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1. 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.

2. New Members take Oath in Lokpal of India (March 28, 2024)

Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi assumed charge as the newest judicial member of the Lokpal on March 27, 2024.

An Overview of the News

- Lokpal Chairperson Justice AM Khanwilkar administered the oath to Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi.
- Pankaj Kumar and Ajay Tirkey took oath as new members of the Lokpal at the Lokpal Office in New Delhi on March 27, 2024.
- On March 26, the tenure of two judicial members, Justice PK Mohanty and Justice Abhilasha Kumari, ended.
- Additionally, on the same day, the tenure of three other members – DK Jain, Archana Ramasundaram and Mahendra Singh – expired.

Introduction of New Members:

- Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, former Chairman of the 22nd Law Commission of India and former Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court, plays the role of judicial member.
- Pankaj Kumar, a 1986 batch IAS officer of Gujarat cadre, previously served as the Chief Secretary of Gujarat.
- Ajay Tirkey, a 1987 batch IAS officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre, was the former Secretary of the Department of Land Resources, Government of India.

Historical Background of Lokpal:

- The concept of an ombudsman originated in Sweden in 1809 and gained global prominence with its adoption by New Zealand and Norway in 1962.
- In India, the idea of a Constitutional Lokpal was first proposed in Parliament in the early 1960s by Law Minister Ashok Kumar Sen.
- The terms "Lokpal" and "Lokayukta" were introduced by jurist LM Singhvi, and the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 was ultimately passed after advocacy by the Anna Hazare-led India Against Corruption Movement.
- The purpose of this Act was to establish the Lokpal at the Center and Lokayuktas in the states to investigate allegations of corruption against public officials.

3. 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

4. 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 Piszkova 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

5. 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

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. Operation Indravati Begins: Evacuation of Indian Citizens from Haiti (March 23, 2024)

Operation Indravati was launched to evacuate Indian citizens from Haiti amid increasing gang violence.

An Overview of the News

- Armed gangs have attacked the suburbs of **Port-au-Prince**, prompting India to intervene.
- The evacuation plan includes relocating Indian nationals to the Dominican Republic.
- More than **15 Americans are being airlifted to Santo Domingo.**
- Haiti is facing a crisis exacerbated by gang violence following the **2010 earthquake.**
- Gangs are **carrying out attacks, burning police stations and spreading anarchy.**
- The airport was closed, prisoners were released, a state of emergency was declared, and a curfew was imposed.

- **Gang leader Jimmy Charizier** demanded the resignation of acting Prime Minister Ariel Henry. Ariel Henry announced his decision to step down but remained in power. Henry is currently in exile in Puerto Rico.

About Haiti:

- Haiti, located in the Caribbean, shares the island of Hispaniola with the **Dominican Republic** to its east.
- Despite ongoing efforts to recover from the devastating 2010 earthquake, Haiti has preserved many sites dating back to the early 19th century.
- These sites include the **Citadelle La Ferriere**, which sits atop a mountain and serves as a fortress.
- The **Sans-Souci Palace,** the Baroque former royal residence of **King Henry I**, is located in nearby ruins, offering a glimpse of Haiti's historic past.

Capital - **Port-au-Prince**

Official languages - **Haitian Creole, French**

Currency - **Haitian Gourde**

Continent - **North America**

10. New Zealand Implements Ban on Disposable E-Cigarettes and Vapes (March 23, 2024)

Following the recent repeal of legislation aimed at phasing out tobacco smoking, the New Zealand government has implemented a ban on disposable e-cigarettes and vapes.

An Overview of the News

Government action:

- To prevent sales to minors, fines for retailers selling to those under 18 will increase.
- Retailers may face fines of up to NZ$100,000, while individuals can be fined NZ$1,000 for the same offence.

Youth Safety Measures:

- The rules also restrict the sale of e-cigarettes with packaging or branding that appeals to youth, with the aim of preventing youth from being attracted to vaping.

Reasoning behind the ban:

- Associate Health Minister Casey Costello says e-cigarettes are recognized as a smoking cessation tool, but the ban is intended to discourage minors from taking up the vaping habit.

Global trend against disposable vapes:

- United Kingdom's ban: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced a ban on disposable vapes in 2022, citing concerns about long-term effects and youth addiction.
- Australia's ban: Joining the global movement to address the popularity and potential health risks of vaping among youth, Australia also implemented a ban on disposable single-use vapes this year.