hoolock gibbon.

Features of Hoolock Gibbon

- Belonging to the Hylobatidae family, the hoolock gibbon is one of 20 gibbon species on Earth.
- Known for their energetic vocal performances, the population of these apes is estimated to be around 12,000.
- They are the smallest and fastest species of apes, exhibiting high intelligence and strong family bonds.

Distribution and Accommodation

- The hoolock gibbon is native to tropical and subtropical forests in the southeastern part of Asia, including Bangladesh, northeastern India, parts of Myanmar, and southwestern China.
- In India, they are unique in the Northeast between south of the Brahmaputra River and east of the Dibang River.
- Hoolock gibbon populations face a number of threats, including deforestation for infrastructure projects, habitat destruction, hunting for meat, and human encroachment.

Conservation Efforts

- To protect Hoolock gibbons, conservationists have proposed setting up dedicated gibbon wildlife sanctuaries on the lines of Assam.
- Legal protection, limited infrastructure development in their habitats and efforts to control human encroachment and poaching are also necessary.

Conservation Status

- Since the 1990s, the Hoolock gibbon population has declined significantly, leaving all 20 gibbon species at high risk of extinction.
- The IUCN Red List maintains the previous classification, with the eastern hoolock gibbon classified as vulnerable and the western hoolock gibbon as endangered.
- Both species are included in Schedule I of the Indian (Wildlife) Protection Act, 1972.

Global Gibbon Network (GGN)

- Established in 2022 in Haikou, China, GGN aims to protect singing gibbons and their habitats, which are an integral part of Asia's unique natural heritage.
- GGN envisions promoting participatory conservation policies, legislation and actions for gibbon conservation.

9. Surat Diamond Bourse: World's largest office complex (July 20, 2023)

Surat-Diamond-Bourse-World's-largest-office-complex

The **Surat Diamond Bourse** has also surpassed the **Pentagon office complex of the US Department of Defense** as the world's largest office complex.

An Overview of the news:

- The full functioning of the Surat Diamond Bourse will give a boost to the dynamism and growth of the diamond industry.
- The exchange will serve as a hub of trade, innovation and collaboration, boosting the country's economy and creating over **1.5 lakh jobs**.

Inaugurated by the Prime Minister on 21 November:

- Surat Diamond Bourse will start functioning from November 21, 2023. The official inauguration will be done in the presence of Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**.

90% of the world's diamonds get their final form in Surat:

- Surat is famous for producing 90 percent of the world's diamonds. According to the Union Ministry of Finance, 14 out of 15 diamonds in the world are finally cut in Surat.

Bourse Cost:

- This office complex has been built at a cost of **more than Rs 3,000 crore**. This Diamond Bourse has been constructed in **6.7 million square feet**.

Chief Architect:

- The office complex was designed by **Manit Rastogi**, founding partner of architecture firm Morphogenesis, who was commissioned following an international design competition.

Complex Structure:

- The Surat Diamond Bourse consists of nine interconnected buildings connected by 24 feet wide spine corridors. Each of these buildings is 15 floors high including the ground floor.
- Each office ranges from 300 to 75,000 square feet in size.
- There is also a 2 million square feet parking area in the basement of the exchange.

Largest group of professionals in the world:

- The complex of 4,500 diamond trading offices is spread over 35.54 acres and can house 67,000 diamond professionals including cutters, polishers and traders.

Security Arrangements of the Bourse:

- The facility has provision for highly secure campus security checkpoints, CCTV surveillance, control room, public announcement system and under car scanners at the entry gates at all entry and exit gates.

IGBC Accredited:

- The Diamond Bourse has been designed to be eco-friendly and has also been given a **platinum ranking** from the **Indian Green Building Council (IGBC)**.

Design in harmony with nature:

- The shape of the central spine circulates air through the funnel structure to the entire structure, as well as lowering the indoor temperature by circulating chilled water beneath the radiant cooling floor.
- All the offices overlook the landscaped court, designed on the concept of "**panchtatva**" - the five elements, **air, water, fire, earth and sky** - which is approximately 200 feet wide and 300 feet long.

Facilities available in the office premises:

- The bourse has many facilities like safe deposit vaults, conference hall, multi-purpose hall, restaurant, bank, customs clearance house, convention centre, exhibition centre, training centre, entertainment zone, restaurant and a club with security plans.

10. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (July 19, 2023)

India-Myanmar-Thailand-Trilateral-Highway

The India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Highway is a regional connectivity project covering approximately 1,360 km (845 mi) that aims to connect India, Myanmar and Thailand.

An Overview of the News

- The project was proposed by former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and approved in 2002. Its construction began in 2012 and is being implemented in several phases.
- The Ministry of External Affairs in India, in collaboration with Myanmar and Thailand, is responsible for project implementation, with funds allocated from the Ministry of Finance.
- The highway starts from Moreh in Manipur, India, passes through Myanmar and ends at Mae Sot in Thailand. The India-Myanmar Friendship Road is the first section connecting Tamu/Moreh to Kalemyo and Kalewa.
- India's contribution to the project includes the construction of 69 bridges along with access roads on the 74-km Kalewa-Yagyi road section and the 70-km Tamu-Kyygon-Kalewa (TKK) road section in Myanmar.

About Thailand

- It is officially known as the Kingdom of Thailand and historically known as Siam, located on the Indochinese peninsula in Southeast Asia.
- It is bordered by Myanmar and Laos to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the east, and Malaysia and the Gulf of Thailand to the south.
- On the western side, it is bordered by the Andaman Sea, and also has maritime borders with Vietnam to the southeast and Indonesia and India to the southwest.

Capital- **Bangkok**

Official language - **Thai**

Emperor - **Vajiralongkorn (Rama X)**

Prime Minister - **Prayut Chan-o-cha**

About Myanmar

- Capital - **Naypyidaw**
- Official Language - **Burmese**
- President - **Myint Swe (Acting)**
- SAC President and Prime Minister - **Min Aung Hlaing**
- SAC Vice President and Deputy Prime Minister - **Soe Win**