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1. US President signs major climate change and health care legislation (Aug. 17, 2022)

US President Joe Biden has signed a historic climate change and healthcare spending bill into law on August 16.

IMPORTANT FACTS -

- This law will go a long way in reducing health care costs and combating climate change.
- According to the White House, the **\$740 billion investment** bill is the largest commitment to combat climate change in the country's history.
- The White House claimed that Biden's **Inflation Reduction Act** would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by nearly a billion tons in 2030.
- This law is ten times bigger than any climate law ever enacted.
- The bill provides for significant investment in renewable energy through wind and solar power projects and heavy tax credits for electric vehicles.
- The law would also stipulate the cost of the drug for Medicare recipients in excess of \$2,000 annually.
- The new law will also help the nearly 13 million Americans pay for their health insurance.

Similar climate packages announced by other countries :

- In May 2022, **Japan** announced an '**Invest in Kisida**' plan.
- 'Invest in Kisida' plan aims for a \$1.1 trillion investment to bolster the Japanese economy.
- Japan aims to transition to clean energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by **46 percent by 2030**.
- In June 2021, the **European Union (EU)** proposed a similar '**Fit for 55**' plan to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030.

2. India contributes USD 400,000 to the United Nations Trust Fund (Aug. 17, 2022)

Reflecting its commitment to global promotion and protection of human rights and support of UN human rights, India has contributed USD 400,000 to four voluntary trust funds.

IMPORTANT FACTS -

- As a founding member of the United Nations, India strongly supports the objectives and principles of the United Nations and has made significant contributions to the implementation of the goals of the Charter and the development of specialized programs and agencies of the United Nations.
- India's deep engagement with the United Nations is based on its strong commitment to multilateralism.
- India firmly believes that the United Nations and the standards of international relations that it has promoted are the most effective tools to address today's global challenges.
- These global challenges are poverty eradication, environment, climate change, peace building and peacekeeping, terrorism, disarmament, human rights, migration and health and pandemics.
- The United Nations also has an important role to play in newly emerging areas such as cyber security, space and frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Purpose of the fund :

- The fund is meant to support victimization of atrocities, technical cooperation, implementation of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the participation of Least Developed Countries (LDCs)/Small Island Developing States (SIDs).
- Global promotion and protection of human rights.
- In 2007, India became the first country to deploy a women's contingent for a police unit set up for the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia.

United Nations Human Rights Council :

- It is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system.
- It is responsible for strengthening the spread and protection of human rights around the world.
- It was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006.
- It has been created in place of the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
- It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.

3. UK becomes first nation to approve Omicron vaccine (Aug. 16, 2022)

The UK on 16 August approved a booster dose against COVID-19, which is claimed to be effective against both the original and variant Omicron forms of the coronavirus.

Important facts

- The agency's decision was based on clinical trial data showing that the booster dose triggered "a strong immune response" against both Omicron and the original 2020 coronavirus.

- With this, Britain has become the first country to have approved such a vaccine.
- The vaccine was found to meet the standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.
- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency said that half of each dose of the booster vaccine Spike Vax Bivalent Original/Omicron, i.e. 25 micrograms, works against the original form, while the other half targets Omicron.

5 variants of coronavirus are cause of concern

- **Omicron** - Identified in southern Africa in November 2021
- **Delta** - emerged in India in late 2020 and spread around the world
- **Gamma** - Emerged in Brazil in late 2020
- **Beta** - Emerged in South Africa in early 2020
- **Alpha** - Emerged in Britain in late 2020

4. Scotland becomes first in the world to provide free period products (Aug. 16, 2022)

Scotland became the first country in the world from August 15 to ensure universal access to free period products.

Important facts

- The Scottish Parliament voted unanimously in favour of the Period Products Bill, which made the right to free access to sanitary products in public buildings a legal right in November 2020.
- After the enactment of this law, sanitary napkins will be available free of cost in many public places including community buildings, youth clubs and medical stores.
- Even before this, in the year 2018, Scotland has become the first country to provide free sanitary products in government schools.

What is included in the new law?

- Under the law, local authorities and education providers are legally required to provide period sanitary facilities free of charge to those who need them.
- In addition to the provision of free products, the government has funded an educational website for employers, improved menstrual health resources available to schools, and implemented a successful anti-stigma campaign.
- Product seekers can locate their nearest collection point using the PickupMyPeriod mobile app, which was launched by social enterprise "Hey Girls" with the support of the Scottish Government.

About Scotland

- Scotland is a country in the United Kingdom.
- Capital - Edinburgh
- Currency - Pound Sterling
- Prime Minister- Nicola Sturgeon

5. Global Employment Trends for Youth report - 2022 (Aug. 16, 2022)

The Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022 report has been released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as part of the global call to action for a "human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic".

Key points of the report

- According to the "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022" report, rare unemployment among youth aged 15-24 has reached 15.6% worldwide. This is three times the unemployment rate among adults.
- According to the report, the number of unemployed youth population has come down from 75 million in 2021 to 73 million in 2022. However, this number is still 6 million more than the number before the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The unemployment rate in Africa is 12.7%, lower than the global average of 14.9%. This figure highlights that young people have withdrawn from the labour markets.
- Schools were closed in India for 18 months. Of the 240 million school going children, only 8% in rural areas and 23% in urban areas had access to online education. As a result, 92% of children on average have lost a basic ability in language. 82% of children have lost at least one basic ability in maths.
- According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the labour force participation rate (LPR) in India fell to 38.8% in June 2022.
- The share of people in the age group of 18-21 in newly created EPF accounts has come down from 37.9% in 2018-19 to 24.1% in 2021-22.

About International Labour Organisation

- It was established in 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles as an affiliated agency of the League of Nations.
- In 1946, it became the first specialised agency affiliated with the United Nations.
- Objective of Establishment: Social justice is essential for global and lasting peace.
- India is a founding member of the ILO and has been a permanent member of the governing body of the ILO since the year 1922.
- The first office of ILO in India was established in 1928.
- Headquarters- Geneva, Switzerland

Director General – Gilbert Hongbo

6. William Ruto declared winner of Kenya presidential election (Aug. 16, 2022)

In Kenya, Deputy President William Ruto has been declared the winner of Kenya's presidential election on 16 August.

Important facts

- He defeated his rival Raila Odinga by a very small margin, securing 50.5 percent of the vote.
- The worst drought in 40 years has ravaged the northern part of the country, leaving 4.1 million people dependent on food aid, while the country's debt levels have risen.
- Ruto was the Vice President of Kenya for the last 9 years.
- Significantly, President Uhuru Kenyatta remained in power for a decade.

History of violence

- In 2017, over 100 people were killed after the Supreme Court quashed preliminary results over irregularities in the electoral process.
- Amid fears that allegations of vote rigging had led to bloody conflicts after the presidential elections in 2007 and 2017, the courts were urged to control any disputes.
- The US Embassy in Kenya urged all parties to work together to peacefully resolve concerns about the election.
- Economic issues such as rising food and fuel prices, government debt, unemployment and widespread corruption were central to the election in the country.
- People here were more worried about fuel prices after the Russia-Ukraine war.

About Kenya

- Capital - Nairobi
- Official Languages - Swahili, English
- Currency - Kenyan Shilling

7. Latvia and Estonia withdraw from cooperation group between China and Central and Eastern European countries (Aug. 12, 2022)

Latvia and Estonia have withdrawn from a cooperation group between China and more than a dozen Central and Eastern European countries.

Important facts

- The move comes amid Western criticism of China over increasing military pressure on Taiwan.
- Relations between Lithuania and China deteriorated after Taiwan was allowed to open a de facto embassy late last year.
- Latvia and Estonia said they would continue to work towards a constructive and pragmatic relationship with China while respecting a rules-based international order and human rights.

China and Central & Eastern European (CEE) 17+1 cooperation group

- It is a China-led format founded in 2012 in Budapest.
- It aims to expand cooperation between Beijing and Central and Eastern European (CEE) member states with investment and trade for the development of the CEE region.
- It also aims at the development of infrastructure projects such as modernization of bridges, motorways, railway lines and ports in the member states.
- It includes twelve EU member states and five Balkan states.
- Name of the countries in 17+1 - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

8. India-UK conclude fifth round of FTA talks (Aug. 12, 2022)

India and the United Kingdom (UK) concluded the fifth round of talks for an FTA on the 29th of last month.

Important facts

- In the fifth round of talks, technical experts from both sides came together to discuss 15 policy areas.
- Currently, India is holding FTA talks with some of its trading partners including the European Union, Canada and Israel.

Consensus between both countries

- Officials in India and the UK will continue to work intensively throughout the summer to finalize talks on a comprehensive and balanced free trade agreement by the end of October 2022.
- UK agrees to end duties on Indian rice and textile items.
- India may allow duty-free entry of British apples, medical equipment and machinery manufactured in the UK.

- India initially proposed an early harvest agreement or interim FTA that would be ready by Diwali.
- Through this agreement, India-UK bilateral trade is estimated to double to about \$100 billion by 2030.
- An agreement is also expected to be reached on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications.
- India is likely to get more skill visas, as the UK currently faces a shortage of experts in the IT and programming sectors.
- The India-UK FTA agreement is also expected to give a boost to the domestic textile sectors.

What is Free Trade Agreement (FTA)?

- Under this agreement, customs duties, regulatory laws, subsidies and quotas etc. are simplified on the products under import-export between two countries.
- Its main objective is to simplify trade.
- A major advantage of FTA is that the cost of production of the two countries between which this agreement is made becomes cheaper as compared to other countries.
- This encourages trade and gives impetus to the economy.

9. India expresses concern over shelling near Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant (Aug. 12, 2022)

India has expressed concern over reports of shelling near the **Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant** in Ukraine and called for mutual restraint to ensure that the safety and security of nuclear facilities is not endangered.

Important facts

- India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ruchira Kamboj said that India expresses its concern over reports of shelling near the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant.
- The statement came as Ukraine again accused Russia of shelling the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) on 11 August.
- India attaches high importance to ensuring the safety and security of nuclear plants, as any accidents involving nuclear facilities can potentially have serious consequences for public health and the environment.
- In March 2022, the Russian military took control of Europe's largest nuclear power plant, the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant.
- An emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council was held on this development regarding the plant.
- On February 24, Russia launched a "special military operation" in Ukraine, which the West called a "war without cause".

As a result, Western countries have also imposed severe sanctions on Moscow.

About Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant

- It was built between 1984 and 1995, is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe and the sixth largest in the world.
- It is located in south-east Ukraine in Enerhodar on the banks of the Kakhovka reservoir on the Dnieper river.
- It is located about 200 km from the disputed Donbass region and 550 km south-east of Kyiv.
- In normal times it generates one-fifth of Ukraine's total electricity.

World's largest nuclear power plants

1. **Kashiwazaki-Kariwa** - Japan - capacity - 7,965 megawatts
2. **Bruce Nuclear Generating Station** - Canada - 6,384 MW
3. **Kori Nuclear Power Plant** - South Korea - 6,040 MW
4. **Hanul Nuclear Power Plant** - South Korea - 5,928 MW
5. **Hanbit Nuclear Power Plant** - South Korea - 5,875 MW
6. **Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant** - Ukraine - 5,700 MW

10. Argentine Rear Admiral Guillermo Pablo Ríos appointed Chief Military Observer of UNMOGIP (Aug. 12, 2022)

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appointed a veteran Argentine naval officer as Head of Mission and Chief Military Observer for the United Nations Military Observer Group (UNMOGIP) in India and Pakistan.

Important facts

- Rear Admiral Guillermo Pablo Ríos of Argentina has replaced Major General Jose Eladio Alcán of Uruguay.
- After graduating as a Middle Shipman from the Naval Academy, Rear Admiral Ríos has had a distinguished career in the Argentine Navy since 1988.
- He, most recently, served as the General Director of Education, Training and Doctrine of the Joint Staff (2022).
- Prior to this, he was Marine Infantry Commander (Core Commander) (2020-2021).
- He has also served as Marine Infantry Fleet Commander (Brigade Commander) (2019), Head of Education, Navy Warfare School (2018) and Defence, Military, Navy and Air Force in Russia (2016-2018).

- He has also been a training officer in the United States Marine Corps Regiment under the United States and Argentina Marine Exchange Program (2002–2003).
- Ríos has served in two peacekeeping missions, including the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) in 1993 and 1994, and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in 2007.
- He has also served as a Humanitarian Mining Observer with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Angola (1997–1998).
- He holds a master's degree from the Naval University Institute and E-Salad University in Argentina.

About UNMOGIP

- UNMOGIP was established in January 1949.
- Following the Indo-Pakistani War and the Armistice Agreement in 1971, UNMOGIP's main tasks are to oversee developments related to strict adherence to the ceasefire.
- It has 44 military observers, 25 international civilian personnel from 10 countries and 47 local civilian staff.
- India has maintained that UNMOGIP has outlived its utility and is irrelevant after the Simla Agreement and the establishment of the Line of Control (LoC).
- The last report of the Secretary-General of the Security Council on UNMOGIP was published in 1972.
- The group is financed by the United Nations.

Simla Agreement

- It was signed by India and Pakistan in July 1972.
- It established the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir, which was similar to the ceasefire line established by the Karachi Accords.
- Under this, India and Pakistan mutually agreed on certain principles.
- They emphasised respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, not interfering in each other's internal affairs.