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1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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 Vitoshka, dates back to the 5th century BC.

4. 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.

5. 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

6. 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

7. PM Modi Unveils Cutting-edge Medical Center in Thimphu (March 27, 2024)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bhutanese counterpart Tshering Tobgay jointly inaugurated Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck Mother and Child Hospital in Bhutan's capital Thimphu.

An Overview of the News

- This hospital is an example of the strong development cooperation between India and Bhutan.
- The hospital has a state-of-the-art 150-bed facility built with Indian assistance.
- Built in two phases, the first phase costing ₹22 crore became operational in 2019, while the second phase, completed recently, was undertaken as part of Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan at a cost of ₹119 crore.

Strengthening Bilateral Ties

- Prime Minister Modi's visit aims to bolster the unique and long-standing friendship between India and Bhutan.
- During his visit, PM Modi met with Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and held talks with Prime Minister Tobgay.

Recognition and Support

- The King of Bhutan confers the prestigious 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo' on PM Modi, making him the first foreign Head of Government to receive this honor.
- India pledges ₹10,000 crore in support to Bhutan over the next five years, reinforcing the enduring partnership between the two nations.

About Bhutan:

Capital- Thimphu

King - Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk

Currencies - Bhutanese Ngultrum, Indian Rupee

Official language- Dzongkha

8. Luis Montenegro Appointed as Prime Minister of Portugal (March 27, 2024)

Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa announced the appointment of Luis Montenegro, leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), as the country's new prime minister.

An Overview of the News

- The decision followed political consultations on forming a new government, during which the president consulted with parties and coalitions that secured seats in the March 10 elections for the Assembly of the Republic.
- Montenegro's party, the Democratic Alliance (AD), emerged victorious in terms of seats, leading to his appointment as prime minister.

Election Results and Parliamentary Composition

- Montenegro's AD defeated the incumbent Socialist Party (PS) in the March 10 elections but secured only 80 seats in the 230-seat parliament, falling short of a majority.
- The Socialist Party won 78 seats in the elections.

Commencement of the New Government

- The new government, headed by Luis Montenegro, is scheduled to assume office on April 2.

Montenegro's Political Journey

- Luis Montenegro's political career began in the early 2000s when he joined the PSD.
- He swiftly climbed the party ranks and held various positions within the party over the years.
- In 2011, Montenegro was elected to the Portuguese Parliament as a representative for Aveiro, a city situated on the Atlantic Ocean coast.

9. Simon Harris: Ireland's Youngest Prime Minister (March 26, 2024)

37 year old Simon Harris is going to become the youngest Prime Minister of Ireland.

An Overview of the News

- He came into limelight after the unexpected demise of Leo Varadkar.
- Harris, a prominent figure in Irish politics, emerged as the only candidate to be the next Prime Minister of Ireland.
- At 37, he is set to make history as Ireland's youngest Prime Minister.

Simon Harris's Political and Ministerial Experience:

- A member of Fine Gael, Harris has been actively involved in politics since his youth, and has risen through the ranks of the party's youth organisation.
- Despite not completing her undergraduate degree, she increasingly demonstrated her commitment to politics, holding various positions within Fine Gael.
- Notably, Harris held the position of Health Minister of Ireland from 2016 to mid-2020, and played a key role in managing the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic during that period.
- Currently serving as Minister for Further and Higher Education, her time in these ministerial roles has honed her leadership skills and policy acumen.

Strategic Approach and Social Media Presence:

- With 92,000 followers and 1.8 million likes, Harris' skillful use of TikTok has attracted attention.
- It serves as a platform to promote their political agenda and connect with voters.
- Harris aims to rejuvenate Fine Gael's appeal by taking advantage of his youth and crisis management skills.
- His campaign will emphasize key policy priorities while addressing internal concerns of the party.

10. AUKUS Partnership: Australia building SSN-AUKUS Submarines (March 26, 2024)

The AUKUS partnership has been established by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia to enhance trilateral security and develop nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy.

An Overview of the News

- This historic agreement represents a major step in defense cooperation between the three countries.

Submarine Construction:

- Collaboration between Australia's ASC and UK-based BAE Systems to build submarines.
- Based on British design incorporating American weapons systems.
- Australia aims to operate eight nuclear-powered submarines by 2050.
- **Capabilities:**
 - Submarines equipped for intelligence, surveillance, undersea warfare and attack operations.
 - Increased privacy and quiet compared to Australia's existing diesel-powered fleet.
 - Focus on maximizing interoperability between AUKUS partners.
- **Funding:**
 - Australia has pledged 4.6 billion Australian dollars to British industry for the SSN-AUKUS submarines.
 - Significant investment from all AUKUS partners to ensure the success of the programme.
 - Trilateral industrial bases will be converged and integrated to support SSN cooperation.

Regional Concerns:

- China has expressed concern over a potential arms race in the Asia-Pacific region due to the AUKUS agreement.
- China's military modernization and assertiveness towards the South China Sea and Taiwan are highlighted.

General Information:

- This is the first time that a country has acquired the capability to build nuclear-powered submarines and continue production indefinitely.
- The Australian funding for British industry comes after a defense and security agreement with the UK aims to tackle issues such as growing Chinese involvement in the South China Sea and the South Pacific.
- Taiwan has spotted 36 Chinese military aircraft around the island, representing the highest number in 2024, which coincides with the unveiling of the AUKUS partnership.