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1. Sarbananda Sonowal flags off maiden International Cruise Vessel, MV Empress in Chennai (June 6, 2023)

Sarbananda-Sonowal-flags-off-maiden-International

Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, **Sarbananda Sonowal** flagged off **India's first international cruise vessel - MV Empress, from Chennai to Sri Lanka** on June 5.

An overview of the news

- This is the launch of the **International Cruise Tourism Terminal at Chennai** built at a cost of **Rs 17.21 crore**, ushering in a new era of **cruise tourism** and maritime trade in the country.
- On the occasion of Environment Day, Sonowal along with the port officials also planted 2,500 saplings at the port.
- The launch of the first cruise service between Chennai and Sri Lanka has opened a **new chapter in the cruise tourism sector** in the country.
- This is the result of an MoU signed during the Incredible India **International Cruise Summit** in 2022 between **Chennai Port and M/s Waterways Leisure Tourism Pvt Ltd** to start domestic and international cruise services.

International Cruise Vessel, MV Empress

- It is a renowned and **luxurious cruise ship** that operates globally.
- It offers passengers a unique and unforgettable experience on the **open seas, combining comfort, entertainment, and leisure.**
- The vessel is equipped with state-of-the-art navigation systems and safety features, ensuring a secure and smooth journey for all on board.
- Its elegant design and modern amenities make it a preferred choice for travelers seeking a premium cruising experience.

2. Nepal's PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit to India (June 3, 2023)

Nepal's-PM-Pushpa-Kamal-Dahal's-visit-to-India

In a significant diplomatic development, Prime Minister of Nepal **Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'** made a four-day visit to New Delhi on 31 May.

An overview of the news

- Various projects were launched during the visit which included the **Kurtha-Bijalpura section of the railway line.**
- An Indian Railways cargo train was inaugurated from the newly constructed **rail link Bathnaha (India) to Nepal Customs Yard** under Indian grant.

- **Integrated Checkposts (ICPs)** were inaugurated at Nepalgunj (Nepal) and Rupaidiha (India).
- Celebration of ICP in **Bhairahawa (Nepal) and Sonauli (India)**.
- Phase-II facilities under **Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum pipeline** inaugurated.
- Apart from this, another new pipeline will be built from **Siliguri to Jhapa in eastern Nepal**.

Exchange of MoU/Agreement between the two countries

- **Treaty of Transit** between India and Nepal.
- MoU between India and Nepal for cooperation in the field of **Petroleum Infrastructure**.
- MoU between India and Nepal for development of infrastructure at **Dodhra Chandani Check Post on Indo-Nepal border**.
- MoU between **NPCIL and NCHL**, Nepal for cross border payments.
- Project Development Agreement of Lower **Arun Hydro Electric Project**.
- MoU for the development of **Phukot-Karnali Hydroelectric Project**.

About Nepal

- The kingdom of Nepal was established by the **Shah dynasty**.
- It is a **landlocked country in South Asia**.
- Prime Minister - **Pushpa Kamal Dahal**
- President - **Ram Chandra Paudel**
- Capital - **Kathmandu**
- Currency - **Nepalese Rupee**

3. India, Vietnam hold 3rd Maritime Security Dialogue (June 1, 2023)

India and Vietnamese officials held the **third Maritime Security Dialogue** in New Delhi on 31st May.

An overview of the news

- Both sides discussed ways to better maintain the marine environment which is helpful for the **inclusive development** of both the countries.
- Senior officials from ministries and services dealing with **maritime affairs participated in the dialogue**.

- The two sides also reviewed initiatives for maritime cooperation and ways to strengthen international and regional mechanisms for comprehensive maritime security.
- The **second India-Vietnam Maritime Security Dialogue** was to be held in virtual format in **April 2021** after the **first round was held in Hanoi in March 2019**.

India, Vietnam Relation

- Vietnam has become an important partner in **India's Act East policy** and the **Indo-Pacific vision** as both countries have disputes with China.
- Vietnam is involved in a dispute with China on the **South China Sea Island**. China claims nearly all of the disputed South China Sea islands, though **Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam** all claim parts of it. Beijing has built artificial islands and military installations in the South China Sea.
- India favours free and open navigation right in the South China Sea which is threatened by China.
- India has oil exploration projects in the **Vietnamese waters** in the South China Sea. India and Vietnam are boosting their maritime security cooperation in the last few years to protect common interests.
- **In 2016**, during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Vietnam, the bilateral relations were further elevated to a "**comprehensive strategic partnership**".
- India and Vietnam signed an important **Joint Vision Statement on defence partnership** during the visit of the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Vietnam on 8 June 2022.
- During the defence minister's visit India provided a **\$500 million defence loan to Vietnam**.

About Vietnam

- It lies in **South East Asia** and it is a member of **Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN)**
- Prime Minister: **Pham Minh Chinh**
- Capital: **Hanoi**
- President: **Vo Van Thuong**
- Currency: **Dong**

4. India extends \$1 billion credit line to Sri Lanka till March 2024 (May 30, 2023)

India-extends-\$1-billion-credit-line-to-Sri-Lanka-till-March-2024

India on May 30 extended its **\$1 billion line of credit to Sri Lanka till March 2024** to

help purchase essential food, medicine and other essential commodities as Sri Lanka grapples with an unprecedented economic crisis.

An overview of the news

- This agreement is an important step towards continuation of financial assistance provided by the **Indian side to the Sri Lankan Government for procurement of essential items.**
- The signing ceremony took place in the presence of Sri Lanka's Minister of State for Finance, **Shehan Semasinghe**, senior officials from Sri Lanka's Ministry of Finance and representatives of the Indian High Commission in Colombo.
- The credit line was extended last year when Sri Lanka was passing through its **worst economic crisis.**
- The facility has been instrumental in prompt procurement of critical supplies such as fuel, medicines, food items and industrial raw materials for the island nation.
- This extension of financial assistance further underscores the strong commitment of the Government of India as it continues to assist Sri Lanka with a comprehensive package of **approximately USD 4 billion in line with India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy.**

About sri lanka

- The **Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka** is a tropical **island nation located off the southeast coast of the Indian** subcontinent.
- Sri Lanka is separated from the **Indian subcontinent by the Gulf of Munnar and the Palk Strait.**
- Capital: **Colombo (Executive and Judicial) and Sri Jayawardenepura (Legislative).**
- Official languages: **Sinhala and Tamil**
- President - **Ranil Wickremesinghe**
- Prime Minister - **Dinesh Gunawardena**
- Currency: **Sri Lankan Rupee**

5. India hands over 20 broad gauge locomotives to Bangladesh (May 24, 2023)

20-broad-gauge-locomotives-to-Bangladesh

Taking a significant step towards enhancing **bilateral cooperation in the railway sector**, India and Bangladesh handed over **20 broad gauge locomotives to Bangladesh** on May 23.

An overview of the news

- The initiative is aimed at meeting the growing demand for **passenger and freight traffic between the two neighboring countries**.
- The handover ceremony was conducted virtually, which was attended by Indian Railway Minister **Ashwini Vaishnav** and Bangladesh Railway Minister **Nurul Islam Sujan**.
- During the meeting held in **June 2022**, fruitful discussions were held on various aspects of **railway operations between the two countries**.
- Minister Nurul Islam Sujan highlighted the importance of strengthening rail connectivity between India and Bangladesh **to promote trade and travel**.
- The newly acquired locomotives will help in meeting the **growing demands of passenger and freight traffic** on both sides of the border.
- Currently, there are **nine interchanges between India and Bangladesh**, of which five are already operational and two are under construction.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

- Capital: **Dhaka**
- Prime Minister: **Sheikh Hasina Wazed**
- President: **Mohammad Shahabuddin**
- Currency: **Taka**

6. India and Australia sign agreements in the field of migration, mobility partnership and green hydrogen (May 24, 2023)

mobility-partnership-and-green-hydrogen

The **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was exchanged after a bilateral meeting between Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** and his Australian counterpart **Anthony Albanese in Sydney**.

An Overview of the News

- Prime Minister Modi invited Prime Minister Albanese and Australian cricket fans to India for the Cricket World Cup.
- Prime Minister Albanese announced the establishment of a new **Australian Consulate General** in Bengaluru to link Australian businesses to India's digital and innovation ecosystem.

About Australia

It is a sovereign country located in the **Southern Hemisphere** and is geographically isolated from the rest of the world.

Capital - **Canberra**

Government - **Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy**

Emperor - **Charles III**

Governor-General - **David Hurley**

Prime Minister - **Anthony Albanese**

7. India-US Working Group on Education and Skill Development virtually launched (May 23, 2023)

India-US-Working

The **Ministry of Education, Government** of India and US Department of State on 22 May launched the **India-US Working Group on Education and Skill Development** in virtual mode.

An overview of the news

- Its aim is **to enhance cooperation and collaboration between the two countries** in the field of education and skill development.
- Both sides acknowledged the importance of **skilling and vocational education** in an industry-centric era.
- Recognizing the need to align skill training programs with industry requirements, both sides agreed to promote partnerships between educational institutions, industry stakeholders and relevant government agencies.
- The collaboration aims to bridge the skill gap, increase employability and promote entrepreneurship in both the countries.
- The delegations from both sides expressed their commitment **to strengthen cooperation in education and skill development between India and the United States.**
- The establishment of an India-US Working Group on Education and Skill Development was **announced during the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue** held between India and the US in **Washington DC** in April 2022.

Topic of discussion

- Skilling and vocational education
- Certification and recognition
- Matchmaking between U.S. and Indian higher educational institutions
- Engaging with the Private Sector

8. AL-MOHED AL-HINDI 2023 Naval Exercise (May 23, 2023)

AL-MOHED AL-HINDI 2023 Naval Exercise

Indian Navy ships **INS TARKASH and INS SUBHADRA** arrived at **Port Al-Jubail in Saudi Arabia** on 21st May.

An overview of the news

- The visit of these ships marks the beginning of the **harbor phase of the second edition of the naval exercise** between the two countries, known as '**Al-Mohad Al-Hindi 2023**'.
- This year the naval exercise also includes the **participation of a Maritime Patrol Aircraft**.
- During the exercise, naval forces from both countries will engage in **joint maneuvers, training activities, and exchange of expertise**.
- The exercise will focus on enhancing maritime security capabilities and promoting interoperability between the two navies.
- The **inaugural edition** of the exercise was **successfully conducted in 2021**.

About Al-Mohed Al-Hindi Exercise

- The decision on this bilateral exercise between India and Saudi Arabia was taken at the **Riyadh summit held in 2019**.
- Its aim is to carry out **tactical maneuvers, search and rescue operations, and an electronic warfare drill** to enhance interoperability.
- It aims to strengthen the **defense ties between India and Saudi Arabia**.

Importance of the Exercise

- AL-MOHED AL-HINDI 2023 signifies the **growing strategic partnership between India and Saudi Arabia** in the defense sector.
- The exercise will provide an opportunity for both navies to learn from each other's experiences and improve their **operational capabilities**.
- The naval exercise also serves as a platform for fostering diplomatic relations and strengthening regional security cooperation.
- The successful conduct of **AL-MOHED AL-HINDI 2023** may pave the way for future collaborations in defense technology, intelligence sharing, and joint defense projects.
- The exercise contributes to maintaining **stability and security in the region** by promoting cooperation and mutual understanding between the Indian and Saudi Arabian navies.

9. PM Narendra Modi holds bilateral meeting with Japanese PM Fumio Kishida in Hiroshima (May 20, 2023)

PM-Narendra-Modi-holds-bilateral-meeting

On May 20, **PM Modi** held a bilateral meeting with his Japanese counterpart **Fumio Kishida** ahead of the **G-7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan.**

An Overview of the News

- Discussed enhancing India-Japan friendship in **trade, economy, culture and Indo-Pacific cooperation.**
- Emphasised efforts to synergize between the **G-7 and G-20 Presidencies and the voices of the Global South.**
- Prime Minister Modi unveiled a **statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Hiroshima as a symbol of friendship and peace.**
- G-7 summit priorities include **nuclear disarmament, economic resilience and security, regional issues, climate and energy, food and health, digitization and science and technology.**
- Later, Prime Minister Modi had a productive meeting with President of **South Korea Yoon Suk Yeol** to strengthen bilateral friendship in key developmental areas.

About G-7

- It is an **intergovernmental political forum.**
- It consists of seven member states: **Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.**
- In addition to the seven member states, the European Union is also part of the G7 as a non-enumerated member.

Formation - **25 March 1973**

First G6 Summit - **15 November 1975**

Japan:

- It is also called **Nihon or Nippon** and is an archipelago in the **western Pacific Ocean in East Asia.**
- It is made up of four main islands **Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu** and **Honshu** is the largest island of Japan.
- Its highest mountain is **Mount Fuji.**
- It is the third largest economy in the world after the **United States and China.**

Capital - **Tokyo**

Currency - **Yen**

Prime Minister - **Fumio Kishida**

10. India, EFTA take significant steps towards new Trade and Partnership Agreement (May 16, 2023)

Partnership-Agreement

India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states have recently taken important steps towards a **new trade and partnership agreement.**

An overview of the news

- At the ministerial meeting held in Brussels on May 15, Commerce and Industry Minister **Piyush Goyal** held discussions with representatives of EFTA to work towards a comprehensive new **Trade and Partnership Agreement (TEPA).**
- The Ministerial meeting marked an important milestone in taking forward the negotiations on **TEPA between India and the European Free Trade Association.**
- Both sides stressed the importance of principles of good faith and respect for each other's sensitivities in order to achieve a fair, just and balanced settlement.

About India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

- EFTA has established **bilateral relations and cooperation in the field of trade and commerce.**
- The objective of this cooperation is to strengthen economic ties and promote mutually **beneficial trade between the two countries.**
- The EFTA is an intergovernmental organization consisting of four member states: **Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein.**
- These countries have a **strong tradition of trade and economic liberalization.**
- India and EFTA have engaged in negotiations to establish a comprehensive trade agreement.
- The negotiations cover various aspects, including **trade in goods, services, investment, intellectual property rights, and other trade-related issues.**