



PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

Posted at: 22/05/2019

Brahmos Air Launched Missile from Su-30 MKI Aircraft

Why in news?

IAF successfully fired the BrahMos air version missile from its frontline Su-30 MKI fighter aircraft. The launch from the aircraft was smooth and the missile followed the desired trajectory before directly hitting the land target.

Highlights:

- The air launched BrahMos missile is a 2.5 ton supersonic air to surface cruise missile with ranges of close to 300 km, designed and developed by BAPL.
- The IAF became the first Air Force in the world to have successfully fired an air launched 2.8 Mach surface attack missile of this category on a sea target on 22 Nov 17.
- Today's was the second such live launch of the weapon. The integration of the weapon on the aircraft was a very complex process involving mechanical, electrical and software modifications on aircraft.
- The IAF has been involved in the activity from its inception. The software development of the aircraft was undertaken by the IAF engineers while HAL carried out mechanical and electrical modifications on the aircraft.
- The dedicated and synergetic efforts of the IAF, DRDO, BAPL and HAL have proven the capability of the nation to undertake such complex integrations.

- The firing could be successfully undertaken with dedicated support from Indian Navy by way of ensuring availability of a large number of monitoring ships to ensure range safety clearance.
 - The BrahMos missile provides Indian Air Force a much desired capability to strike from large stand-off ranges on any target at sea or on land with pinpoint accuracy by day or night and in all weather conditions.
 - The capability of the missile coupled with the superlative performance of the Su-30MKI aircraft gives the IAF the desired strategic reach.
-

UN lowers India's FY20 GDP growth forecast

Why in news?

The United Nations (UN) has lowered its forecast for India's GDP growth in 2019-20 to **7.1% from its estimate in January of 7.5%**, citing an overall slowdown in global growth.

Economic Situation and Prospects:

- The UN World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2019 report said that the global economy is experiencing a **broad-based growth slowdown** led by slowing industrial production coupled with the weakening of international trade activity due in large part to the unresolved trade disputes between the U.S. and China.
- Across both developed and developing countries, growth projections for 2019 have been downgraded, the report said.
- Alongside **a slowdown in international trade, business sentiments have deteriorated**, casting a cloud on investment prospects.
- The Indian economy, which generates two-thirds of the regional output, expanded by 7.2% in 2018, the report added.
- **Strong domestic consumption and investment** will continue to support growth, which is projected at 7% in 2019 and 7.1% in 2020.

- While the slowdown in European Union has meant exports from nations such as Bangladesh have also slowed as the EU is one of its major export destinations, **India is on a stronger footing because of the nature of its export destinations.**
 - India's exports remain more robust, as around half of exports are destined for faster-growing Asian markets," the report said.
 - Overall, the UN lowered its **growth forecast for South Asia marginally to 5.8% in 2020** from the 5.9% estimated for the year in January.
-

RBI to create regulatory cadre

Why in news?

The Reserve Bank of India's Central Board has decided to create a specialised supervisory and regulatory cadre.

Supervision and regulation:

- The cadre is being created with a view to strengthening the supervision and regulation of commercial banks, urban cooperative banks and non-banking financial companies, the RBI said in a statement.
 - The Central Board, in its 576th meeting in Chennai chaired by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, reviewed the current economic situation, global and domestic challenges and various areas of operations of the Reserve Bank.
 - Other matters discussed included issues related to currency management and the banker to government functions of the RBI.
-

No dissent notes in orders

Why in news?

The Election Commission of India (ECI) decided by a majority of 2:1 that **dissenting opinions in the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) disputes will not be made part of any final order** and will only be included in internal files, as per previous practice.

Minutes of the meeting:

- In the meeting of the Election Commission, regarding the issue of MCC, it was inter alia decided that proceedings of the Commission meeting would be drawn, including the views of all the Commission Members. Thereafter, formal instructions to this effect would be issued in consonance with extant laws and rules," the ECI said.
- It is learnt that Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa had maintained his stand that **minority views should get reflected in the MCC orders**.
- The issue came up before the full bench comprising Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, Mr. Lavasa and Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra, after Mr. Lavasa raised objections over his dissenting opinions not being included in the orders on certain speeches of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP chief Amit Shah.
- Mr. Lavasa wrote thrice to Mr. Arora, conveying his decision to stay away from the proceedings related to the MCC if dissenting views were not incorporated in the orders.

No precedent:

- However, there is no such precedent. According to the existing rules, only the majority decision in case of non-quasi-judicial issues like the MCC is communicated to the parties concerned. **The divergent opinion is recorded in files,"** said a senior EC official.
- Following news reports that Mr. Lavasa had recused himself from MCC matters, Mr. Arora earlier issued a statement saying: "It needs to be mentioned that in the last meeting of the Commission on May 14, it was unanimously decided that some groups shall be formed to deliberate the issues that arose in the conduct of Lok Sabha

Elections, 2019, just as it was done after the Lok Sabha elections of 2014. Of the 13 issues and areas identified, Model Code of Conduct is one of them.”

- **The three members of the ECI are not expected to be template or clones of each other.** There have been so many times in the past when there has been a vast diversion of views as it can and should be,” he had said.
 - Former Legal Advisor to the EC S.K. Mendiratta, who has worked with the poll body for about 53 years, had also told that in case of a difference of opinion on MCC matters, the dissent note is recorded in the files and only majority view is communicated through an order.
 - The **dissenting ruling is made part of the order only in quasi-judicial matters** like the disputes related to the Representation of the People Act and election symbols.
-

EC to set up control room for EVM complaints

Why in news?

Faced with widespread Opposition allegations of EVM swapping and tampering, the Election Commission announced that an EVM control room (011- 23052123) will be set up at the Nirvachan Sadan for handling any EVM-related complaints till the completion of counting. The control room will become operative from 11 a.m. on May 22.

Complaints from candidates:

- Afzal Ansari, BSP candidate from Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh, had held a sit-in protest along with his supporters outside an EVM strong-room in the constituency on Monday, demanding deployment of five of his representatives outside the storehouses in eight-hour shifts.
- The issue was resolved after the local administration allowed one representative at each of the strong-rooms in the five Assembly segments, the EC said.

- In Chandauli, reserve EVMs and VVPATs were being moved to a strong-room when several Samajwadi Party supporters protested saying the machines used for polling could be tampered with.
 - Following the protests, representatives of other candidates also gathered at the strong-room and demanded that the machines be sent back. The reserve machines were then stored at a Collectorate office that was sealed.
 - The District Election Officer however, informed the EC that all the parties had been given advance intimation about the movement of reserve EVMs to the strong-room and all procedures were duly followed.
 - Again in Uttar Pradesh's Domariaganj, supporters of various political parties staged a protest against the movement of EVMs on May 14.
 - The local poll officials said they had been kept in reserve. An alleged incident was also reported in Jhansi, where EVMs were found inside a City Magistrate's vehicle.
 - It turned out that the machines were either kept in reserve or had malfunctioned and were being taken back to the strong-room, said an official.
 - Responding to the allegations, the EC issued a statement that the visuals circulating in various media platforms did not pertain to any EVMs used during the polls.
 - After the close of polls, all polled EVMs and VVPATs are brought under security cover to the designated strong-rooms, which is sealed with double locks, in the presence of the candidates and observers of the Election Commission," said the Commission, adding that the entire process is videographed. The panel also said continuous CCTV coverage is done till completion of counting
 - Before counting, agents are shown the address tags, seals and serial numbers of EVMs to confirm that they were used in the actual polls, said the Commission.
-

SC rejects plea for 100% EVM-VVPAT verification

Why in news?

The Supreme Court dismissed a writ petition for 100% random physical verification of EVM-VVPAT in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019.

SC Observations:

- The court said that there were just two days left before counting and the country should be allowed to choose its government. The court would not stand in the way.
- Dubbing the public interest litigation filed by a collective of technocrats called 'Tech4All' a "nuisance", the Vacation Bench of Justices Arun Mishra and M.R. Shah junked the PIL in a brief hearing.
- The Bench pointed out that all the seven phases of polling were over and the country was looking forward to form a new government on May 23.
- The PIL was ill-timed and would only disrupt the electoral process which was on its last spring to the finish line, it noted.
- The PIL had cited the recent allegations of changing the EVMs even as the Election Commission of India has strongly denied them.
- The PIL said the Supreme Court's order in April to raise the physical verification of votes using Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (EVM-VVPATs) from one EVM to five EVMs per Assembly segment was not enough of a safeguard from tampering.
- There was a need for 100% physical counting for foolproof poll results on May 23, it said. On May 7, a Supreme Court Bench, led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, had dismissed a plea by 21 Opposition parties to review its April judgment.

Germany will do its best to prevent oil shock

Why in news?

Germany will do everything to save the nuclear deal with Iran, the new German Ambassador to India, Walter J. Lindner, told.

German efforts on Nuclear deal:

- His statement reflects the official position of Germany, which is working to prevent a conflict in the Persian Gulf and a consequent oil shock for nations like India.
- **Nuclear rivalry would break out in the West Asian region if the nuclear deal fell apart.**
- No one wants such a scenario because of the implications for the world.
- Germany will do everything in its ability to keep Iran in the nuclear deal," said the Ambassador, who submitted his letter of credential to President Ram Nath Kovind.
- Mr. Lindner said Germany, along with other European Union members, supported India's plans to counter a possible oil shock in case of increased volatility in the Persian Gulf.

Chancellor's visit:

- Instability increased after the U.S. government ended waivers for oil purchase from Iran on May 2.
- The Ambassador noted that India was yet to decide on whether to continue buying Iranian crude. A decision is likely after the general election.
- The Iran issue is likely to figure during the visit of Chancellor Angela Merkel to India. She will be among the first visitors to the country after the end of the election
- German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas was among the signatories to a statement issued after the end of U.S. waivers for oil trade and **vowed to stand by Iran.**
- The waivers were meant for major importers of Iranian energy, such as India, China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Italy, Greece and Turkey.
- However, the Ambassador did not spell out any strategy to deal with U.S. President Donald Trump's strategy for increasing pressure on Iran through renewed sanctions.
- Mr. Maas had expressed **collective "regret" at the re-imposition of sanctions by the United States.**

Pakistani fishing vessel caught after hot pursuit

Why in news?

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Tuesday seized heroin, estimated to be worth between Rs. 800 and Rs. 1,000 crores in the international market, from a Pakistani fishing vessel off the Gujarat coast.

Suspicious movement:

- According to ICG, they received intelligence inputs on May 20 from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) and other agencies that a Pakistani fishing boat was to deliver narcotics off the Gujarat coast to an Indian fishing boat.
- The Coast Guard swiftly diverted its ships for intercepting the vessel.
- ICG ship Arinjay on patrol off the India-Pakistan International Maritime Border Line was alerted.
- Two additional Interceptor Boats C-437 and C-408 from Jakhau and Okha were asked to join the search. An ICG Dornier aircraft was also launched from Porbandar for aerial recce.
- The Coast Guard ships and aircraft noticed one fishing boat, Al Madina, to be suspicious and shadowed it through the intervening night of May 20 and 21.
- At first light on May 21, the suspect vessel crossed the International Maritime Border Line and started moving towards the Jakhau coast.
- Al Madina was kept under surveillance and intercepted by Arinjay at about 9.15 a.m. on Tuesday. The Karachi-based vessel was then 08 NM from the IMBL, inside Indian waters.
- Despite evasive maneuvers carried out by the crew of Al Madina and rough sea conditions, it was intercepted within Indian waters.
- During hot pursuit, the crew threw bags containing suspicious material into the sea. The Coast Guard team upon boarding the vessel took six crew members into custody and retrieved the material from the sea.

- Officials said a preliminary investigation revealed that the contraband being transported was heroin.

What is Hot Pursuit and its legality:

- Hot pursuit owes its origin to the law of the seas against vessels that are involved in piracy or smuggling.
- The coastal country would take action in spite of the **principle of freedom of the high seas** — the rights of vessels of all nations to navigate freely on the high seas.
- The rule ensured that the violating ship is unable to escape citing the protection under the right to free navigation on the high seas, which had been designed to protect innocent vessels.
- This customary doctrine has been codified in the **Article 111 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of High Seas (UNCLOS)** and in Article 23 of the 1958 Convention on the High Seas.
- However, the Convention clearly spelt out that the right of hot pursuit ceases as soon as the ship pursued enters the territorial sea of its own country or a third state so as to not violate the sovereignty of other nations.
- There is **no international law governing 'hot pursuit' over land**.
- However, nations have time and again used the argument of self-defence to enter the territory of another country in pursuit of a terrorist, terrorist organisation, criminals or anyone that is threat to the defence of the pursuing country.
- Under international legal norms on state responsibility, and UN Security Council Resolution 1373, passed shortly after the events of 9/11, state sovereignty implies a duty to control one's territory.
- A state will not allow its land to be used by the non-state actors or terrorist organisations to carry out operations against its neighbours.
- Also, article 51 of the UN charter defines self-defence. It is the action necessary to preserve a country's territorial integrity and political independence.

Hot Pursuit in India and its neighbours:

- India has carried out many hot pursuits in the last few years. All have been undertaken with some understanding with the host country whether they openly agree or not.

- Because of terror camps in Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, India has gone inside these countries and taken action against armed groups.
- Pakistan has been violated many times over by the Americans. But in all those cases there was tacit support from the Pakistani side.
- The operation to assassinate Osama Bin Laden could not have taken place without a secret understanding between the US and a section of senior Pakistani military leadership.

What a surgical strike?

- The technical definition of a surgical strike is “**an attack (usually without prior warning) intended to deal only with a specific target.**”
 - In other words, it is a **swift and targeted attack** with minimum collateral damage to the nearby areas and civilians.
 - Neutralising targets using surgical strikes also helps prevent a conflict from escalating into a war.
 - Such attacks can be carried out through air strikes, by airdropping special operations teams, or through swift ground operations by sending in commandos or regular troops.
 - Military strategist Sir Basil Liddell Hart said a surgical strike was akin to a single arrow shot by Paris (who eloped with Helen, queen of Sparta, sparking the Trojan war) at Achilles' heel, his only vulnerable spot.
-

West Nile fever cases in Kozhikode go unnoticed

Why in news?

A month after a boy from Malappuram died of West Nile fever in March, four cases of the infection have been reported from within the Kozhikode Corporation limits too. According to sources in the department, three Japanese Encephalitis cases were reported.

Detection:

- The presence of the West Nile virus was identified from the **mosquito samples** collected from these areas and serum samples of the close contacts of the infected persons by a team from the **National Centre for Disease Control**.
- There could have been more unreported cases of the disease as 80% of the infected people do not show any symptoms, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Human infection is most often the result of bites from infected mosquitoes of the **Culex genus**.
- Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, which circulate the virus in their blood for a few days," says the WHO.

Information:

- Kozhikode Additional District Medical Officer Asha Devi, who is in charge of the **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)** that records data on various diseases in the district, told that the information about the West Nile fever cases had been uploaded on the Health Department website on time.
- Asked about the possibility of sub-clinical infections, which do not show up the symptoms, she said nothing had been reported so far though the department was keeping a vigil.
- Mosquito eradication works had been taken up in areas from where these cases were reported. Steps were also taken to create awareness among local residents, she added.

Health dept. clueless:

- The Health Department is, however, still clueless about the source of the West Nile infection in Malappuram as the samples of dead crows and mosquitoes collected from the premises of the boy had turned negative.
- Another case of West Nile fever was also reported from the district in the course of the investigation into the mysterious outbreak of encephalitis in the past few months.
- The department had formed a drastic response team and devised a treatment protocol after over 60 encephalitis cases were reported from Malappuram.

- Doctors in private and government hospitals had been asked to report unusual fever cases to the surveillance team under the DMO to spot potential epidemic cases.
- With the onset of the monsoon expected in the next two weeks, the possibility of mosquito breeding could be higher, said a senior Health Department official, adding that there need to be more vigil.

Key facts:

- West Nile virus can cause a fatal neurological disease in humans.
- However, approximately 80% of people who are infected will not show any symptoms.
- West Nile virus is mainly transmitted to people through the bites of infected mosquitoes.
- The virus can cause severe disease and death in horses.
- Vaccines are available for use in horses but not yet available for people.
- Birds are the natural hosts of West Nile virus.
- WNV is commonly found in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North America and West Asia.
- WNV is maintained in nature in a cycle involving transmission between birds and mosquitoes. Humans, horses and other mammals can be infected
- West Nile Virus (WNV) is a member of the flavivirus genus and belongs to the Japanese encephalitis antigenic complex of the family Flaviviridae.

Outbreaks:

- West Nile Virus (WNV) was first isolated in a woman in the **West Nile district of Uganda in 1937.**
- It was identified in birds (crows and columbiformes) in Nile delta region in 1953.
- Before 1997 WNV was not considered pathogenic for birds, but at that time in Israel a more virulent strain caused the death of different bird species presenting signs of encephalitis and paralysis.
- Human infections attributable to WNV have been reported in many countries in the World for over 50 years.
- In 1999 a WNV circulating in Israel and Tunisia was imported in New York producing a large and dramatic outbreak that spread throughout

the continental United States of America (USA) in the following years.

- The WNV outbreak in USA (1999-2010) highlighted that importation and establishment of vector-borne pathogens outside their current habitat represent a serious danger to the world.
- The largest outbreaks occurred in Greece, Israel, Romania, Russia and USA. Outbreak sites are **on major birds' migratory routes**.
- In its original range, WNV was prevalent throughout Africa, parts of Europe, Middle East, West Asia, and Australia. Since its introduction in 1999 into USA, the virus has spread and is now widely established from Canada to Venezuela.

Treatment:

- Treatment is supportive for patients with neuro-invasive West Nile virus, often involving hospitalization, intravenous fluids, respiratory support, and prevention of secondary infections. No vaccine is available for humans.

Reducing the risk of infection in people:

- In the absence of a vaccine, the only way to reduce infection in people is by raising **awareness of the risk factors and educating people** about the measures they can take to reduce exposure to the virus.
- **Reducing the risk of mosquito transmission:** Efforts to prevent transmission should first focus on personal and community protection against mosquito bites through the use of mosquito nets, personal insect repellent, by wearing light coloured clothing (long-sleeved shirts and trousers) and by avoiding outdoor activity at peak biting times. In addition, community programmes should encourage communities to destroy mosquito breeding sites in residential areas
- **Reducing the risk of animal-to-human transmission:** Gloves and other protective clothing should be worn while handling sick animals or their tissues, and during slaughtering and culling procedures.
- **Reducing the risk of transmission through blood transfusion and organ transplant:** Blood and organ donation restrictions and laboratory testing should be considered at the time of the outbreak in the affected areas after assessing the local/regional epidemiological situation.

Vector Control:

- Effective prevention of human WNV infections depends on the development of comprehensive, integrated mosquito surveillance and control programmes in areas where the virus occurs.
 - Studies should identify local mosquito species that play a role in WNV transmission, including those that might serve as a “bridge” from birds to human beings.
 - Emphasis should be on integrated control measures including source reduction (with community participation), water management, chemicals, and biological control methods.
-
-

