

India lodges strong protest with China over creation of 2 new counties in Hotan region

NEW DELHI, Jan 3 (PTI)

INDIA on Friday said it has lodged a "solemn protest" with China over creation of two new counties in Hotan prefecture, asserting that such moves will not lend legitimacy to Beijing's "illegal and forcible" occupation in the region.

In a strong reaction, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said parts of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of Ladakh and that the Chinese action will have no bearing on New Delhi's consistent position regarding its sovereignty.

China's announcement on



Creation of new counties will not lend legitimacy to China's forcible occupation: MEA to China

establishing the two counties came days after Special Representatives of the two nations resumed boundary

talks that was stalled for almost five years. "We have seen the announcement pertaining to the establishment of two new counties in Hotan Prefecture of China. Parts of jurisdiction of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of Ladakh," Jaiswal said.

"We have never accepted the illegal Chinese occupation of Indian territory in this area," he said. "Creation of new counties will neither have a bearing on India's long-standing and consistent position regarding our sovereignty over the area nor lend legitimacy to China's illegal and forcible occupation of

(Contd on page 5)

Ajay Kumar Bhalla sworn in as Manipur Governor

IMPHAL, Jan 3 (PTI)

FORMER Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla took oath as the 19th Governor of Manipur during a function at the Raj Bhawan here on Friday.

Bhalla was administered the oath of office by



Manipur High Court Chief Justice D Krishnakumar in the presence of CM N Biren Singh. He inspected the guard of honour by Manipur Rifles personnel. Speaking on Bhalla's swearing-in as the Governor, the Chief Minister said, "He is a dynamic person who knows the ground reality and the situation of the state very well. He is a very committed person. I wholeheartedly welcome him. With his appointment as the governor of the state, I believe that normalcy and peace will be restored at the earliest."

Bhalla is a 1984-batch retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre.

French carrier strike group in India today

NEW DELHI, Jan 3 (PTI)

THE French Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle and its entire carrier strike group will visit Goa and Kochi from Saturday in what is being seen as a powerful demonstration of growing India-France strategic ties.

A carrier battle group or carrier strike group (CSG) is a mega naval fleet comprising an aircraft carrier, accompanied by a large number of destroyers, frigates and other ships.

At present, the French CSG is deployed in the Indian Ocean where it is conducting joint training sessions with its regional partners and allies, including India.

India has been France's foremost strategic partner since 1998, a French readout said, announcing the CSG's visit to the country. Deployed in the Indian Ocean as part of Mission CLEMENCEAU 25, the French carrier strike group, comprising the aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle, its embarked air fleet and escort vessels (frigates and supply ships), will be making stopovers in Goa and Kochi from January 4, the French embassy said.

Maritime cooperation between India and France has witnessed a major expansion in the last few years.

It also highlighted the growing strategic partnership between India and France.

S Korea's Yoon defies warrant after 6-hour standoff

SEOUL, Jan 3 (AP)

SOUTH Korean investigators left the President's official residence after a nearly six-hour standoff during which he defied their attempt to detain him in the latest confrontation of a political crisis that has paralysed South Korean politics and seen two heads of State impeached in under a month.

The country's anti-corruption agency said it withdrew its investigators after the presidential security service blocked them from entering President Yoon Suk Yeol's residence for hours due to concerns about their safety. The agency expressed "serious regret about the attitude of the suspect,



Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol stage a rally to oppose a court having issued a warrant to detain Yoon, as police officers stand guard near the Presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea, on Friday.

(AP/PTI)

who did not respond to a process by law."

Yoon, a former prosecutor, has defied investigators' attempts to question him for weeks. The last time he is known to have left the residence was on December 12, when he went to the nearby presidential office to make a televised statement to the nation, making a defiant statement that he will fight efforts to oust him.

Investigators from the country's anti-corruption agency are weighing charges of rebellion after Yoon, apparently frustrated that his policies were blocked by an Opposition-dominated Parliament, declared martial law on December 3 and dispatched troops to surround the National

Assembly. Parliament overturned the declaration within hours in a unanimous vote and impeached Yoon on December 14, accusing him of rebellion, while South Korean anti-corruption authorities and public prosecutors opened separate investigations into the events. A Seoul court issued a warrant for Yoon's detention on Tuesday, but enforcing it is complicated as long as he remains in his official residence.

Yoon's lawyers, who filed a challenge to the warrant on Thursday, say it cannot be enforced at his residence due to a law that protects locations potentially linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge.

'India's exports to cross USD 800 bn this fiscal'

NEW DELHI, Jan 3 (PTI)

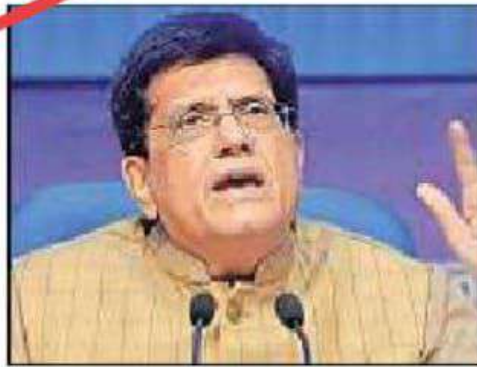
COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said despite global economic uncertainties, India's exports of goods and services are expected to cross USD 800 billion this fiscal, which will be a record.

Last fiscal year, the exports stood at USD 778 billion.

He said though there will be stresses in the global system, but India's exports basket is large.

"My estimate is that we will cross USD 800 billion in exports, another record given the world situation," he told reporters here.

He added share in services exports is also growing at a rapid pace.



Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal

On exports to developing and least developed countries (LDCs), he said those nations have been stressed because of the forex crisis they are facing after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Red Sea crisis too had impacted shipping lines.

Despite all these challenges and several items where the government had imposed restrictions, significant growth in exports of goods and services is registered.

"Imports were also high but that is in a way a sign of a growing economy. It shows that there is a demand for equipment, machinery in a big way, input and intermediate products, in the country," he said.

On the new US administration, the minister said: "We are looking forward to a deep and substantive engagement with the new US administration. We are looking forward to working with (Donald) Trump administration again".

INDIA always stood by MALDIVES: Jaishankar

NEW DELHI, Jan 3 (PTI)

THE Maldives is a "very concrete" expression of India's neighbourhood first policy and New Delhi has always stood by the island nation, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said while hosting his Maldivian counterpart Abdulla Khaleel for talks.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Jaishankar noted the finalisation of a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border trade between India and Maldives besides listing New Delhi's financial assistance to Male to help it deal with economic stress.

Both sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding for implementation of high impact community development projects under phase-III in Maldives through grant assistance from India.

In his comments, Khaleel reaffirmed President Mohamed Muizzu's firm commitment to work closely with New Delhi in realising the joint vision for India-Maldives comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership. Khaleel arrived here on Thursday on a three-day visit to explore ways to bolster bilateral ties in several key areas including trade and investment.

The Maldives has been reeling under some financial stress.

"I see that the framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border transactions has been signed,"



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives Abdulla Khaleel during a meeting in New Delhi on Friday. (PTI)

Jaishankar said.

"We have increased our engagement in various sectors and I do want to say that India has always stood by Maldives. For us, you are a very concrete expression of our neighbourhood first policy," he added. The External Affairs Minister, referring to India's financial support to Maldives, mentioned the currency swap lines of USD 400 million.

"We have also facilitated the export of essential commodities to Maldives. That has been very much a tradition in our relationship," he said.

"We certainly hope that our relationship has helped you to

navigate through these difficult times," he added.

'Maldives is a "very concrete" expression of India's neighbourhood first policy'

The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an upward trajectory under the previous government in Male.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Jaishankar and Khaleel took stock of progress made on the understandings reached during the visit of President Muizzu to India in October.

Faiz Ahmed Kidwai appointed DGCA chief, Ashutosh Agnihotri to head FCI

BUREAUCRATIC RESHUFFLE

NEW DELHI, Jan 3 (PTI)

SENIOR IAS officer Faiz Ahmed Kidwai has been appointed the chief of Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) as part of a senior-level bureaucratic reshuffle effected by the Centre on Friday.

The 1996-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre is currently Additional Secretary in the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

He has been appointed as Director General in the DGCA "in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary to the Government of India by keeping the Recruitment Rules of the post in abeyance", an order issued by the Personnel

Senior bureaucrat Akash Tripathi has been appointed as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Power

Ministry said.

Ashutosh Agnihotri, Additional Secretary in the Home Ministry, has been named Chairman & Managing Director of Food Corporation of India (FCI), it said.

Senior bureaucrat Akash Tripathi has been appointed as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Power.

Tripathi, a 1998 batch IAS officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre, is currently Chief Executive Officer (CEO), MyGov, Ministry of Electronics & Information & Technology.

Kamal Kishore Soan, Additional Secretary in the Labour Ministry, will now be Additional Secretary & Mission

Director, Jal Jeevan Mission under the Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation.

Shubha Thakur, Additional Secretary in the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, has been appointed as Additional Secretary in the Inter State Council Secretariat under the Home Ministry.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has approved in-situ upgrade of the post held by senior IAS officer Vinay Kumar, currently Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways.

Accordingly, Kumar will now be Additional Secretary in the same Ministry.