

IAF activates Emergency Landing Facility Strip on national highway in Andhra

NEW DELHI, Mar 19 (PTI)

THE Indian Air Force has carried out an activation of an Emergency Landing Facility airstrip on a national highway in Andhra Pradesh's Bapatla district, showcasing high level of "synergy and liaison" between the IAF, civil agencies.

The activation was conducted on March 18, a senior IAF official said on Tuesday.

The 4.1 km long and 33-m wide concrete airstrip has been constructed by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) as per specifications provided by the IAF.

The Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) airstrips enhance



flexibility of air operations during contingencies and are invaluable assets during humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in far flung areas, IAF officials said.

"While other airstrips are already operational in various parts of the country, this ELF

in Andhra Pradesh has been recently operationalised in peninsular India," the IAF said.

On March 18, the IAF's fighter and transport aircraft "carried out operations on an ELF airstrip on national highway-16 near Addanki in Bapatla district," the official said.

India had world's 3rd worst air in '23, Delhi foulest capital

Bihar's Begusarai Most Polluted Globally: Report

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New Delhi: India was ranked the third most polluted country and New Delhi the most polluted capital in the 2023 World Air Quality report by Swiss tech company, IQAir. The latest report by the company that provides live information on major air pollutants globally, found Begusarai in Bihar as the most polluted city globally last year.

The report, released Tuesday, showed Bangladesh and Pakistan were the top two most polluted countries in 2023. India showed a relative decline as the country was ranked 8th in 2022, an improvement from 2021 when it had the 5th rank.

IQAir said 13 of the 15 most polluted cities in the world in 2023 were in India with Begusarai, Guwahati and Delhi being the top three.

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WAS 8TH LAST YR

► In 2023, India's air quality was 3rd worst globally after B'desh & Pak. It had ranked 8th in 2022 & 5th in 2021

MOST POLLUTED CITIES

► Begusarai, Guwahati & Delhi were world's top 3 polluted cities last year

CAPITAL SHAME

► Delhi was most polluted capital with annual PM2.5 at 92.7 µg/m³ — WHO's safe limit is 5 µg/m³ — a spike of 10% from 2022

'2023: Heat, climate markers broke record'

Last year was not just the hottest on record by a wide margin, with global mean temperature around 1.45°C above the 1850-1900 average, key climate indicators such as greenhouse gas levels, ocean heat, sea level rise, Antarctica sea ice loss and glacier retreat also were at unprecedented levels, World Meteorological Organisation said, sounding alarm over the critical state of Earth's geophysical systems. **P 10**

India AI Mission gets **Rs 2,000 cr** for startups: Meity Startup Hub CEO

NEW DELHI, Mar 19 (PTI)

THE Government has earmarked over Rs 2,000 crore for



Jitendra Vijay

funding and supporting AI-related startups, and the scheme will be rolled in the next fiscal, beginning

April 1, a senior Government official said on Tuesday.

While speaking on the sidelines of Startup Mahakumbh, Meity Startup Hub Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Jitendra Vijay said the Government is providing a larger funding programme for the priority sector through various plans like a design-linked incentive scheme for semiconductor design, among others. "Cabinet has approved India AI Mission where more than Rs 10,000 crore is being allocated in supporting AI

ecosystem in India. More than Rs 2,000 crore is allocated for funding and supporting AI-related startups. We are looking more at figuring out mechanisms for the deployment of these programmes and schemes on both sides. This should be operationalised within the fiscal year," Vijay told PTI.

The Cabinet approved the India AI Mission in the first week of March with an outlay of Rs 10,372 crore for five years to encourage AI development in the country.

Under the mission, super-computing capacity, comprising over 10,000 GPUs (graphics processing units) will be made available to various stakeholders for creating an AI ecosystem.

Vijay said that Meity Startup Hub (MSH) is currently supporting and funding 143 incubators and centres of excellence (CoE) across India as well as providing funding to all startups from the idea level to the growth stage through funds of funds.

In Red Square spectacle, Putin hails conquests in Ukraine

Calls On 'KGB's Heirs' To Bust West Sanctions

His most beloved crooner sang a nationalistic ballad with an appeal to Russians: "The Motherland is calling. Don't let her down." His favourite band belted out a moody song about wartime sacrifice. And then he took the stage, under a banner celebrating the 10th anniversary of Crimea's seizure from Ukraine, to remind thousands of Russians gathered on Red Square that his fight to add territory to Russia wasn't over.

President Putin, a day after a three-day election swiftly declared that he had won more than 87% of the vote, signalled Monday that the war against Ukraine would continue to dominate his rule and called for unity in bringing the people of eastern Ukraine "back to their home family." "We will move on together, hand in hand," he told the crowd, boasting of a restored railroad line that he said would soon connect to Crimea through territory taken from Ukraine.

Conducting business as usual on Tuesday, Putin told the Federal Security Service, the main successor to the Soviet-era KGB, to help Russian companies bust Western sanctions and expand their clout into new markets around the world. He also addressed bor-

TOI LINE OF NO CONTROL

SANDEEP ADHWARYU

PUTIN WINS 87% VOTES



'Putin to visit China in May for talks with Xi'

President Putin will travel to China in May for talks with Xi Jinping, in what could be the Kremlin chief's first overseas trip of his new term, according to five sources. When asked, the Kremlin said information on Putin's visits would be released closer to the date. REUTERS

der assaults, which have marred his re-election week. He claimed Russian troops inflicted "heavy losses" on units that he said were made up of regular Ukrainian soldiers, foreign mercenaries and pro-

Ukraine's survival in danger: Pentagon

US defence secretary Lloyd Austin on Tuesday warned that Ukraine's survival was in danger and sought to convince allies that the US was committed to Kyiv. Speaker Mike Johnson has refused to call a vote on a bill that would provide \$60 billion in aid for Ukraine. REUTERS

Ukrainian Russian fighters. "About these traitors... we must not forget who they are, we must identify them by name. We will punish them without statute of limitations, wherever they are." NYT & REUTERS

India, US hold exercise Tiger Triumph-24 aboard INS Jalashwa in Vizag

VISAKHAPATNAM, Mar 19 (PTI)

THE Indian and US navies on Tuesday held a bilateral tri-service Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) exercise, Tiger Triumph - 24 on the Eastern Seaboard.

The HADR exercise represents the robust strategic partnership between India and US, with the drill aimed at sharing best practices and standard operating procedures (SoPs).

"The Harbour Phase of the exercise is scheduled at Visakhapatnam from March 18 to 25, which includes pre-sail discussions, subject matter expert exchange on professional subjects and deliberations on planning and execution procedures of various tasks," said a press release from



the Visakhapatnam-based Eastern Naval Command (ENC) of the Indian Navy.

Other Harbour Phase activ-

ities include friendly sports events to further enhance camaraderie between the participating armed forces per-

sonnel of both nations.

Scheduled from March 26 to 31, the Sea Phase will involve the naval units from both the

countries setting up joint command and control centre and a joint relief and medical camp.

Further, a planning and coordination exercise would be conducted to discuss and refine SoPs to enable rapid and smooth coordination between the forces of both India and United States.

Indian Navy's landing platform dock and landing ship tanks (large), along with their integral landing crafts and helicopters will be participating in the Tiger Triumph-24 exercise.

The Indian Army will be represented by one infantry battalion group with mechanised forces and the Indian Air Force (IAF) will deploy medium lift aircraft, transport helicopters and a Rapid Action Medical Team (RAMT).

Nominations for first phase of LS polls to begin today

NEW DELHI, Mar 19 (PTI)

NOMINATIONS for the first phase of the seven-phase parliamentary elections in 12 States on 102 seats will begin on Wednesday, an election official said. 102 parliamentary constituencies will vote in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls on April

19. According to the Election Commission, the notification for the polls will be issued on March 20, while March 27 is the last date for filing of nominations.

The scrutiny of nominations will be done on March 28 and the last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 30. The counting of

votes will take place on June 4, the Election Commission said. This time the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has announced to contest the elections alone while the Samajwadi Party has formed an alliance with the Congress and both parties are part of the Opposition I.N.D.I.A. bloc. The Rashtriya Lok Dal

has joined hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won 62 seats and its ally Apna Dal (S) two seats, decimating the SP-BSP alliance. The Congress won the lone Rae Bareilly seat of Sonia Gandhi.

Army's tech unit headed by Colonel-rank officer from CORPS OF SIGNALS

NEW DELHI, Mar 19 (PTI)

SIGNALS Technology Evaluation and Adaptation Group (STEAG), an elite unit of the Indian Army recently raised in Delhi, is headed by a Colonel-rank officer from the Corps of Signals, with a primary aim to enhance the communication infrastructure of the force, officials on Tuesday said.

This unit, with a strength of nearly 280 personnel, will undertake research and evaluation of futuristic communi-

cation technologies like 6G, Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and quantum computing for defence applications in view of the changing nature of the field.

"The primary aim is to enhance the communication infrastructure of the Indian Army," a senior official said.

This group will be operational under the Signals Directorate and is based in Delhi. It is headed by a Colonel rank officer of the Army from the Corps of Signals, official said.

Major Rajprasad RS of Corps of Engineers gets patent for multi target detonation device

NEW DELHI, Mar 19 (ANI)

THE Indian Army achieved yet another milestone with a patent granted for the innovation of a Portable Multi Target Detonation Device (WEDC). It was developed by Major Rajprasad RS of the Corps of Engineers.

The innovation, which would enable troops to undertake demolition at long range with increased safety and several advanced features, has been inducted in the Indian Army. The device developed by Major Rajprasad is aimed at enhancing the safety and reliability of the detonation of multiple targets and overcoming the limitations of the previously used Exploder Dynamo Capacitor. The previously utilised system is a mechanically operated wired system with limited range of 400 metres.

The requirement of the Indian Army was to increase the safety range and carry reserve demolition of multiple targets wirelessly from longer ranges. This device is a microprocessor based electronic system that offers a long range of 2.5 kilometres with both wired and wireless mode of firing. Multiple targets can be selectively fired- both independently or simultaneously. It provides great advantage in reserve Demolition of enemy targets, Destruction of IEDs from longer ranges.