

May 3rd news:

International:

Military spending rises to \$1.8 trn, India among top 5 spenders: Report

India and China were among the five biggest military spenders which together accounted for 60 per cent of the total global defence expenditure of \$1.739 trillion in 2017, a Swedish arms watchdog said on 2nd May

In a report, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said China's military expenditure rose again in 2017, continuing an upward trend that has lasted for more than two decades.

According to the arms watchdog, the five top military spenders in 2017 were the US, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and India.

It said the total global military spending rose to USD 1.739 trillion which is an increase of 1.1 per cent compared to the expenditure in 2016.

The report said that China's military spending, at an estimated USD 228 billion, accounted for 48 per cent of the total defence spending in the Asia and Oceania region, and was 3.6 times that of the region's second largest spender, India.

India spent USD 63.9 billion on its military in 2017, an increase of 5.5 per cent compared with 2016 and of 45 per cent since 2008.

According to the report, China's spending as a share of world military expenditure has risen from 5.8 per cent in 2008 to 13 per cent in 2017.

At USD 610 billion, the US military spending accounted for more than a third of the world total in 2017. The US' spending was 2.7 times greater than the next highest spender, China, it said. SIPRI said the US military spending was unchanged between 2016 and 2017.

On the other hand, Russia's military spending fell for the first time since 1998, the report said, adding that the total global expenditure of 1.739 trillion was an increase of 1.1 per cent in real terms compared to the spending in 2016.

At USD 66.3 billion, Russia's military spending in 2017 was 20 per cent lower than in 2016, the first annual decrease since 1998.

SIPRI said driven, in part, by the perception of a growing threat from Russia, military spending in both Central and Western Europe increased in 2017, by 12 and 1.7 per cent, respectively.

Many European states are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and, within that framework, have agreed to increase their military spending.

The arms watchdog said total military spending by all 29 NATO members was USD 900 billion in 2017, accounting for 52 per cent of world spending.

The total global military expenditure accounted for 2.2 per cent of global gross domestic product in 2017, the report said.

National:

Swachh Bharat Mission Launches GOBAR-DHAN Scheme

Union Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation, Uma Bharti, launched the GOBAR (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources) - DHAN scheme at the National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI) Auditorium, Karnal, Haryana. The scheme aims to positively impact village cleanliness and generate wealth and energy from cattle and organic waste.

The scheme also aims at creating new rural livelihood opportunities and enhancing income for farmers and other rural people

Pilot scheme to Procure aggregate power Of 2500 MW

The Indian government launched a Pilot Scheme for procurement of aggregate power of 2500 MW on a competitive basis for three years under medium term from commissioned power plants without power purchase agreements.

The main purpose of the scheme is to revive commissioned power plants which are unable to sell electricity in the absence of valid power purchase agreements. These plants can bid for power supply under the scheme.

Cabinet approves accession to the Protocol under WHO Framework Convention

The Union Cabinet Chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given approval to accede to the Protocol under World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on tobacco control to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products. It will be applicable to both smoking and chewing or smokeless tobacco (SLT) forms as negotiated and adopted under Article 15 of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). India is a party to WHO FCTC.

The protocol lays down obligations of the parties. It spells out supply chain control measures that must be adopted by the parties viz. licensing of manufacture of tobacco products and Machinery for manufacturing of tobacco products, due diligence to be kept by those engaged in production, tracking and tracing regime, record keeping, security; and measures to be taken by those engaged in e-commerce, manufacturing in free-trade zones and duty free sales.

The protocol lists out offences, enforcement measures such as seizures and disposal of seized products. It calls for international cooperation in information sharing, maintaining confidentiality, training, technical assistance and cooperation in scientific and technical and technological matters.

Elimination of illicit trade in tobacco products through strengthened regulation will help in strengthening comprehensive tobacco control, leading to reduction in tobacco use which in turn, will result in reduction in disease burden and mortality associated with tobacco use.

Accession to such treaty will provide actionable alternatives against such prevailing practices that are affecting public health at large.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first international public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO. The objective of FCTC is to provide a framework for supply and demand reduction measures for tobacco control at the national, regional and global levels.

Bilateral:

India-China border trade via Nathu La resumes

The bilateral trade for the year 2018 between the traders of India and China through the Nathu La border started on 2nd May with traders and government officials from both sides

Last year, the trade was disrupted following the Doklam standoff. This year, the traders are hopeful that there would be no problem. Traders from India and the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) said they were optimistic that there would be no problems this year, the Sikkim government official said, adding that the trade was stopped in July last year.

In 2016-2017, goods worth Rs 3.54 crore were traded via the Sino-Indian border, Nathu La. The trade between the two countries through Nathu La border, located at a height of 14,200 feet, was resumed in 2006, 44 years after it was closed.

Economy:

Draft telecom policy aims 40 lakh new jobs by 2022

The government on 2nd May pushed out the draft of a new telecom policy -- 'National Digital Communications Policy 2018' -- with an aim to create 40 lakh new jobs by 2022, attract \$100 billion in investments into the sector and ensure broadband speeds of 50 mbps for every citizen.

The draft also proposes to address woes of the debt-ridden telecom sector by reviewing licence fees, spectrum usage charges, universal service obligation fund levy -- all of which add to cost of telecom services -- under the new policy for enhancing ease of doing business in the sector.

The National Digital Communications Policy's draft said it aims to accomplish provisioning of broadband for all, creating 40 lakh additional jobs in the digital communications sector and enhancing the contribution of the digital communications space to eight percent of India's GDP from about six percent in 2017. Under the new policy, the government aims to enable fixed line broadband access to 50 percent of households and start landline portability services.

The policy suggests providing universal broadband coverage at 50 mbps to every citizen and providing 1 gbps (gigabit per second) connectivity to all gram panchayats of India by 2020 and 10 gbps by 2022. It proposes to adopt "Optimal Pricing of Spectrum" to ensure sustainable and affordable access to digital communications.

The draft policy also proposes recognising of mid-band spectrum, particularly the 3 GHz to 24 GHz range, for next-generation networks. It also outlined a roadmap for high in demand backhaul spectrum for transmitting signals between mobile towers in E and V band as per international best practices.

To propel development of India with use of next generation technology through investment, the policy proposes goal to attract "investments of \$100 billion in the digital communications sector" by 2022 with help of regulatory reforms.

Additionally, the policy aims to remove regulatory barriers and reduce the regulatory burden that hampers investments, innovation and consumer interest. The draft policy also proposed to rationalise taxes and levies on digital communications equipment, infrastructure and services

Economic growth in India likely to strengthen at 7.3% this fiscal

Economic growth in India is expected to strengthen to 7.3 per cent in financial year 2018-19 on the back of robust activity from construction, manufacturing, and services sectors, says a report.

According to a BMI Research, a Fitch group company, the negative shock from demonetisation and GST implementation has "largely subsided".

As per the report, construction is likely to receive a boost from increased public infrastructure spending aimed at improving the nation's transport and rural infrastructure. Besides, solid economic activity in the US and the UAE, would also support a further expansion of the export manufacturing sector.

Another factor that is expected to boost growth is the rise in foreign direct investment (FDI) as a result of ongoing improvements to domestic business conditions and regulatory amendments to encourage higher foreign investor participation such as the liberalisation of domestic single brand retail trading to 100 per cent ownership through FDI. BMI Research has a mixed growth outlook for South Asia in 2018.

India's ranking slips 3 notches to 11th spot on AT Kearney FDI index

India's ranking fell three places to 11th spot in global consultants AT Kearney's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index 2018. This is an annual survey which tracks the impact of likely political, economic and regulatory changes on the FDI preferences of chief executive officers and chief financial officers.

Last year, India was ranked eighth. Its position was pushed out of the top 10 for the first time since 2015. Switzerland and Italy entered the top 10 for the first time in more than a decade, edging out India and Singapore. The report said one factor for the fall could be the coming elections in India, as investors are likely to be monitoring political risks. China also fell two positions below, to fifth rank.

However, the report says the sheer size of the Chinese and Indian markets will continue to attract investors and they remain the highest-ranking among emerging markets on the index.

Investors based in the Americas and in the industry sector rank India the highest in terms of intention to invest there. This confidence could be a result of the government's 'Make in India' initiative, which aims to boost investment in India's manufacturing sector, as well as its pursuit of closer ties with the US, according to the report.

It said the International Monetary Fund projects India's economy is growing by 7.4 per cent in 2018-19, the fastest by any major economy. Inward FDI flows increased to an estimated \$45 billion (around Rs 3 trillion) in 2017, a record high.

Japan, the US, the UK, and Singapore consistently serve as large sources of FDI for India. The country's service sector is a target of particular interest for investors, with the government's Economic Survey 2017-2018 noting FDI to the service sector will grow by 15 per cent from 2017 to 2018.

Persons in news:

Narendra Modi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is far ahead of other world leaders, including US President Donald Trump, when it comes to popularity on Facebook.

According to the study "World Leaders on Facebook" released in Geneva by Burson Cohn & Wolfe, over 43 million people follow the Indian premier on the social media platform.

US President Donald Trump, who rules the other social media platform Twitter, is in second place with over 23 million followers. Indonesian President Joko Widodo has 46 million interactions and Cambodia's Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen and Argentina's President Mauricio Macri follow with 36 and 33 million interactions. Facebook has become the key platform for world leaders and governments to engage with voters, supporters and citizens.