

Maldives, China sign 21 agreements

after Muizzu-Xi meeting amid diplomatic row with India

BEIJING, Jan 10 (PTI)

CHINESE President Xi Jinping on Wednesday held talks with his Maldivian counterpart Mohamed Muizzu after which the two countries signed 20 key agreements and elevated their ties to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.

The two heads of state announced the elevation of bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership, state-



Chinese President Xi Jinping with Maldives' President Mohamed Muizzu, in Beijing on Wednesday. (PTI)

run 'Xinhua' news agency reported. "20 key agreements were signed today between the Government of the Maldives and the Government of China this afternoon and both the Presidents witnessed the signing ceremony," Maldivian President's office said in a post on X. Muizzu and his wife Sajida Mohammad were given a ceremonial welcome at the Great Hall of People by Xi and his wife Peng Liyuan at the Great Hall of People.

Indian Navy 'proactively' deploying fleet to keep pirates at bay: Navy chief

HYDERABAD, Jan 10 (PTI)

THE Indian Navy is proactively deploying its fleet to keep the pirates away and confine them in their waters, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Hari Kumar said on Wednesday.

After unveiling the indigenously manufactured Drishti 10 Starliner Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) by Adani Defence and Aerospace for the Navy, Hari Kumar said there have been about 35 drone attacks on ships largely on Israel-owned or flagged or related vessels in the Red Sea, North and Central Arabian Sea during the last 40-42 days. Without taking names, he said the immediate neighbours of India collectively hold



Indian Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar during unveiling of the Drishti 10 Starliner UAV, at Adani Aerospace Park in Hyderabad. (PTI)

a very large inventory of UAVs and therefore, it's only prudent that the country and its armed forces continue to harness resident expertise in the domain.

DRDO launches assault rifle 'Ugram'

PUNE, Jan 10 (PTI)

'UGRAM', an assault rifle developed by the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) in collaboration with a private firm was launched on Monday, officials said.

The weapon, developed at the Armament Research and Development Establishments (ARDE), the DRDO's Pune-based laboratory, is designed to meet the Indian Army's 'GSQR' (General Staff Qualitative Requirement) of a rifle weighing less than four kg, said a release.

The operational prototype of the 7.62 x 51mm assault rifle was unveiled by Dr S V Gade, director general (Armament & Combat Engineering Cluster) in the presence of A Raju, direc-



tor of ARDE.

Raju said this was a "monumental moment" for DRDO and ARDE. "We have been working on the design part of assault rifle for the last two-three years and with the help of Dvipa Armour India Ltd, we could realise this product in record time. This weapon is fully indigenous and matches international standards of similar calibre weapons," he was

quoted as saying in the release.

Special care has been taken to ensure reliable functioning with the in-service ammunition, and steel construction of all critical components ensures "ruggedness and intuitive operations", as per the release. "Prototypes were demonstrated to various senior officials from the Indian Army and the Minister of Home Affairs," it added.

Natural disasters cause \$250 bn loss globally in 2023

BERLIN, Jan 10 (IANS)

NATURAL disasters caused losses of around \$250 billion across the globe in 2023, German reinsurer Munich Re said in its annual report.

Thunderstorms in North America and Europe were "more destructive than ever before", Xinhua news agency quoted the report as saying.

In North America alone, assets worth around \$66 billion dollars were destroyed by storms, while in Europe storm damage amounted to \$10 billion. "The warming of the earth that has been accelerating for some years is intensifying the



Residents rescued from flooded homes following Storm Daniel in Palamas, Greece. (File photo)

extreme weather in many regions, leading to increasing loss potentials," said Ernst Rauch, chief climate scientist

at Munich Re.

In Germany, 2023 was the warmest year since measurements began in 1881, according to the National Meteorological Service (DWD).

In contrast with previous years, which were often characterized by drought and heat waves, 2023 had mostly warm and humid conditions, with high levels of precipitation.

"Climate change is continuing unchecked," said Tobias Fuchs, head of the climate and environment business area at DWD, when presenting the figures. "We must intensify efforts to protect the climate and learn to adapt to the damage caused

by extremes in weather."

The most devastating natural disaster in 2023 was the earthquakes in southeastern Turkey and Syria in February.

Munich Re noted that with 58,000 people killed and overall losses of around \$50 billion, it was also the year's costliest natural disaster. The number of deaths caused by natural disasters last year rose to 74,000. "A series of devastating earthquakes led to humanitarian disasters," Munich Re said. Around 63,000 people "lost their lives as a result of such geophysical hazards in 2023 - more than at any time since 2010".

US & UK forces repel 'largest attack' by Houthis in Red Sea

Shoot Down 21 Projectiles

The US and Britain said that their warships on Tuesday had shot down one of the largest barrages yet of drones and missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen toward commercial ships in the Red Sea, highlighting the Iranian-backed militia's escalating effort to disrupt global commerce in protest of Israel's war against Hamas.

F/A-18 fighter jets from the aircraft carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower and four other warships intercepted "a complex attack" involving 18 drones, two anti-ship cruise missiles and one anti-ship ballistic missile, the US military's Central Command said in a statement. No injuries or damage were reported, the command said. Grant Shapps, UK defence secretary, said that the Diamond, a British Navy destroyer, had also responded to repel the Houthis' "largest attack" since they began targeting ships in the Red Sea. The Houthis have carried out 26 attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea since Nov 19, as per the US military. Houthi military spokesman



Police set up barriers in Ramallah to stop people protesting Blinken's visit

Blinken meets Abbas, seeks reform by Palestinian Authority for Gaza role

Anthony Blinken, the US secretary of state, met Wednesday with Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, to discuss Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza and the role that the authority might play there when the conflict ebbs. Blinken travelled in a convoy from Tel Aviv to Ramallah, the seat of the authority, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

In their meeting, Abbas told Blinken that the Palestinians would not accept what he called Israeli plans to keep Gaza separate from the West Bank, according to Wafa, the Palestinian Authority's official news agency. "The Gaza Strip is part and

parcel of the state of Palestine," it quoted him as saying.

Later in Bahrain, Blinken said he had spoken with Abbas about the need to make changes to the Palestinian Authority to make it more effective as a governing organisation. He said Abbas was "committed" to that. "He's prepared to move forward and engage in all of these efforts," he said, adding that this would be an important step toward an eventual goal of uniting West Bank and Gaza under one governing body. Critics say the authority, which has limited governing powers in the West Bank, has become more autocratic and corrupt over the years. NYT

Yahya Sarea said the group's forces had used "a large number" of missiles and drones to target an American ship "that was offering support to the Zionist entity". It wasn't clear if he was describing the Tuesday attack. Sarea said the attack was in response to a US response 10 days ago that sank three Houthi boats, killing its 10 fighters.

The US and a dozen allies issued an ultimatum to the Iran-backed Houthis last week to cease their near-daily attacks that have disrupted shipping in the crucial sea lanes that connect the Indian Ocean with the Suez Canal. The Houthis have promised to attack ships until Israel stops the war in Gaza. The rising tensions in the Red Sea have fuelled concerns of a wider conflict in the region. The Houthi attacks have forced the world's largest shipping companies to reroute vessels away from the Red Sea, creating delays and extra costs felt through higher prices for oil and other imported goods.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday declined to say what actions might be coming. "What I can tell you is that, as we made clear, and many other countries made clear, there'll be consequences for the Houthis' actions," he said. NYT

India set to be world's 3rd largest eco by 2027-28: FM

Says Partnership Between Centre And States Has Improved

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Gandhinagar: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Wednesday that India is poised to become the world's third largest economy, with a GDP of over \$5 trillion by 2027-28 on the back of a strong foundation laid by Modi government over last nine years, through measures such as direct benefit transfer, financial inclusion and digital payments.

At the Vibrant Gujarat Summit, the minister also said during the current government's two terms, a spirit of partnership had developed between the Centre and states, reversing the earlier "default setting" of "give for the union and take for states".

"From 2014, the Planning

“FDI is coming in, it is like water, it flows to lower ebb, where policy brings in greater certainty, convenience, ease of doing business. Of course, disruptions of higher US Fed rate and other things can divert it elsewhere, but despite that we have been getting a flow of FDI. It is not only coming for manufacturing but also for service sector

Nirmala Sitharaman | FINANCE MINISTER



Commission has been revamped and the NITI Aayog, which is more driven towards policymaking and guidance. It is a partnership with the states — a partnership so that states also aspire and their aspirations find (space) in the scheme of things of the Centre. It is also about working together with the states for strengths that they have and to make sure that through programmes such as aspirational

districts, you leverage the partnership of states and strengthen challenges to turn them into strengths of the states," she said.

With a GDP of roughly \$3.4 trillion, India is currently the fifth-largest economy in the world, after the US, China, Japan and Germany. The FM said that India is on course to achieve a GDP of \$30 trillion by 2047, while making it inclusive for citizens.

Sitharaman said India is

on track to become an in-house producer of semiconductors and EV adoption is happening in a big way and argued that India had been a large recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) in recent years. Between April 2000 and March 2023, India attracted \$919 billion FDI, of which 65%, or \$595 billion, came during the last eight-nine years, she said.

"FDI is coming in, it is like water, it flows to the lower ebb, where policy brings in greater certainty, convenience, ease of doing business. Of course disruptions of higher US Fed rate and other things can divert it elsewhere, but despite that we have been getting a flow of FDI. It is not only coming for manufacturing but also for the service sector," she said.

UK to deploy warships in Indian Ocean to bolster def ties

London UK government on Wednesday unveiled plans to deploy Royal Navy warships to the Indian Ocean region later this year to operate and train with Indian forces, signalling what it described as the growing importance of the strategic relationship between the two countries.

UK defence secretary Grant Shapps, who co-chaired an India-UK Defence Industry CEOs Roundtable with defence minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday, said the Littoral Response Group (LRG) will be deployed this year and the Carrier Strike Group (CRG) in 2025 for joint India-UK training.

The deployment of the UK's "most advanced naval capabilities" has been flagged by the UK ministry of defence (MoD) as a "decisive step" in bolstering UK-India security ties.

"There is absolutely no question that the world is becoming increasingly contested, so it's vital that we continue to build on our strategic relationships with key partners like India," said Shapps.

"Together, we share the same security challenges and are steadfast in our commitment to maintaining a free and prosperous Indo-Pacific. It is clear that this relationship is going from strength to strength, but we must continue to work hand-in-hand to uphold global security in light of threats and challenges that seek to destabilise and damage us," he said.

The LRG is a Royal Navy task group consisting of at least two amphibious warfare ships, and the CRG is the aircraft carrier battle group of the Royal Navy. The CRG's inaugural deployment was back in 2021 in the Indo-Pacific, where it conducted joint exercises with the Indian forces.

"India envisions an enriching partnership with the UK to cooperate, co-create and co-innovate. By synergising the strengths of both the countries, we can do great things together," Rajnath said.

The MoD said the latest deployment reflects a stepped-up partnership during the Indian defence minister's first visit to the UK this week. PTI

Modi, UAE prez call for ceasefire in Gaza

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan in their meeting on Tuesday reiterated the need to “unite efforts to immediately reach a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza to allow safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access at scale”. UAE also reiterated its strong endorsement of India’s bid for permanent membership of a reformed UNSC, said the Indian government.

Both sides emphasised the importance of multilateralism and called for collective action to promote a “just, rules-based global order”. “The Indian side congratulated UAE for its successful tenure as an elected member of the UN Security Council for the 2022-23 term, and commended the efforts led by the UAE in the UNSC, including the adoption of Resolution 2720 penned by the UAE concerning the humanitarian crisis in Gaza,” said the government.

They reaffirmed their “resolute stance” in rejecting terrorism and extremism in all of its forms; and emphasized on the importance of promoting the values of peace and coexistence. TNN