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1. NTPC Launches Latest Edition of GEM Initiative: Empowering Girls Across India (April 13, 2024)

NTPC Limited, formerly National Thermal Power Corporation, unveiled the latest edition of its flagship Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, the Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM), on April 9, 2024.

An Overview of the News

- The new phase of GEM will encompass approximately 3000 underprivileged children across 42 locations of NTPC, marking an expansion to benefit a total of 10,000 girls.
- This expansion aligns with the Government of India's "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" campaign, aiming to foster girl empowerment and combat gender inequality.

Program Progress:

- Since its inception, GEM has facilitated the empowerment of 7,424 girls, with a consistent increase in participation each year.
- In 2023, the initiative saw 2,707 girls engaging in workshops across 40 NTPC locations spanning 16 states in India.

Origins and Evolution:

- GEM originated as a pilot project in 2018, initially spanning three locations. Over the years, it has evolved into a nationwide endeavor.
- GEM aims to empower girls as agents of change, capable of influencing not only their own lives but also those of their families, communities, and the nation at large.

About NTPC Limited:

- NTPC Limited is a Central Public Sector Undertaking (CPSU) operating under the Ministry of Power.
- Recognized as a Maharatna company since 2010, NTPC is helmed by Gurdeep Singh, serving as Chairman & Managing Director.
- The company's headquarters are situated in New Delhi, Delhi, with its establishment dating back to 1975.

2. Simon Harris becomes the youngest new Prime Minister of Ireland (April 11, 2024)

Simon Harris, aged 37 and leader of the Fine Gael party, elected as the new Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of the Republic of Ireland by members of the Dáil (Irish parliament).

An Overview of the News

- Officially installed as Taoiseach on 9th April 2024 after receiving the seal of office from President Michael D. Higgins.
- Succeeds Leo Varadkar, who resigned as Fine Gael leader and Taoiseach in March 2024.

Key Points:

- Harris becomes the youngest Prime Minister in the history of the Republic of Ireland.
- His tenure will extend until the general election scheduled for March 2025.
- Members of the Dáil voted 88 to 69 in favor of Harris as Taoiseach.
- The 3-party coalition government (Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, and the Green Party) has been in power since 2020.
- This marks the third change in Taoiseach within less than four years for the coalition government.

About Simon Harris:

- Elected as the youngest Teachta Dála (TD), a member of Dáil Éireann, in 2011 at the age of 24.
- Held ministerial positions in the Irish government since 2016.

3. Paradip Port Achieves Highest Cargo Handling Status in India (April 12, 2024)

The Paradip Port Authority in Odisha overtook the Deendayal Port Authority in Kandla to become India's top major port for cargo handling in the fiscal year 2023-2024.

An Overview of the News:

- Paradip Port handled a record-breaking 145.38 million metric tons (MMT) of cargo.
- With a growth rate of 7.4%, this was a noteworthy gain of 10.02 million metric tons over the previous year.
- Paradip Port gained the highest productivity among all major ports in India.
- Observed an increase in berth productivity, which demonstrated operational excellence, from 31,050 MT to 33,014 MT.
- Kept the lowest tariff rates in the nation when compared to all other ports.
- Acted strategically by putting a three-year freeze on cargo handling rates beginning in 2022 as part of its corporate development plan.

History and Administration of Paradip Port:

- The Government of India took control of it in 1965 after it was first founded by the Odisha government in 1962.
- Proclaimed a major port on April 18, 1966, and contributed significantly to the maritime infrastructure of India.
- Functions as a separate entity in accordance with the Major Port Trusts Act of 1963.
- Administered by a Board of Trustees appointed by the Government of India, functioning under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways.

4. Sittwe Port Takeover by India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) (April 9, 2024)

The Ministry of External Affairs of India has given its approval to India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) to assume control of all operations at the Sittwe port situated in Myanmar's Rakhine province.

An Overview of the News

- This move marks Sittwe port as the second international port under Indian control, following the Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, Iran.
- Unlike Chabahar, where India controls two terminals, India will have full control over operations at the Sittwe Port.
- The deal includes a long-term lease arrangement, renewable every three years, and IPGL will mobilize resources to further develop the port.

Sittwe Port Development and Significance:

- The development of Sittwe port is part of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, aimed at enhancing connectivity between Myanmar and India's northeastern states.
- The project involves connecting Sittwe port in Myanmar with Mizoram state in India through multimodal transit connectivity on the Kaladan River.
- India provided a \$500 million grant to Myanmar for the construction of the port.
- The port was inaugurated by the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush, Shri Sarbananda Sonowal on May 9, 2023, marking a significant milestone in India-Myanmar connectivity.
- Sittwe port plays a crucial role in the development strategy for India's northeastern states, aiming to reduce transportation and logistic costs.

Connectivity Enhancements

- The Kaladan Multimodal project includes the development of 158 km of waterways on the Kaladan River from Sittwe Port to Paletwa in Myanmar, along with a road network of 109 km from Paletwa to Zorinpui on the India-Myanmar border in Mizoram.

- This infrastructure development is expected to significantly enhance connectivity in
- India's northeastern states, particularly Mizoram and Tripura.

Impact on Tripura and Mizoram Connectivity:

- The project will facilitate the transportation of goods from Shyam Prasad Mukherjee Port in Kolkata to Sittwe Port, then to Teknaf Port in Bangladesh, and finally to Sabroom in Tripura, reducing transportation time and logistics costs.
- It is anticipated to benefit Tripura and Mizoram by improving access to goods and services, thereby fostering economic growth in the region.

Threats to Sittwe Port:

- The Sittwe port's development faces potential threats from ongoing conflicts in Myanmar, particularly the civil war between the military government and insurgent groups like the Arakan Army in the Rakhine state.
- The instability in the region poses uncertainties regarding the fate of the Sittwe project, especially if the rebels gain control of the Rakhine province, jeopardizing the port's operations and security.

5. RBZ Launches Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG) Currency Backed by Gold and Foreign Reserves (April 9, 2024)

The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) has launched a new currency called "Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG)," which is backed by gold and foreign currencies, aiming to replace the local currency, Zimbabwe dollars (ZW\$) Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollar.

An Overview of the News

- RBZ has instructed banks to convert existing Zimbabwe dollar balances into ZiG starting from April 5, 2024.
- Circulation of ZiG notes and coins will commence on April 30, 2024.
- Banks will continue accepting ZW\$ deposits for 21 days after April 5, 2024.

About Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG):

- ZiG is backed by a combination of foreign currency and precious metals, predominantly gold.
- The initial exchange rate of ZiG is set at 13.56 ZiG per US dollar (USD).
- Denominations of ZiG notes and coins include 1ZiG, 2ZiG, 5ZiG, 10ZiG, 20ZiG, 50ZiG, 100ZiG, and 200ZiG.

Background on Currency and Economic Context:

- Zimbabwe adopted the US dollar in 2009 to combat hyperinflation.

- The new Zimbabwe dollar (Real-Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollar) was introduced in 2019.
- RTGS dollar experienced a significant devaluation, losing 75% of its value in 2024 and nearly 100% against the US dollar in 2023.

About Zimbabwe:

- President - Emmerson Mnangagwa
- Capital - Harare
- Currency - Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG)

6. Valerie Adams Named International Ambassador for TCS World 10K Bengaluru 2024 (April 8, 2024)

Valerie Adams, the renowned shot putter and multiple-time World Champion, has been appointed as the International Event Ambassador for the 16th edition of the Tata Consultancy Services World 10K Bengaluru.

An Overview of the News

- Adams, a four-time World Champion and two-time Olympic medalist from New Zealand, is celebrated as one of the most successful female shot putters in history.
- With a remarkable Olympic record, Adams has secured two gold medals (2008, 2012), one silver (2016), and one bronze medal (2020) across five appearances.

The World 10K Bengaluru:

- The World 10K Bengaluru, also recognized as the TCS World 10K Bengaluru due to sponsorship from Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), is an annual road running event held in Bangalore, India.
- Established in 2008, this 10-kilometer competition typically occurs towards the end of May each year.
- Initially sponsored by Sunfeast, a brand under ITC Limited, the event has evolved over the years.
- Participants from various backgrounds come together to compete in this renowned race, showcasing their endurance and athleticism.

7. Peter Pellegrini wins in Slovakia's Presidential Election (April 8, 2024)

Peter Pellegrini, a candidate backed by Slovakia's nationalist-leftist government, won the presidential election, strengthening the influence of Prime Minister Robert Fico, who holds pro-Russian views.

An Overview of the News

- Fico, serving his fourth term as prime minister, has shifted Slovakia's foreign policy toward Russia and reformed criminal law and media regulations, raising concerns about the rule of law.
- Pellegrini received 53.26% of the vote, while his pro-West rival Ivan Korčič received 46.73%, with almost all voting districts reporting.
- Although the powers of the Slovak President are limited, he can veto laws and nominate judges to the Constitutional Court, which could potentially influence political conflicts over Fico's reforms, especially regarding corruption penalties.
- Fico's coalition, which also includes Pellegrini's party, halted official arms shipments to Ukraine, reflecting their stance against Western involvement in the conflict.

About Slovakia

- It is officially known as the Slovak Republic, located in Central Europe.
- It is bordered by Poland to the north, Ukraine to the east, Hungary to the south, Austria to the west and the Czech Republic to the northwest.
- Slovakia is a landlocked country, meaning it has no direct access to the sea.
- Its neighboring countries create a diverse geopolitical landscape within Central Europe.
- The borders with Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic define the territorial extent of Slovakia.

Capital - Bratislava

Official language - Slovak

Prime Minister - Robert Fico

Currency - Euro

8. Romania unveils world's most powerful laser (April 6, 2024)

Developed by a research center in Romania as part of the EU Infrastructure Extreme Light Infrastructure (ELI) project.

An Overview of the News

- Operated by French company Thales, this laser claims to have revolutionary potential in a variety of fields, from healthcare to space exploration.
- At the core of this groundbreaking laser technology lies chirped-pulse amplification (CPA), a method developed by Mourou and Strickland.
- CPA facilitates the amplification of laser power while ensuring safe intensity levels by stretching and compressing the ultra-short laser pulse.

- This innovative technology achieves unprecedented levels of intensity, opening the door
- to myriad applications such as corrective eye surgery and advanced precision instruments in industrial operations.

Nobel Prize Winner Contribution:

- Gerard Mourou and Donna Strickland were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2018 for their pioneering work in laser technology.
- His inventions have led to revolutionary advancements by enabling precision instruments and applications.

Possible Applications:

- Nuclear waste treatment: Laser technology can reduce the radioactivity period of nuclear waste, increasing the safety and manageability of disposal.
- Space debris removal: Laser technology can be deployed to clear space debris, reducing the risk of collisions with satellites and spacecraft.
- Medical Advances: The precision of lasers promises breakthroughs in medical treatments, including targeted cancer treatments and advanced surgical techniques.

Involvement of the ELI Project and Thales Group:

- Part of the European Union Infrastructure Extreme Light Infrastructure (ELI) project, which aims to push laser technology boundaries.
- Operated by Thales Group, a leading global provider of aerospace, defense and security solutions, headquartered in France.

9. Unprecedented Recognition: Over 60 Products GI Tags (April 5, 2024)

The Geographical Indication (GI) tag has been awarded to over 60 products from different parts of India.

An Overview of the News:

- This is the first time that so many products have been recognized at the same time for Geographical Indication (GI) purposes.
- The prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) label has been awarded to nineteen traditional Assamese items and crafts, thirteen of which are credited to the Bodo community.

Name of the Select 60 Products that Were Awarded GI Tags:

- Assam: Mishing handloom products, Pani Meteka crafts, Sarthebari metal crafts, Jaapi (bamboo headpiece), Asharikandi terracotta crafts, Bodo Eri silk (fabric of peace or ahimsa), Bihu dhol, Bodo Dokhona (traditional attire of Bodo women), and Bodo Sifung (long flute).

- Tripura: Matabari Peda (a sweet delicacy) and Pachra-Rignai (traditional attire worn on auspicious occasions).
- Meghalaya: Chubitchi, Lyrnai Pottery, Garo Textile Weaving.
- Uttar Pradesh: Banaras Lal Bharwan Mirch, Banaras Lal Peda, Banaras Tabla, Banaras Shehnai, Banaras Thandai.

A GI tag: what is it?

- A GI tag is a designation or label that identifies goods as coming from a particular region and highlights their distinctive features.
- Protected by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.
- it gives owners of rights the ability to stop unapproved usage by noncompliant third parties

Key fact about GI tag:

- In 2004, the Darjeeling tea from West bengal received the first-ever GI tag in India.

10. 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.