

## International Affairs

### India, Australia, Japan, US call for an open Indo-Pacific region

- Senior officials of India, US, Japan and Australia met in Bangkok to hold consultations on their collective efforts for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region and reaffirmed their shared commitment to preserving and promoting the rules-based order in the region.
- China claims almost all of the South China Sea whereas Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have also counter claims over it.

### US withdraws special tax exemption to Pakistani diplomats

- The United States has withdrawn its special tax exemption to Pakistani diplomats. This move comes over a year after the Trump administration imposed travel restrictions on them.
- The Diplomatic Tax Exemption programme is usually granted to foreign diplomats and consulars. It provides sales and use, food, utility and other tax exemptions to eligible foreign officials on assignment in the US.
- Tax exemption privileges are generally based on two international treaties: The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

### BIMSTEC Day celebrated in Dhaka

- Members of the 7 countries regional grouping Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) celebrated the BIMSTEC Day in Dhaka.

### Tanzania latest African nation to ban plastic bags

- A plastic bag ban comes into force in Tanzania as Africa leads efforts to stem the tide of plastic pollution. Tanzania is banning the importation, production, sale and use of plastic bags. It becomes the 34th African country to implement such restrictions, according to the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP). Globally, 127 countries have some sort of plastic bag legislation. 91 of these include a ban or restriction on manufacturing, importation and retail distribution, according to the UNEP.

### Council of Europe restores Russia's voting rights

- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has voted in favour of restoring Russia's voting rights, five years after they were revoked over its illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. Despite strong opposition from Ukraine, the assembly voted 118 in favour and 62 against, with 10 abstentions. The move paves the way for Russia to participate in the election of a new secretary general for the pan-European rights body.

**South Korea, UK agree to sign free trade deal ahead of Brexit**

- South Korea and Britain have agreed in principle to sign a separate free trade deal ahead of Britain's exit from the European Union in late October. The deal includes keeping zero-tariffs on South Korean exports such as auto parts and automobiles.
- As of 2018, South Korean exports to Britain amounted to about \$6.4 billion in 2018, making up 1.05% of the country's total exports.

**Women peacekeepers team from India assumes duties in UN mission in Congo**

- A team of women peacekeepers from India has assumed duties in the UN mission in Congo with a focus on working with women and children worst affected by conflict. The Female Engagement Team from India, comprising nearly 20 women peacekeepers began its deployment with the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission Democratic Republic of Congo also known as MONUSCO which is considered one of the most challenging peacekeeping missions under the UN flag.

**UAE launches UN-developed anti-money laundering platform**

- The UAE has become the first country in the Gulf to launch a new reporting platform developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to curb organised crimes. The UAE's Financial Intelligence Unit launched the new anti-money laundering platform 'goAML', which has been open for registration since May. This was announced by officials of UAE Central Bank in Abu Dhabi.

**Sri Lanka to hold election later this year**

- The presidential elections in Sri Lanka would be held between November 15 and December 7. According to the constitutional provisions, the polls must be held one month before the end of the current President's term.

**55 Asia-Pacific countries unanimously back India's bid for non-permanent seat at UNSC**

- Fifty-five countries of the Asia-Pacific group at the United Nations unanimously endorsed India's candidature for a non-permanent seat of the Security Council for a two-year term in 2021-2022.
- Until now, India has been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for seven terms: 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, 1991-92 and most recently in 2011–2012 under the leadership of former Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri.

**Campaign 'Zero Chance'**

- The Australian government is launching a campaign 'Zero Chance' to raise awareness among people trying to enter the country illegally by boats.
- Those who wish to enter the country must apply through refugees resettlement programmes, and Australia works with the UNHCR to identify those people.

**India-Pakistan clash over Nizam of Hyderabad funds in UK**

- A decades-old legal dispute between India and Pakistan over around 35 million pounds belonging to the Nizam of Hyderabad at the time of Partition in 1947 and deposited in a London bank account has reached an important stage in the UK High Court.

**First Bangladesh International Theatre Festival being held in Dhaka**

- The first international theatre festival of Bangladesh is being held at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in Dhaka. It was inaugurated by the Bangladesh State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid. The festival is being organised at the initiative of the Culture Affairs Ministry of Bangladesh. Theatre troupes from India, Bangladesh, Russia, China, France, Vietnam and Nepal are participating in the festival.

**FATF warns Pak to complete action plan on terror financing by October 2019**

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has said that Pakistan failed to complete its action plan on terror financing. The FATF strongly urged Pakistan to swiftly complete its action plan by October 2019 or face consequences. FATF is responsible for issuing international standards, policies and best practices to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation.

**US unveils 50 Billion Dollar Economic Plan for Palestine**

- United States today unveiled a 50 billion dollar global investment plan for the Palestinians under the Middle East peace plan. The scheme, which calls for a mix of public and private financing and intends to create at least a million new jobs for Palestinians, was posted to the White House website ahead of a two-day conference in Bahrain. The plan calls for projects 27.5 billion dollars in the West Bank and Gaza, and 9.1 billion dollars for Palestinians in Egypt, 7.4 billion dollar Palestinians in Jordan and 6.3 billion dollars for Palestinians in Lebanon.

**Voluntary Euthanasia becomes legal in Australian state**

- Victoria has become the first state in Australia to enact Euthanasia laws that would now allow terminally ill patients suffering from intolerable pain to legally ask their doctor for lethal drugs to end their lives.

**Awami League of Bangladesh celebrated 70th foundation day**

- The ruling Awami League of Bangladesh celebrated its 70th founding day on June 23. Prime Minister and President of the Awami League of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina has greeted the countrymen on this occasion. Awami League was founded on June 23, 1949 in Dhaka of the then East Pakistan. It led a number of major movements such as the Language Movement in 1952, anti-Ayub movement in 1962 and mass surge in 1969.

**Saudi launches residency scheme to boost revenue**

- Saudi Arabia launched a new special residency scheme aimed at luring wealthy expats as the petro-state seeks to boost non-oil revenue. The scheme offers a permanent residency for 800,000 riyals (\$213,000) and a one-year renewable residency costing 100,000 riyals (\$27,000), according to the online portal for registrations. The scheme will allow expats to do business without a Saudi sponsor, buy property and sponsor visas for relatives.

**China's largest ever Picasso exhibition**

- The largest Picasso exhibition ever held in China opens, featuring more than 100 works, many of them from the artist's early years. Featured works include paintings, sculptures and drawings, and are accompanied by photos of the young Pablo in Barcelona and Paris. The first Picasso exhibition in China was held in 1983. This year's exhibition, which runs until September 1 at the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, focuses on the artist's first 30 years.

**Palau changes ocean sanctuary plan to allow Japan fishing**

- The Pacific nation of Palau has amended plans to create a huge marine reserve so Japanese fishing boats still have partial access to its waters. Fish stocks are overexploited around the world, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation warned this year, and Palau has long been regarded as a pioneer in ocean conservation. The island nation will close 80 per cent of its exclusive economic zone — a 500,000 square kilometre (193,000 square mile) area, roughly the size of Spain — to commercial fishing from next year.

**Programmes being organised to celebrate 5th International Day of Yoga in Nepal**

- In Nepal, many programmes are being organised to celebrate the 5th International Day of Yoga. Embassy of India in Kathmandu organised a programme on Yoga Day. Yoga students from Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre Kathmandu, Patanjali Yoga Peeth, Nepal Yoga Home and Himalayan Yoga Academy performed various Yoga Asanas

**US approves deployment of 1,000 additional troops in West Asia**

- The US has approved the deployment of 1,000 additional troops in West Asia for defensive purposes amidst tensions with Iran. The acting US Defence Secretary Patrick Shanahan said the deployment is being done to ensure the safety and welfare of US military personnel working throughout the region and to protect America's national interests.

**Ranjit Singh's sculpture was unveiled in Lahore**

- Maharaja Ranjit Singh's sculpture was unveiled in Lahore to mark his 180th death anniversary. Around 500 people crossed the Wagah border to attend the unveiling event. The main ceremony will take place at Gurdwara Dera Sahib. The sculpture is the result of collaboration between Fakir Khana Museum and Sarkar Khalsa Foundation.

**Bangladesh emerged as fastest growing economy among 45 countries of Asia-Pacific region**

- Bangladesh has emerged as the fastest growing economy among the 45 countries of the Asia-Pacific region according to Asian Development Bank (ADB). In the financial year 2018-19 Bangladesh attained growth rate of 7.9 % which is its fastest rate since 1974. The bank predicted that the growth will be 8% in the next financial year.

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**Mexico ratifies US-Mexico-Canada agreement**

- Mexico has ratified the US-Mexico-Canada agreement. This makes it the first country to give the new North American trade deal final approval despite recent tensions with the US. The Mexican government called the deal's passage a clear message in favor of an open economy and deepening economic integration in the region.
- President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador claimed the deal would bring in more foreign investment and jobs in Mexico, and access to the US market. The deal aims to replace the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which helped turn Mexico into an exporting powerhouse over the past 25 years.

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**UAE Cabinet adopts "National Strategy for Wellbeing 2031"**

- The UAE Cabinet adopted the National Strategy for Wellbeing 2031 during its meeting at the Presidential Palace in Abu Dhabi. One of the most important initiatives is the development of the first 'National Wellbeing Observatory' to support the policymaking process.
- It also aims to promote an integrated concept of wellbeing, thus supporting the vision of the UAE Vision 2021 and the UAE Centennial 2071. The Strategy is based on a national framework of three main levels - individuals, society and the country.

**Canada to ban single use plastics from 2021**

- Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that single-use plastics will be banned in the country from 2021. Single-use items represent some 70 percent of the plastic waste littering the marine environment.
- Canada, France, Germany, Britain and Italy, along with the European Union, subscribed at last year's G7 summit in Quebec to a new charter against pollution in the world's oceans. The United States and Japan did not join the pact.

**China launches Internet 'clean-up' campaign**

- China has launched a campaign to clean up its Internet, state media said. Authorities have, in recent days, blocked more foreign media websites and shut down domestic accounts on social media.
- The campaign will punish and expose websites for "illegal and criminal actions", failing to "fulfil their obligation" to take safety measures or the theft of personal information. The campaign follows a series of shutdowns and blockages of certain websites and social media accounts.

**Algeria's Constitutional Council cancels presidential elections**

- Algeria's Constitutional Council has extended interim President Abdelkader Bensalah's powers. The presidential elections scheduled next month have been cancelled by the Constitutional Council. The Council said that a presidential election would not be held because it had rejected the only two candidates' documents who had applied to run for the elections.

**US imposes major new restrictions on travel to Cuba**

- The US has imposed major new travel restrictions on its citizens visiting Cuba, banning cruise ships and ending a heavily used form of educational travel as it seeks to further isolate the communist government.
- The Treasury Department has announced that the US will no longer allow cruises to Cuba or the group educational and cultural trips known as "people to people" travel to the island. Along with the cruise ships, the US will also now ban most private planes and boats from stopping the island.

**ICA issues first UAE Permanent Residency 'Golden Card' in Abu Dhabi**

- UAE's Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship (ICA) has issued the first Golden Residence Permit in Abu Dhabi, as part of the Investors Permanent Residence System aimed to attract investors, entrepreneurs and qualified individuals who meet its criteria.

**Russia launches first Arctic train service**

- In Russia, the first tourist train traveling through Russia's Arctic region and on to Norway, set off from St. Petersburg station with 91 passengers aboard for the inaugural trial journey. The train, named "Zarengold" ("The Tsar's gold" in German) complete with two restaurant cars will travel from Saint Petersburg through Petrozavodsk, the historic town of Kem and Murmansk.

**UK Foreign Office Board gets first Indian-origin member**

- Kumar Iyer has been appointed by the UK government as the Chief Economist of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), making him the first Indian-origin member of the department's management board.

**Russia prepared to drop nuclear weapons agreement treaty with US: Putin**

- Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Russia was prepared to drop a nuclear weapons agreement treaty with the US. He said Washington showed no genuine interest in conducting talks on extending the New START treaty which caps the number of nuclear warheads well below Cold War limits.
- The treaty was signed by US President Barack Obama and Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev in Prague in 2010. It expires in 2021.

**'Gandhi Cycle Rally for Peace' organised in Saudi Arabia**

- To mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Indian Embassy in Saudi organized 'Gandhi Cycle Rally for Peace' in association with the Diplomatic Quarter Authority and Saudi Cycling Federation.

**US deploys F-22 stealth fighters to Qatar for 1st time**

- The United States has deployed F-22 stealth fighters to Qatar for the first time. The announcement adds to a buildup of US forces in the Gulf amid tensions with Iran. The US Air Forces Central Military Command stated that the Air Force F-22 Raptor stealth fighters have been deployed to defend American forces and interests. The number of hi-tech planes sent was not specified.

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