



PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

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MRSAM Firing Trials

- The Indian Navy achieved a significant milestone in enhancing its Anti Air Warfare Capability with the maiden cooperative engagement firing of the Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (MRSAM).
- The firing was undertaken on the Western Seaboard by Indian Naval Ships Kochi and Chennai wherein the missiles of both ships were controlled by one ship to intercept different aerial targets at extended ranges. The firing trial was carried out by the Indian Navy, DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries.
- The successful conduct of the test has been the result of sustained efforts by all stakeholders over the years. DRDL Hyderabad, a DRDO Lab, has jointly developed this missile in collaboration with Israel Aerospace Industries.
- The MRSAM has been manufactured by Bharat Dynamics Limited, India.
- These Surface to Air Missiles are fitted onboard the Kolkata Class Destroyers and would also be fitted on all future major warships of the Indian Navy.
- With the successful proving of this cooperative mode of engagement, the Indian Navy has become a part of a select group of Navies that have this niche capability.
- This capability significantly enhances the combat effectiveness of the Indian Navy thereby providing an operational edge over potential adversaries.

No move for nationwide NRC exercise

Why in news?

The ruling BJP's election promise to implement the National Register of Citizens across the country, if voted back to power for a second term, contradicts the Centre's stand in the Supreme Court and Parliament.

Response to SC:

- Responding to a petition calling for implementing the NRC in Tripura, the Centre had filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court in January that it was not required as adequate laws existed to identify and deport illegal immigrants.

What is the NRC?

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is the list of Indian citizens of Assam.
- It was prepared in 1951, following the census of 1951. For a person's name to be included in the updated NRC list of 2018, he/ she will have to furnish:
 1. Existence of name in the legacy data: The legacy data is the collective list of the NRC data of 1951 and the electoral rolls up to midnight of 24 March 1971.
 2. Proving linkage with the person whose name appears in the legacy data.

How did NRC verification begin in Assam?

- The process of NRC update was taken up in Assam as per a **Supreme Court order in 2013**.
- In order to wean out cases of illegal migration from Bangladesh and other adjoining areas, NRC updation was carried out under The Citizenship Act, 1955, and according to rules framed in the Assam Accord.

How is verification carried out?

- The updating process started in May 2015 and ended on 31 August

2015.

- A total of 3.29 crore people applied through 68.31 lakh applications.
- The process of verification involved house-to-house field verification, determination of authenticity of documents, family tree investigations in order to rule out bogus claims of parenthood and linkages and separate hearings for married women.

Who all have been left out?

- Out of the 40.07 lakh applicants who have been left out of the final draft NRC released, on Monday, 2.48 lakh applicants have been kept on hold including the D-Voters (doubtful voters who have been disenfranchised on account of failure to prove citizenship), descendants of D-voters and persons whose cases are pending before the foreigners tribunal.
- The state however, has not revealed the reason for keeping others on hold.

What next?

- The process of filing claims and objections will start on 30 August, during which people whose names have been left out of the NRC Assam, can once again appeal to have their case reconsidered.
- Those left out are not yet being labelled as "foreigners" or being sent to detention centres.
- However, only those applicants who had submitted their applications in 2015 will be considered.

Govt. declines to share black money details from Switzerland

Why in news?

The government has declined to share information on black money cases received from Switzerland, citing confidentiality.

Replying to an RTI query, the Finance Ministry said India and Switzerland share information on black money on a case to case basis... the

information is governed by confidentiality provisions.

Navy boosts its air warfare capability

Why in news?

The Navy crossed a milestone in enhancing its anti-air warfare capability, with the maiden “**cooperative engagement firing**” of the medium-range surface-to-air missiles.

Capabilities of all platforms:

- This was achieved by network-centric operations that helped to combine the capabilities of all military platforms in a formation, the Navy said.
 - The firing was undertaken on the western seaboard by the INS Kochi and the INS Chennai, wherein the missiles of both ships were controlled by one ship to intercept different aerial targets at extended ranges,” the Navy said in a statement.
 - The trial was carried out by the Navy, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).
 - The missile was developed by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad, a DRDO laboratory, and IAI. It is made by Bharat Dynamics Limited.
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Peace pact with Taliban is unlikely before Sept. polls

Why in news?

A peace agreement with the Taliban is unlikely to materialise before the

September election in Afghanistan, said a leader of the High Peace Council of the country. Addressing a gathering at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) here, Mohammad Umer Daudzai, Chief Executive of the Afghan High Peace Council, said **Afghanistan would not compromise on fundamental issues with the Taliban**, stating that the rebels would have to come clean about ties with Pakistan.

Long process:

- Peace talks is a complex and long process which will take some time. But it will not be achieved before the election. There will be some uncertainties but the polling and transition will be completed nevertheless," said Mr. Daudzai, who held talks with External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.
- In conversation with the visiting dignitary, Ms. Swaraj conveyed India's support to peace and stability in the war-torn country.
- India expressed its support for **sustainable peace in Afghanistan**," said the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar in a social media message.

Areas of concern:

- Mr. Daudzai explained Kabul's main areas of concern about the ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and the United States in Qatar.
- He pointed out that the U.S. special envoy for the talks, Ambassador **Zalmay Khalilzad**, and other senior officials have from time to time briefed Kabul about the talks but maintained that they had no way to find out if they were being told the full details.
- The visit by the key official took place, days after the visit of Mr. Khalilzad to Delhi during which he briefed Indian policy makers.

High profile:

- However, he said the talks had given the Taliban a higher political profile.
- He mentioned that the U.S.-Taliban talks were not supposed to treat the rebels as the real representative of the people of the country, saying "People of Afghanistan are optimistic of the future of peace but they are also pessimistic as **the real party that is the Government**

of Afghanistan is missing in the talks.”

- When the right time comes, the Taliban will join the rest of the country said Mr. Daudzai, expressing hope for continued peace process in the future.
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Varanasi has only one air quality monitoring station

Why in news?

Prime Minister's constituency Varanasi, which goes to polls on May 19, continues to have only one air quality monitoring station, despite being ranked as among the top 3 most polluted cities in the world three years ago, a Right to Information request has found.

Zero 'good-air' days:

- The Central Pollution Control Board's 2015 dataset (made public in 2016) found Varanasi's air quality to be among the most toxic in the country and that it had only one air quality monitor capable of measuring particulate matter 2.5 and particulate matter 10 levels.
- Out of 227 days measured in 2015, the city had zero 'good-air' days and this was attributed to the **heavy levels of industrial pollution**.
- Biomass burning, vehicular emissions, brick kilns and diesel generator sets were also major contributors.
- Let Me Breathe, a portal that investigates how people cope with poor air quality, queried the city's civic officials and the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board with Right to Information requests to check what progress the city had made in improving its air quality.
- While the average air quality for PM 2.5 from 2017-2019 had improved to 104 from 206 in 2016, the maximum PM levels breached continued to be above 200, or in the "very poor" category.

Serious priority:

- Varanasi is one of the most polluted cities on the planet.

- Still there is only one monitoring station.
 - While in the last few years the government has done amazing work on the beautification of the city and solar, it's time to make air pollution a serious priority as well
 - While Varanasi's municipal bodies had taken steps to address road dust and curb road-side burning of garbage, no data was provided on the number of violations and the steps taken to reprimand offenders, the RTI queries revealed.
 - Varanasi is one of the cities that is part of the **National Clean Air Campaign**, an initiative by the Union Environment Ministry to improve air quality in 100 cities by 20% at least by 2024. One of the commitments under this is to improve air quality monitoring.
 - In February, a study by IIT Kanpur and the Shakti Foundation showed Varanasi suffered from poor air quality for 70% of the days between October and November 2018 with PM 2.5 levels crossing 170 micrograms per cubic metre against the national average of 60 and the WHO average of 25.
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House Democrats concerned over Trump's India policy

Why in news?

Disturbed by what they describe as a **lack of leadership and policy coherence**, Democrats from the U.S. House of Representatives, including the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Eliot Engel, have written to President Donald Trump.

Committee Suggestions:

- Their letter asks that the President appoint an **Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs** and lists a series of concerns, including the lack of a coherent India policy.
- Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is copied on the letter, which is dated May 15.

- We are deeply concerned by your failure, more than two years into your term, to name and have confirmed an Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs at the Department of State,” the letter reads.

Position vacant:

- The position has been vacant since January 2017, when Nisha Biswal left the Department.
- In April, the White House had confirmed that it was withdrawing the name of Robert Williams, an intelligence officer nominated for the top South and Central Asia job.
- The Department has been run by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Alice Wells in the absence of a permanent appointment.
- From the failure of the Department’s senior officials to engage directly with Sri Lankan government officials during the country’s October-December 2018 constitutional crisis, to the Department’s failure to form a coherent India policy, to the mishandling of the U.S.-Afghanistan relationship in the midst of seeking a peace deal with the Taliban, it is clear that American leadership when it is needed most is missing in action,” the letter says, adding, “We believe that these failures are at least in part the result of not having a confirmed Assistant Secretary.

Relations with India:

- The India-U.S. relationship has been mixed over the last two-odd years of the Trump administration.
- Mr. Trump had announced **his South Asia policy** in August 2017 calling for a greater development role for India in Afghanistan (and linking that to India “making billions of dollars in trade” with the U.S.), asking Pakistan to end its support for terrorism, and seeking stability in Afghanistan.
- The U.S. also played a central role in helping to get Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar sanctioned by the UN.
- However, of late, the **trade-related irritants** in the relationship have piled up.
- Disagreements over ICT, dairy products, medical devices, India’s e-commerce policy and the U.S.’s H-1B visa policies are yet to be resolved.

- Mr. Trump's March announcement that preferential trade benefits for India under the U.S.'s **GSP program** will be withdrawn, and the U.S. requiring India to stop its imports of Iranian oil from May have added to the strain on the relationship
 - The Democrats say that they cannot understand why the position remains vacant given that, to their knowledge, a number of candidates have been considered for the role.
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