

1. NEW ICBM TEST BY NORTH KOREA

North Korea said it had successfully tested a powerful new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that put the entire US mainland within range, declaring it had achieved its long-held goal of becoming a nuclear power.

- ✚ North Korea said the new powerful missile reached an altitude of around 4,475 km (2,780 miles) - more than 10 times the height of the international space station - and flew 950 km (600 miles) during its 53 minute flight.
- ✚ The new **Hwasong-15** named after the planet Mars, was a more advanced version of the Hwasong-14. It was designed to carry a "super-large heavy warhead" and had much greater advantages in its tactical and technological specifications than its predecessor. Based on its trajectory and distance, the missile would have a range of more than 13,000 km (8,100 miles) - more than enough to reach Washington D.C.

2. M-SAND (MANUFACTURED SAND)

The bullish rise in construction sector is leading to the overexploitation of sand present in the river. Emptying out the riverbed to mine sand poses a very real environmental threat which has to be stopped. Considering that we cannot curb the demand, Engineers and specialists have come out with few alternatives to sand. And one of those breakthroughs is M-Sand (manufactured sand).

- ✚ M-sand is achieved through crushing hard granite or other such blue stones.
- ✚ It is cubically shaped with grounded edges.
- ✚ It's processed and washed before put to use.
- ✚ The processing makes it somewhat costlier than the normal sand.

ADVANTAGE:

- ✚ It's a better substitute to river sand and good for environment.
- ✚ It also has the potential to regulate illegal sand mining by substituting the river-sand.

3. INDIAN NAVY TO GET 260 SOFTWARE-DEFINED-RADIO SETS

Defense Acquisition Council (DAC) approved procurement of over 260 software-defined-radio (naval communication) sets under the category of buy (India Designed Developed & Manufactured).

Software defined radio (SDR) system

- ✚ SDR/software defined radio is a radio communication system where components that have been typically implemented using hardware are instead replaced by software.
- ✚ This reduces cost, power consumption and size of components on a personal computer or embedded system.
- ✚ It can be used for powering satellite phones, drones and satellite receiver for ISRO.

4. TOLD TO PUSH ROHINGYA BACK INTO BANGLADESH: BSF CHIEF

Border Security Force (BSF) Director said that they had instructions to push back the Rohingya to Bangladesh as they become a “liability” once they are arrested.

- ✚ He said it was difficult to distinguish between Rohingya and Bangladeshis as they had similar facial features and the BSF personnel were not equipped to differentiate between the two on the basis of dialect.
- ✚ He said that around 36,000 Rohingya were present in various parts of the country and the BSF was prepared to stop their entry into India as their links with terror organisations could not be ruled out.
- ✚ He said the border guarding force had not come across any specific case where a Rohingya they caught possessed arms, ammunition or had terror connection.

5. SC TO REVISIT ITS JUDGMENT

- ✚ The judgment of the Supreme Court in **Rajesh Sharma v. Union of India**, in which it had laid down safeguards to prevent the misuse of Section 498A(dowry harassment) of the Indian Penal Code, could soon be overturned by a larger Bench.
- ✚ The Supreme Court said there was no need for the guidelines framed by it to restrain immediate arrest of a husband and his relatives in dowry harassment cases without verifying the authenticity of the complaint and agreed to reexamine its previous verdict.
- ✚ The SC said the mechanism to screen anti-dowry complaints through district-level committees was outside provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure and needed to be scrapped.
- ✚ The court took a second look at the committees it set up as it believed they might be legally unsustainable.

BACKGROUND:

Expressing concern over misuse of the anti-dowry law by disgruntled wives against husbands and in-laws, a division bench of the SC in **Rajesh Sharma v. Union of India** case had directed that no arrest or action be taken on such complaints without ensuring the veracity of the allegations.

It directed setting up of a family welfare committee (FWC) in each district and entrusted it with the task of examining the authenticity of dowry harassment complaints. It had said such complaints received by the police or a magistrate be referred to the committee and no action be taken till the committee gave its report after interacting with the parties.

6. INDIA UNLIKELY TO CUT MALARIA BY HALF IN 2020: WHO

According to a report released by the World Health Organization (WHO), India accounted for 6% of global malaria cases and 7% of deaths caused by it in 2016.

- ✚ This is in the same ballpark as last year, though the WHO figures also suggest that India is **unlikely to reduce its case burden beyond 40% by 2020**. In contrast, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan achieved malaria-free status in 2015 and 2016 respectively. There were an estimated 445,000 deaths from malaria globally in 2016, compared with 446,000 estimated deaths in 2015. About 80% of the deaths were accounted for by 15 countries, namely, India and 14 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- ✚ A **key impediment** to eliminating malaria is a weak surveillance system. India and Nigeria, two major contributors to the global burden of malaria, were able to **detect only 8% and 16% of cases**, respectively, via the system.
- ✚ Moreover, 51% of plasmodium vivax cases -the milder cousin of the p. falciparum - were traced in India. This could at least be partially explained by resistance to chloroquine, the first line treatment to p. vivax infections that has been detected in pockets of the country earlier this decade. For a long time, p.falciparum dominated India's case burden and, though its share has decreased, there is a slight increase in malaria cases by other parasites.
- ✚ Bhutan, Nepal, Thailand, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Indonesia are among the countries poised to reduce malaria incidence by over 40% by 2020. India - due to **low funding per person** at risk and resistance to certain frontline insecticides -is only expected to achieve a 20%-40% reduction.

7. FOLLOWING NORTH KOREA'S TEST, CHINA REITERATES CALL FOR 'DOUBLE FREEZE'

- ✚ China has reiterated its "double freeze" call to ease tensions on the Korean peninsula.
- ✚ It calls for North Korea halting its nuclear and missile programme in return for the U.S. and South Korea suspending their major military exercises.

8. BIRDS NOW COSY UP TO ISRAEL

- ✚ Climate change is turning Israel into a permanent wintering ground for some of the 500 million migrating birds that used to stop over briefly before flying on to the warm plains of Africa.
- ✚ The birds now prefer to stay longer in cooler areas rather than cross into Africa, where encroaching deserts and frequent droughts have made food more scarce.
- ✚ Although migrating birds are a welcome attraction for ornithologists and tourists, their hunger for food from crop fields makes them a menace to farmers.

9. TAMILNADU GOVERNMENT OPPOSES PERMANENT TRIBUNAL TO ADJUDICATE WATER DISPUTES

The Tamil Nadu government has reiterated its opposition to the proposal to constitute a Permanent Water Disputes Tribunal (PWDT) to adjudicate inter-State water disputes. It said the functioning of the existing Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal should not be hampered under the pretext of transfer of the pending applications to the proposed Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal. It also reiterated that each and every water dispute was “unique in character” and the disputes that would arise would be “complex in their mode unlike the usual civil and criminal cases normally dealt with by the courts”.

BACKGROUND:

The Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2017

The Bill seeks to amend the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.

Highlights of the bill:

- ✚ **Disputes Resolution Committee:** Under the Act, when a complaint is received from a state government regarding a water dispute, the central government may ask the affected states to undertake negotiations to settle the dispute. If the dispute cannot be settled through negotiations, the central government has to set up a Water Disputes Tribunal within a year of receiving such a complaint. The Bill replaces this provision and requires the central government to set up a **Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC)**, for resolving any inter-state water dispute amicably. The DRC will get a period of one year, extendable by six months, to submit its report to the central government.
- ✚ **Members of DRC:** Members of the DRC will be from relevant fields, as deemed fit by the central government.
- ✚ **Tribunal:** The Bill proposes to set up an Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal, for adjudication of water disputes, if a dispute is not resolved through the DRC. This tribunal can have multiple benches. All existing tribunals will be dissolved and the water disputes pending adjudication before such existing tribunals will be transferred to this newly formed tribunal.
- ✚ **Composition of the Tribunal:** The tribunal shall consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and not more than six nominated members (judges of the Supreme Court or of a High Court), nominated by the Chief Justice of India. The central government may appoint two experts serving in the Central Water Engineering Service, not below the rank of Chief Engineer, as assessors to advise the bench in its proceedings.
- ✚ **Time allotted to Tribunal to take its decision:** Under the Act, any water disputes tribunal has to give its decision on a dispute within a period of three years. This period is extendable by a maximum of two years. Under the Bill, the proposed tribunal has to give its decision on a dispute within a period of two years. This period is extendable by a maximum of one year. Under the Act, if the matter is again referred to the tribunal by a state for further consideration, the tribunal has to submit its report to the central government within a period of one year. This period of one year can be extended by the central

government for such a period as it may consider necessary. The Bill amends this to specify that the extension may be up to a maximum of six months.

- ✚ **Decision of the Tribunal:** Under the Act, the decision of the tribunal must be published by the central government in the official gazette. After publication, the decision has the same force as that of an order of the Supreme Court. Under the Bill, the requirement of publication in the official gazette has been removed. The Bill also adds that the decision of the bench of the tribunal will be final and binding on the parties involved in the dispute. This decision will have the same force as that of an order of the Supreme Court.
- ✚ **Maintenance of data bank and information:** Under the Act, the central government maintains a data bank and information system at the national level for each river basin. Under the Bill, the central government will appoint or authorize an agency to maintain a data bank and information system at the national level for each river basin.
- ✚ **Additional rule-making powers:** The Bill gives the central government powers to make rules in which water will be distributed during stress situations arising from shortage in the availability of water.

10. THE TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS) BILL, 2016

Highlights of the Bill:

- ✚ The Bill defines a transgender person as one who is partly female or male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male. In addition, the person's gender must not match the gender assigned at birth, and includes trans-men, trans-women, persons with intersex variations and gender-queers.
- ✚ A transgender person must obtain a certificate of identity as proof of recognition of identity as a transgender person and to invoke rights under the Bill.
- ✚ Such a certificate would be granted by the District Magistrate on the recommendation of a Screening Committee. The Committee would comprise a medical officer, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a district welfare officer, a government official, and a transgender person.
- ✚ The Bill prohibits discrimination against a transgender person in areas such as education, employment, and healthcare. It directs the central and state governments to provide welfare schemes in these areas.
- ✚ Offences like compelling a transgender person to beg, denial of access to a public place, physical and sexual abuse, etc. would attract up to two years' imprisonment and a fine.

Key Issues and Analysis:

- ✚ The Supreme Court has held that the right to self-identification of gender is part of the right to dignity and autonomy under Article 21 of the Constitution. However, objective criteria may be required to determine one's gender in order to be eligible for entitlements.
- ✚ The Bill states that a person recognised as 'transgender' would have the right to 'self-perceived' gender identity. However, it does not provide for the enforcement of such a right. A District Screening Committee would issue a certificate of identity to recognise transgender persons.

- ✦ The definition of 'transgender persons' in the Bill is at variance with the definitions recognised by international bodies and experts in India.
- ✦ The Bill includes terms like 'trans-men', 'trans-women', persons with 'intersex variations' and 'gender-queers' in its definition of transgender persons. However, these terms have not been defined.
- ✦ Certain criminal and personal laws that are currently in force only recognise the genders of 'man' and 'woman'. It is unclear how such laws would apply to transgender persons who may not identify with either of the two genders.