

India, Nepal to collaborate to promote Sanskrit education

■ By Shirish B Pradhan
KATHMANDU, Mar 31 (PTI)

NEPALESE and Indian Sanskrit scholars have proposed to organise an International Sanskrit Conference every year and set up a study centre to conduct research and arrange publication of Sanskrit scriptures, especially the manuscripts found in the Himalayan nation.

Adopting a five-point resolution at the end of a three-day Nepal-India International Sanskrit Conclave in Kathmandu, the participants also adopted a resolution to

provide support for the development of gurukuls in Nepal with the collaboration of Maharshi Sandipani Veda Vidya Pratisthan, Ujjain, according to a press release.

One of the resolutions mentions that Niti Anusandhan Pratisthan Nepal will function as the head office of the Nepal-India Sanskrit Study Centre.

The centre will conduct joint research and arrange the publication of Sanskrit scriptures from both Nepal and India and study Sanskrit manuscripts found in Nepal.

It is estimated that there are

around five lakh unpublished Sanskrit manuscripts preserved at Nepal's Department of Archaeology.

One of the resolutions mentions organising a training programme for Nepali Sanskrit students in India to enhance their Sanskrit learning capability, according to the release issued by Niti Anusandhan on Sunday.

As per the resolution, Central Sanskrit University, Delhi, will facilitate libraries of Gurukuls in Nepal and provide necessary books to Sanskrit educational institutions in Nepal.

India-US tri-service exercise 'Tiger Triumph-24' concludes

NEW DELHI, Mar 31 (PTI)

THE 14-day bilateral tri-service exercise between India and the US, 'Tiger Triumph-24', has concluded, officials said on Sunday.

The exercise that began on March 18 aimed at developing interoperability for conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations and refining standard operating procedures to enable rapid and smooth coordination between the forces of the two countries.

The Indian Army's contingent comprising one battalion group took part in the second edition of the tri-service exercise in Visakhapatnam and Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh, along with the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force.

The closing ceremony of the amphibious exercise was held on board USS Somerset on



A Naval ship and armoured tank during closing ceremony of the Bilateral Tri-Service Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Amphibious Exercise between India and US, Tiger Triumph 2024. (PTI)

March 30, a senior official said. The exercise signifies the "robust strategic partnership" between the two countries and was aimed towards sharing best

practices and standard operating procedures in undertaking multinational HADR operations. The harbour phase was con-

ducted in Visakhapatnam from March 18-25 and included pre-sail discussions, subject matter expert exchange, sports engagements, ship boarding

drills and cross-deck visits, officials said.

Personnel from both the navies celebrated the festival of Holi together on March 25, as part of the cultural exchange programme showcasing the vibrant and vivid culture of India, they said.

The sea phase was conducted from March 26-30 and it included units of both countries undertaking maritime exercises, followed by landing of troops at Kakinada for setting up of a joint command and control centre and a joint relief and medical camp for HADR operations, the Navy spokesperson said in a statement. "Cross-deck helicopter operations involving UH3H, CH53 and MH60R helicopters were also undertaken between ships of the Indian Navy and the US Navy off Kakinada and Visakhapatnam," the official added.

Apache helicopters will bolster Army's aerial strike strength in western sector: Lt General A K Singh

MUMBAI, Mar 31 (PTI)

THE recent introduction of Apache helicopters, heralded for their ability to conduct missions in diverse weather and terrain conditions, is set to bolster the Indian Army's operational reach and aerial strike capabilities in the western sector, according to a high-ranking Army official.

During an exclusive interview with PTI, Lt Gen A K Singh, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Southern Command, emphasised the significant impact of this move on the army's transformation and operational effectiveness. Marking a pivotal moment, the first medium lift attack heli-



Lt General Ajai Kumar Singh,
GOC-IN-C of Southern
Command. (PTI)

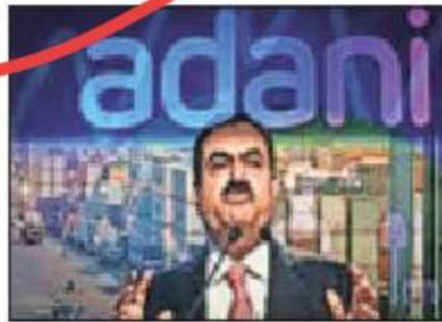
copter squadron within the Southern Command region was established on March 15 this year. This squadron will be outfitted with cutting-edge Apache AH-64E helicopters manufactured by Boeing.

A total of six contracted helicopters are scheduled for delivery to the country in two phases over the upcoming months. He stated, "These helicopters possess the capability to engage in missions across various weather and terrain conditions along our borders." The newly-acquired Apache helicopters boast a range of capabilities, including the capacity to launch anti-tank guided missiles, air-to-air missiles, rockets, and other ammunition.

Adani shrugs off Hindenburg effect, back to rapid expansion spree

NEW DELHI, Mar 31 (PTI)

ADANI group opened a USD 1.2 billion copper plant, bought a port in Odisha, raised stakes in a cement company and stitched an alliance with rival Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries, all in a matter of one week in signs that the apples-to-airport conglomerate has shrugged off the Hindenburg effect and is back to rapid expan-



sion spree.

In the last one week, Adani group has through regulatory filings and press statements announced expansions and investments in its mainstay ports

business, diversification into metal refining, fund infusion into a two-year-old cement foray and continuing progress in the commissioning of its mega solar project. It started with the March 26 announcement of Adani Ports acquiring a 95pc stake in Gopalpur Port for Rs 3,350 crore, taking the number of seaports under its control to 15 - the highest with any private firm in the country.

Cong callously gave away Katchatheevu island to Lanka: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, Mar 31 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday cited a media report to assert that new facts reveal that the Congress "callously" gave away Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka. "Eye opening and startling! New facts reveal how Congress callously gave away Katchatheevu. This has angered every Indian and reaffirmed in people's minds - we can't ever trust Congress," he said on X, sharing the report.

Modi added, "Weakening India's unity, integrity and interests has been Congress' way of working for 75 years and counting." External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also took a swipe at the Congress, saying these facts should concern every cit-

izen. He said on X, "It is important that people know the full truth about our past." The facts brought out by the article should concern every citizen, he added.



BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi claimed that the decision of the then Congress Government at the Centre has led to the capture and imprisonment of Tamil Nadu fishermen by Lankans as they at times wander to the

island, which is only 25 km off their State's coast, and are arrested.

The island was with India till 1975, he said. Tamil Nadu fishermen used to go there earlier, but the agreement India signed with Lanka under the Indira Gandhi Government barred them from doing so, he added.

Unfortunately, neither the DMK nor the Congress is raising the issue but Modi is due to his commitment to the issues pertaining to the country and its people, he said.

The BJP is hopeful that the issue will come handy to its efforts to gain political traction in the Dravidian territory as it gears up for the Lok Sabha polls, more so as it involves the neighbouring Sri Lanka whose treatment of its Tamilian citizens has

long been a charged political issue in the State.

The report is based on a reply Tamil Nadu BJP president K Annamalai received on the decision of the then Indira Gandhi Government in 1974 to hand over the territory in Palk Strait to the neighbouring country.

The report also cites first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's comments on the issue, a source of dispute between India and Lanka, that he would have no hesitation in giving up claims on the island.

In a dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Trivedi asked as to why he is keeping mum on the issue and that he should tell people that not only his party but his family too is responsible for this.

Raising Katchatheevu issue shows PM Modi's desperation: Kharge

NEW DELHI, Mar 31 (PTI)

HITTING back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his charge that Indira Gandhi gave away Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday asked why he did not take steps to get it back during his 10-year rule and alleged that raising the "sensitive" issue ahead of elections shows his "desperation".

The Opposition leader also questioned why PM gave a "clean chit" to China after 20 brave hearts made supreme

sacrifice in the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh. Kharge said that Katchatheevu island was given to Sri Lanka as part of a friendly agreement in 1974 and reminded the Modi Government that it too had undertaken a similar "friendly gesture" towards Bangladesh on exchange of border enclaves.

"Pradhan Mantri Narendra Modi ji, You have suddenly woken up to the issues of territorial integrity and national security in your 10th year of misrule," he said in a post on X.

Sharif conveys to Biden willingness to work with US

Omer Farooq Khan | TNN

Islamabad: Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif assured US President Joe Biden on Sunday that his country was willing to work with the US "on the shared targets of international peace and regional security".

Sharif was responding to Biden's letter on Friday in which the latter, departing from his earlier stance of not engaging with Pakistani leaders, had assured him of Washington's support to Islamabad to tackle "the most pressing global and regional challenges". Biden's letter suggested that despite allegations of election fraud, the US govt is ready to work with Pakistan's new govt. In the letter, Biden did not congratulate



NO RED CARPETS: Shehbaz has banned the use of red carpets at govt events, reserving them for diplomatic receptions, as part of austerity measures to cut down costs in the cash-strapped nation

te Sharif for assuming charge or winning the election.

Interestingly, the US president had not communicated with Imran Khan, the jailed former prime minister, when he assumed office in Jan 2021.

Responding to Biden's letter, Sharif, according to the PM's Office, stated that Pakistan is willing to work with the US towards a common goal of global peace and security and development and prosperity of the region. He said Pakistan attached "key importance" to its relations with the US, adding that the two countries were jointly working together on important initiatives regarding energy, climate change, agriculture, health and education sectors.

Shehbaz welcomed coope-

ration in the energy sector and Green Alliance Framework initiative between the two countries. In his letter, the US president had specifically mentioned the Green Alliance initiative, saying his administration would continue to work with Pakistan for environmental improvement. Biden had also spoken of sustainable agricultural development, water management and recovery from the devastating effects of the 2022 floods in Pakistan.

Pakistan, apparently, seems to be no longer a priority for the US following its withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, but the south Asian nation, according to observers, still remains vital for Washington in terms of regional security and counter-terrorism efforts.

Rural job scheme in huge demand, hints at ongoing distress in villages

In 2023-24, MGNREGS Generated 40cr Persondays Of Work More Than In Pre-Covid Yr

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New Delhi: MGNREGS has generated 40 crore person-days of work more than the pre-pandemic (2019-20) level — suggesting a continuing rural distress, and that job opportunities in the cities may not have returned to normal.

As 2023-24 completes, the flagship distress labour scheme clocked 305.2 crore persondays on March 31. It is a figure which is updated till the end of month and the final number will end up higher. It is in sharp contrast to 293.7 crore persondays generated in 2022-23 — roughly 12 crore persondays more.

The number in 2023-24 was expected to go down as 2022-23 was the first year after the country came out of the pandemic,



The number of persondays in 2023-24 was expected to go down as 2022-23 was the first year after India came out of the pandemic. But it has gone up by 12 crore and the final figure could be even higher

and employment avenues were seen as not having returned to normal after the disruption caused by the two major corona waves which triggered the shuttering of economy across the rural-urban divide.

But instead of dipping, the work has gone up by 12 crore days and the final figure

would be even higher.

However, for MGNREGS, derided as ditch-digging scheme for the poor, the true measure of what is in store as the last resort for unskilled wage earners, is the financial year 2019-20. The pre-pandemic year marked the natural trajectory of work demand under the

job scheme, encapsulating seasonal disruptions like rains or drought, without the unnatural dislocation triggered by the once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.

The last two years — 2022-23 and 2023-24 — provide evidence that employment for the unskilled poor has not returned to the year 2019-20, when the work generated was 265.3 persondays.

Critically, the persondays generated in 2022-23 were 28.4 crore more than 2019-20, and it has shot even higher by almost 40 crore in 2023-24 till date.

The work generation zoomed to an all-time record of 389.9 crore persondays in the pandemic hit year of 2020-21, and then barely slipped to 363.2 crore in 2021-22. The two years are seen as aberrations in the MGNREGS graph because of the closure of traditional work

avenues owing to lockdown, and their slow return to normalcy after the virus subsided.

Rajendran Narayanan, faculty at the Azim Premji university and an expert on the job scheme, said, "There is no doubt that it shows a high demand for MGNREGS because of high levels of rural unemployment. It has been observed in various surveys."

That the work demand and generation under the job scheme should stay elevated, and higher than the pre-pandemic years, is viewed unanimously by experts as signs of high unemployment and rural distress. The unskilled or semi-skilled workers constitute the migrant labour force which mostly finds wages in the construction sector and similar employment in towns and cities.

Russia calls for jointly combating **TERROR** with India, other nations

NEW DELHI, Mar 31 (PTI)

RUSSIA is committed to “decisively fight” the menace of terrorism together with India and other countries, bilaterally and multilaterally, its envoy in New Delhi said on Saturday.

Russian Ambassador Denis Alipov, in a thread post on X, described the March 22 attack on a suburban Moscow concert hall in which 144 people were killed as a “monstrous terrorist attack”.

“The Embassy keeps receiving condolence messages expressing sympathy over the huge loss of lives and condemnation of the monstrous

terrorist attack on March 22 near Moscow,” he said.

“We highly appreciate the sentiments towards victims and their kin and the Russian Government by the people of India and other countries,” Alipov added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had condemned the attack, calling it a “heinous terrorist attack”.

Alipov said, “Russia is committed to decisively fight the menace of terrorism together with India and other countries

bilaterally and multilaterally.”

He said that “strong statements of support” to Russia and “rejection of terrorism in all manifestations” were made by Prime Minister Modi, leaders of political parties, ministers, senior officials and public activists.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on March 31 said he had spoken to his

Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov and conveyed India’s deepest condolences on the loss of lives in the “horrific terrorist attack” in Moscow.



Denis Alipov