

SNOWLESS N-W HIMALAYAS: El Nino effect leads to dry winter

NEW DELHI, Jan 9 (PTI)

HIGH mountain passes with barely any snow, skiershoping to slalom down white slopes disappointed and tourists calling off trips to hill destinations... The El Nino effect is playing out across the north-west Himalayas with an unusually dry winter and no immediate relief in the offing.

According to the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), 2023 was the warmest-on-record year and the warming El Nino event is likely to further fuel the heat in 2024.

The El Nino phenomenon occurs when sea surface temperatures (SSTs) are higher than average in the eastern tropical

Pacific, and there is a simultaneous weakening of trade winds. The absence of snowfall is not a one-time thing but affects the annual cycle of snow.

“If it continues longer, it can have a huge cascading effect on socio-economic benefits. If you don’t get (enough) snow, you don’t get replenishment of water, it will impact agriculture, your health and can, in turn, impact your economy,” glaciologist and Himalayan researcher A N Dimri told PTI.

And so it is that the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) which struggles with snow clearance operations in tough weather conditions to keep the strategically located 11,800 feet altitude Zojila Pass open has had it easier this year.

India not in a hurry to host Maldives prez

In November last year, Male had discussed with New Delhi the possibility of a visit by Muizzu to India. But before the two sides could finalise the dates, Muizzu chose to visit Turkiye—the first democratically elected Maldivian president to not visit India first after taking office,



reports Sachin Parashar.

Also, Muizzu seemed to have lost no time in accepting an offer by President Xi to visit Beijing, further complicating prospects for his India trip as New Delhi would not want to host him, as a source said, soon after his return from China. **FLAP INSIDE**

India, UK set to boost def R&D collaboration

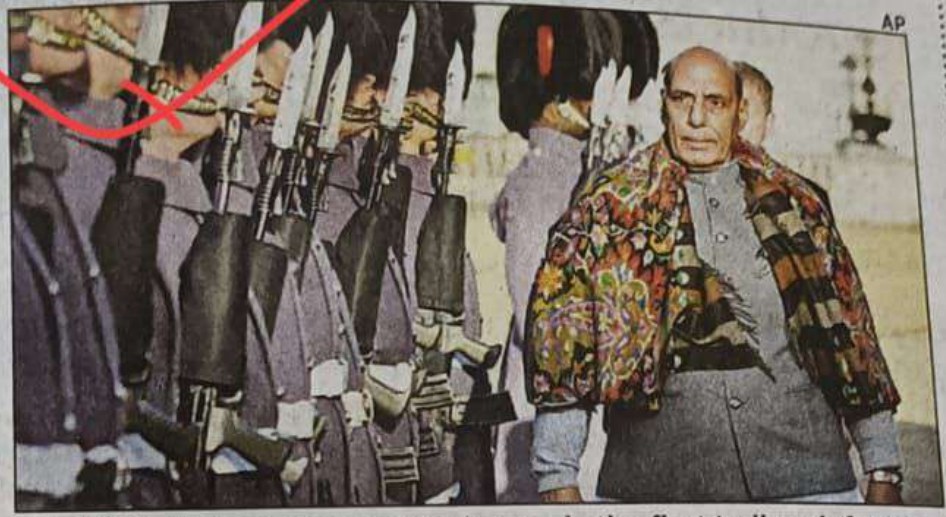
Rajnath Holds Talks With UK Counterpart

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: India and the UK on Tuesday agreed to enhance their defence-industrial collaboration in areas like electric propulsion for warships and fighter jet engines, while reaffirming their expanding strategic convergence in the crucial Indo-Pacific region.

A "letter of arrangement (LoA)" was inked between Indian DRDO and the British Defence Science and Technology Laboratory on defence R&D collaboration after the delegation-level meeting between defence minister Rajnath Singh and his counterpart Grant Shapps in London.

"The ministers discussed a range of defence, security and cooperation matters, with particular emphasis on enhancing defence-industrial collabora-



Rajnath Singh in London on Tuesday. He is the first Indian defence minister to visit UK after George Fernandes in 2002

tion," an official said.

Shapps said the India-UK relationship was "not transactional", with the two countries being "natural partners with many commonalities and shared goals." Singh, in turn, noted there was growing strategic convergence between the two countries, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, the official said.

The two countries also inked an MoU on conduct of international cadets exchange programme. "The LoA and the MoU will provide impetus to people-to-people exchanges, particularly among the youth and

the larger area of defence R&D collaboration between the two countries," he said.

Singh, who paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at his statue at Tavistock Square and was presented with a ceremonial guard of honour at the Horse Guards Parade Ground, is the first Indian defence minister to visit UK after George Fernandes in 2002.

Both countries have been taking steps to strengthen defence cooperation through joint exercises, maritime domain awareness, information exchange and defence-industrial collaboration.

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Lakshadweep's lakshya: New airport, more hotels

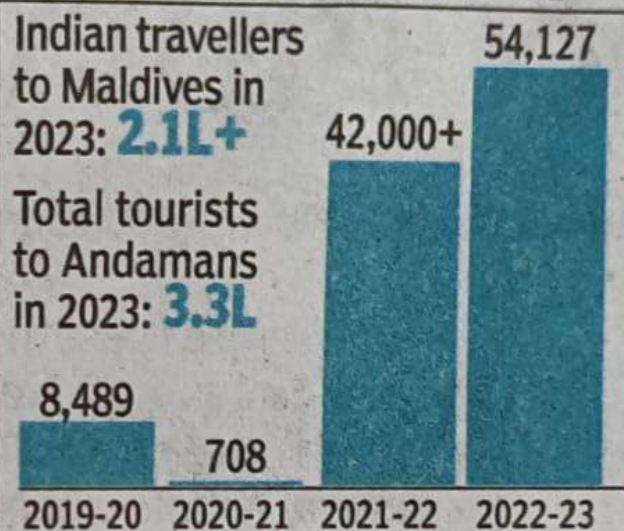
Saurabh Sinha
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New Delhi: Lakshadweep could get improved aerial connectivity with mainland India and the world in coming years with a proposed dual-use airfield for civilian and military purposes in Minicoy that can handle Airbus A320/Boeing 737-size planes as well as fighter jets.

► **EDIT: Bali, Sony, TikTok**

Also, a two-decade-old plan to extend Agatti's 1.2-km-long airstrip may finally take shape now, allowing A320s to operate there instead of the smaller turboprops that currently do so. Indian hotel majors say they are scouting for more sites in Lakshadweep.

TOTAL TOURISTS* TO LAKSHADWEEP



*Nos. include Indians and foreigners.
(L'dweep figures from local admin)

Taj has already announced it will open new hotels in Lakshadweep's Suheli and Kadmat islands by 2026. The administration is also pushing for more cruise tourism to the Arabian Sea archipelago.

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