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1. India and US sign Artemis Accord to take Space cooperation to new heights (June 24, 2023)

Artemis Accords

During his state visit to the United States, Prime Minister **Narendra Modi signed the Artemis agreement** with the **US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)**, highlighting the growing importance of India's role as a global space power.

An overview of the news

- The agreement establishes the foundation for cooperation in space exploration and underlines India's commitment to peaceful space activities.

Joint Mission to the International Space Station (ISS)

- In addition to the Artemis agreement, NASA and the **Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)** have agreed to launch a joint mission to the **International Space Station in 2024**.
- This collaborative effort will enable both countries to advance their space research and exploration efforts.

What is the Artemis Agreement?

- The Artemis Agreement outlines principles for international cooperation in **space exploration, particularly relating to the use of the Moon, Mars, comets and asteroids for peaceful purposes**.
- As non-binding multilateral arrangements, these agreements allow governments, including the United States and other participating nations, to contribute to NASA's Artemis program.

Significance of the Artemis Program

- NASA's Artemis program aims to **advance scientific discoveries and expand human exploration of the lunar surface**.
- By studying the **Moon**, researchers hope to make breakthroughs that could lead to advances in various fields such as **technology, medicine and our understanding of the universe**.
- The program focuses on sending astronauts to **Mars and exploring other planets and celestial bodies**.

Establishment of the Artemis Accord

- **In 2020, NASA** established the Artemis Agreement in collaboration with the **US State Department**.

- These agreements serve as agreements between the United States and the **seven other founding member states**, reinforcing commitment to international space treaties and agreements.
- These agreements promote best practices, including the **transparent sharing of scientific data with the public**.

Guiding principle of Accord

- The purpose of the Artemis Agreement is to create a framework for **peaceful and cooperative space exploration**.
- These principles facilitate progress while ensuring ethical and responsible practices in space.
- Since many countries and private companies are actively engaged in **lunar missions and operations, agreements establish shared principles governing civilian exploration and use of outer space**.
- Key principles include conducting all activities in space peacefully and with **full transparency, sharing research findings, registering space objects, and releasing scientific data**.

Nations Participating in the Artemis Accord

- The agreement was signed in **October 2020** by the directors of the national space agencies of the **United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, Luxembourg, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates**.
- Ukraine joined the agreement a month later. Subsequently, in 2021 the agreement was extended to **South Korea, New Zealand, Brazil, Poland, Isle of Man and Mexico**.
- In 2022, **Israel, Romania, Bahrain, Singapore, Colombia, France, Saudi Arabia, Rwanda, Nigeria and the Czech Republic** also become signatories.
- **Spain, Ecuador and now India** have also joined it, taking the total number of participating countries to **28**.

2. Apple to launch its credit card in India (June 23, 2023)

Apple-to-launch-its-credit-card-in-India

Apple Inc is planning to introduce its credit card, known as **Apple Card**, in India to take advantage of the growing opportunities in the country's financial sector.

An overview of the news

- Apple intends to collaborate with **HDFC Bank** to offer Apple Card to Indian customers.
- Apple CEO **Tim Cook** met HDFC Bank CEO and MD **Shashidhar Jagadishan** during the launch of the Apple Store in India in April.

- RBI has directed Apple to follow the standard procedures set up for other co-branded credit cards.

Features of Apple Card

- Physical Apple Card users can earn up to **1% cashback** for regular purchases, which increases to **2%** when paying with **Apple Pay**.
- The cashback percentage has increased to 3% for payments made at Apple Stores and select partners.
- Apple does not charge Apple Card holders **late fees, foreign transaction fees, returned payment fees, or annual credit card fees**. However, the users are responsible for paying the interest charges levied for maintaining the balance.
- Apple Card owners have the option of opening a savings account with an **interest rate of 4.15%**, with no minimum balance requirement, to deposit their daily cash.
- Each Apple Card user receives a unique card number for each device.
- These numbers are securely stored in the device, used by Apple Pay for transactions and on-device cryptographic functions.

3. Minister of Steel inaugurates Silica Reduction Plant Project at SAIL-Bhilai Steel Plant's Dalli Mines (June 23, 2023)

Minister-of-Steel

Union Minister of Steel and Civil Aviation, **Jyotiraditya M. Scindia** virtually inaugurated the **Silica Reduction Plant at Dalli Mines of Bhilai Steel Plant of Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL)** from New Delhi on 23 June.

An overview of the news

- SAIL's silica reduction plant was inaugurated virtually and is located at the company's **Dalli iron ore mine**.
- This enables SAIL to utilize **low-grade ore** from Dalli mines through beneficiation process.
- About **80 per cent** of the iron ore reserves present in the mine have already been utilised.
- The newly inaugurated plant will improve the **iron (Fe) content by 62-64 per cent** and reduce the silica content by **2-3 per cent**.
- SAIL Chairman **Amarendu Prakash** emphasized the need to refine iron ore of size less than 1 mm to obtain the desired grade for effective use in blast furnaces at SAIL's Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP).
- The Silica Reduction Plant has been set up with an investment of about **Rs 149 crore** and is equipped with state-of-the-art beneficiation equipment.

- Its operation will increase iron ore supply to BSP, which will lead to higher annual production from blast furnace, reduce coke consumption and reduce carbon emissions.
- SAIL, functioning under the Ministry of Steel, is one of the leading steel producers in India with an annual capacity of about **20 million tonnes**.

Bhilai Steel Plant

- It is located in **Bhilai of Chhattisgarh state**.
- A ten-time winner of the **Prime Minister's Trophy for Best Integrated Steel Plant in the country**, Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) is a flagship unit of **Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL)**, a Government of India undertaking.
- It produces high strength rails, heavy structures, broad and heavy steel plates of various grades, commercial products, wire rods etc. Bhilai became the first integrated steel plant in the country to cross the **5 MT mark** in crude oil production in the year 2005-06.
- Bhilai has the unique distinction of having the cleanest rail network in the world.

4. NHA launches 'Knowledge Sharing Platform' for inclusive development of National Highways (June 23, 2023)

NHA-launches-'Knowledge-Sharing-Platform'

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways launched a 'Knowledge Sharing Platform' in collaboration with NHA (National Highways Authority of India).

An Overview of the News

- The objective of this platform is **to promote inclusive development of National Highways**.
- It provides a collaborative space for experts and citizens to share ideas and knowledge.
- Topics covered include **road design, safety, construction, environmental sustainability and related fields**.
- The platform encourages exchange of best practices and innovative ideas from around the world.
- It aims to contribute to the development of **India's national highway infrastructure**.
- Minister of Road Transport and Highways - **Nitin Jairam Gadkari**

About National Highways Authority of India (NHA)

- The NHA was created through a promulgation of the **National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988**.
- It is **an independent organization established by the Government of India**.

- NHAI manages and maintains a vast network of more than 50,000 km of National Highways across India, which represents about 40% of the total length of National Highways in the country.
- NHAI is responsible for maintaining and upgrading the quality of National Highways in India and ensuring their smooth operation for the benefit of road users.

Establishment - **1995**

Headquarters - **New Delhi**

Objective - **Development and maintenance of National Highways**

Parent Agency - **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways of India**

5. DGCA suspends licence of Air India pilot (June 23, 2023)

Directorate-General-of-Civil-Aviation-(DGCA)

The **Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** has recently **suspended the license of an Air India pilot for one year** due to a **breach of protocol**.

An overview of the news

- The pilot allowed an individual who did not have proper authorization to enter the **cockpit of the Chandigarh-Leh flight**.
- The first officer, who was responsible for the cockpit, did not raise any concerns about the unauthorized person's presence.
- The incident occurred on the 3rd of this month during the Air India flight from Chandigarh to Leh.
- The unauthorized person remained in the cockpit throughout the duration of the flight.
- As a result of the investigation, the DGCA suspended the license of the first officer pilot for one year.
- This disciplinary action is a consequence of allowing the **unauthorized entry and failing to address the violation promptly**.
- The first officer was found to be lacking assertiveness in preventing the unauthorized entry and also failed to report the violation.

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)

- It is a **statutory body** and formed under the **Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020**.
- It investigates aviation accidents and enforces **all regulations related to aviation**.
- It registers and provides **certificates to civil aircrafts**.
- It is attached to the **Ministry of Civil Aviation**, Government of India.

- It coordinates all regulatory functions with the **International Civil Aviation Organisation.**

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7. Indian Railways signs MoU with USAID/India (June 23, 2023)

Indian-Railways-signs-MoU-with-USAID-India

Indian Railways signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United States Agency for International Development/India (USAID/India).

An Overview of the News

- It aims **to reduce the carbon footprint of Indian Railways and achieve the mission Net Zero Carbon Emission.**
- Indian Railways is actively working towards achieving **net zero carbon emissions by 2030** and has a multi-pronged strategy.
- The **MoU was signed on June 14, 2023** by **Naveen Gulati of Indian Railways and Isabel Coleman of USAID.**
- USAID is a US government agency that supports international development in a variety of fields.
- The MoU covers areas such as **long-term energy planning, energy efficiency policy, clean energy procurement, regulatory support and bidding management** for renewable energy.

About USAID

- The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an **independent agency of the US federal government.**
- USAID is primarily responsible for **administering civilian foreign aid and development assistance programs.**
- The agency has a **substantial budget of over \$27 billion**, making it one of the largest official aid agencies globally.

Formation - **November 3, 1961**

Headquarters - **Washington, D.C., US**

Motto - "**From the American People**"

8. Digi Yatra app user base crosses the one million mark (June 22, 2023)

Digi-Yatra-app-user-base-crosses-the-one-million-mark

The number of passengers who have installed the **Digi Yatra application** on their mobile phones has **surpassed one million** till 20th June 2023.

An overview of the news

- Since its launch on December 1, 2022, a total of **1.746 million individuals** have utilized this facility.

About Digi Yatra

- The Digi Yatra initiative was initially inaugurated at three airports - **New Delhi, Bengaluru, and Varanasi - in December 2022.**
- Subsequently, in **April 2023**, it was introduced at **Vijayawada, Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Pune** airports, expanding its coverage.

- Digi Yatra is an initiative led by the **Ministry of Civil Aviation**, focusing on implementing a biometric boarding system utilizing **Facial Biometric Verification Technology**.
- Its primary objective is to enhance the airport experience for passengers by streamlining the verification process, eliminating the need for manual ticket and **ID checks at multiple touchpoints**.
- This is achieved through a **Digital Framework** that optimizes existing infrastructure.

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10. China inks deal with Pakistan to set up nuclear power plant (June 22, 2023)

China-inks-deal-with-Pakistan-to-set-up-nuclear-power-plant

China and Pakistan signed an agreement on 20 June to set up nuclear power plants worth \$4.8 billion in Punjab province.

An Overview of the News

- The nuclear power plant deal is a **symbol of growing economic cooperation** between China and Pakistan.

- The agreement covers the construction of the **1,200 MW Chashma-5 nuclear plant in Punjab's Mianwali district.**
- Pakistan is receiving a significant investment of **\$4.8 billion from China for this project.**
 - Pakistan actively engaged with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to meet the conditions required for the 9th review, and Prime Minister Sharif of Pakistan acknowledged the support of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

About Pakistan

- Independence - **14 August 1947**
- Capital - **Islamabad**
- President - **Arif Alvi**
- Prime Minister - **Shahbaz Sharif**
- Official languages - **Urdu, English**

About China

- Government - **Unitary Marxist-Leninist One Party Socialist Republic**
- President - **Xi Jinping**
- Capital - **Beijing**
- Official Language - **Standard Chinese**
- Currency - **Renminbi**