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Sabarimala all set for Makaravilakku festival

Sabarimala is all set for the Makaravilakku festival. As against the annual average of three lakh devotees, only 5,000 devotees will be permitted to the temple for the festival this time.

About Makaravilakku

1. Makaravilakku is an annual festival held on Makar Sankranti in Kerala, India at the shrine of Sabarimala.
2. The festival includes the Thiruvabharanam (sacred ornaments of Lord Ayyappan) procession and a congregation at the hill shrine of Sabarimala.

Publication of notice of marriage not mandatory says Allahabad HC

The verdict

1. The Allahabad High Court has ruled that the provision of publication of notice of intended marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, is not mandatory.
2. The court, in a significant judgment delivered on January 12, said making such publication mandatory “would invade the fundamental rights of liberty and privacy, including within its sphere the freedom to choose for marriage without interference from state and non-state actors, or the persons concerned”.
3. Court mandated that while giving notice under Section 5 of the Act, it shall be optional for the parties to the intended marriage to make a request in writing to the marriage officer to publish or not to publish a notice under Section 6 and follow the procedure of objections as prescribed under the Act.
4. In case the parties do not make such a request, the officer “shall not publish any such notice or entertain objections to the intended marriage and proceed with the solemnisation of the marriage”.
5. The requirement of publication of notice under Section 6 and inviting or entertaining objections under Section 7 can only be read as a directory in nature, to be given effect only on request of parties to the intended marriage and not otherwise, the court observed in the 47-page judgment.



A strong India would act as 'counterbalance' to China: U.S.

The 10-page document recently declassified by the Trump administration outlines objectives and strategies with regard to China, North Korea, India and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

US security challenge

1. Maintaining “U.S. strategic primacy” in the region and promoting a “liberal economic order” while stopping China from establishing “illiberal spheres of influence” is the U.S.’s first national security challenge.
2. With regard to India, one of the ‘desired end states’ of the U.S.’s strategy is for the U.S. to be India’s preferred partner on security issues and for the two countries to “cooperate to preserve maritime security and counter Chinese influence” in South Asia, Southeast Asia and other regions of “mutual concern”.

Border dispute

1. The U.S. aims to help India become a net security provider in the region, solidify a lasting strategic partnership with India.
2. These objectives it plans to achieve via enhanced defence cooperation and interoperability; working with India “toward domestic economic reform” and greater leadership roles for India in the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus.
3. Consequently, the U.S.’s to-do list has on its offers of support to India via military, diplomatic and intelligence channels “to help address continental challenges such as the border dispute with China.”

Act-East policy

1. The U.S. also seeks to bolster common principles, including the peaceful resolution of disputes and the transparent infrastructure-debt practices (a reference to alternatives to financing by China’s Belt Road Initiative, which has led to untenable debt positions in borrowing countries).
2. The U.S. aims to support India’s “Act East” policy. A strong India, in cooperation with like-minded countries, would act as a counterbalance to China,” is one of the underlying assumptions of the strategy.



CCS approves 83 Tejas fighters for Air Force

In the biggest indigenous defence deal, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved the manufacture of 83 Tejas light combat aircraft (LCA) by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) for the Indian Air Force (IAF) at a cost of around ₹47,000 crores.

Highlights:

1. This deal would be a game-changer for self-reliance in the Indian defence manufacturing.
2. It is the first 'BUY (Indian-Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)' category procurement of combat aircraft (with an indigenous content of 50 per cent that will reach 60 per cent by the end of the programme)
3. The Latest MK-1A would have over 40 modifications over the MK-1 variant. The first LCA MK-1A is expected to roll out 2023-24 onwards.
4. For the MK-1A, HAL is outsourcing significant work share to the private industry while it will act as a 'system of systems integrator'.

About LCA:

1. LCA Tejas is a single-engine multirole light combat aircraft. It will replace the ageing Mig 21 fighter planes. It is the second supersonic fighter jet that was developed by HAL (the first one being HAL HF-24 Marut).
2. Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), the autonomous society of DRDO is the design agency and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) as the manufacturer
3. It is the lightest and smallest multi-role supersonic fighter aircraft in its class. It can attend the maximum speed of Mach 1.8.

SC takes cognisance of contamination of rivers

The Supreme Court on Wednesday took suo moto cognisance of the contamination of rivers by sewage effluents through lapses committed by municipalities, saying open surface water resources including rivers are the lifeline of human civilisation.



'Right to life'

1. Deterioration of quality of freshwater has a direct correlation with the quality of public health. The right to clean the environment, and further, pollution-free water, have been protected under the broad rubric of the right to life.
2. Discharging pollutants into the Yamuna is causing an alarming increase in ammonia levels in the water. The increased ammonia levels have impaired its water treatment plants and a drinking water crisis looms large in Delhi.
3. Ammonia and chlorine will cause cancer, the court warned.