

Xi begins Serbia visit

BELGRADE, May 7 (AP)

CHINESE leader Xi Jinping's visit to European ally Serbia on Tuesday falls on a symbolic date: The 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during NATO's air war over Kosovo.

US jets dropped five bombs on the Chinese Embassy compound in the Serbian capital on May 7, 1999, setting it ablaze and killing three Chinese nationals. Twenty other people were injured in the incident, which has burdened relations between the two powers ever since. The Western military alliance had launched the air war in March that year to force

then Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic to end a brutal onslaught against ethnic Albanian rebels in Kosovo.

The US at the time apologised and said the embassy bombing was a mistake that happened due to faulty Intelligence. The intended target, Washington said, was the headquarters of a Serbian State arms exporter located on the same street, a few blocks away.

"Imagine that somebody would, even by accident, strike an American Embassy somewhere around the world. The reaction would be immediate," said Sven Biscop, a Professor of European foreign and security policy at Ghent University.

Putin starts 5th term as prez, more in control of Russia than ever before

US, Allies Boycott Event; Analysts Predict Tough Stance By Kremlin For Next 6 Yrs

President Vladimir Putin began his fifth term at a glittering Kremlin inauguration Tuesday, embarking on another six years as the head of state of Russia after destroying his political opponents, launching a devastating war in Ukraine and concentrating all power in his hands.

At the ceremony inside the gilded Grand Kremlin Palace, Putin placed his hand on the constitution and vowed to defend it as a crowd of hand-picked dignitaries looked on. "...Together we will win," he said after being sworn in.

Since succeeding Prez Boris Yeltsin in the waning hours of 1999, Putin has transformed Russia from a nation emerging from economic collapse to a pariah state that threatens global security. Following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine that has become Europe's biggest conflict since WWII, Russia has been heavily sanctioned by the West. Already in office for nearly a quarter-century and the longest-serving Kremlin leader since Josef Stalin, Putin's new term doesn't expire until 2030, when he will be constitutio-



WHAT NEXT? The Russian govt has now been dissolved so that Putin can name a new PM and cabinet. One key area to watch is defence ministry. Defence minister Sergei Shoigu could become a victim of govt reshuffle

nally eligible to run again.

Putin used the the first moments of his fifth term to thank the "heroes" of his war in Ukraine and to rail against the West. Putin told Russia's political elite after being sworn in that he was not rejecting dialogue with the West, including on nuclear weapons: "The choice is theirs: do they intend to continue trying to restrain the development of Russia, continue the policy of aggression, or look for a path to cooperation and peace?"

He was greeted with app-

ause when he entered the hall with over 2,500 invited guests. They included senior members of the Russian govt as well as celebrities, including US actor Steven Seagal. The US, which said it did not consider his re-election free and fair, stayed away from Tuesday's ceremony. Britain, Canada and most EU nations also boycotted the swearing-in, but France sent its ambassador.

Putin left the ceremony to the music "Hail" from Mikhail Glinka's opera "A Life for the Tsar". The words "Hail, hail,

my Rus! Hail you are my Russian land" rang out in the Kremlin. The original words are "Hail, hail, our Russian tsar!"

The question now is what the 71-year-old Putin will do over the course of another six years, both at home and abroad. Shortly after his re-election in March, Putin suggested that a confrontation between Nato and Russia is possible, and he declared he wanted to carve out a buffer zone in Ukraine to protect his country from cross-border attacks. The Russian govt has now been dissolved so that Putin can name a new PM and cabinet. One key area to watch is the defence ministry. Defence minister Sergei Shoigu could become a victim of the govt reshuffle but that would be a bold move, with the war still raging.

Putin enters fifth term with practically no opposition. His critics are in prison or exile, and his biggest critic, Alexei Navalny, died suddenly in an Arctic penal colony in Feb. Analysts say the govt could take the unpopular steps of raising taxes to fund the war and pressure more men to join the military. AP, REUTERS & NYT

India now net exporter of med consumables

In A 1st, Trend Of Imports Reversed

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New Delhi: India, for the first time, has become a net exporter of medical consumables and disposables, reversing the earlier trend where overseas shipments of products such as needles and catheters completely dominated the market.

The country exported consumables and disposables worth \$1.6 billion, while it imported products worth only about \$1.1 billion in 2022-23, Union pharma secretary Arunish Chawla said on Tuesday. Exports went up 16% compared with the previous fiscal, while imports fell 33%.

Govt is seeking to replicate this success in other segments too, such as surgical instruments and electronic



Govt is seeking to replicate this success in other segments to lower dependence on imports

equipment, so that there is lower dependence on imports, Chawla said on the sidelines of an event by his department & CII.

Govt's push for reducing import dependence for key pharma products and devices got a major thrust post-Covid outbreak after China controlled supplies of everything from basic chemicals to PPEs and testing kits.

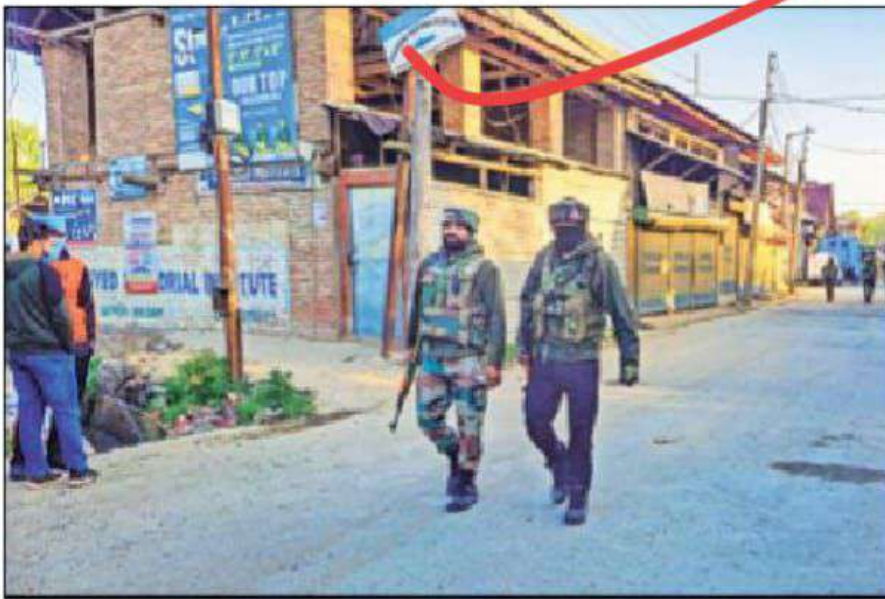
India is known as pharmacy of the world because of its generic medicines and low-cost vaccines. In the medical devices sector, how-

ever, the country remains heavily dependent on imports with nearly 70% of the products being sourced from other countries. China is among the major sources of imports.

Centre has further divided medical device sector into segments such as cancer therapy, imaging, critical care, assistive medical devices, body implants, surgical instruments and hospital equipment, consumables & disposables, and IVD instruments and reagents. The pharma secretary said deliberations are on to identify important medical devices from each segment, assess their import-export dynamics, examine duty structures, and their implications across the value chain.

"During Covid, demand for consumables and disposables increased tremendously which pushed the industry towards augmenting its manufacturing," said Himanshu Baid, chairman of CII's national medical technology forum.

2 terrorists killed in encounter with security forces in Kulgam



Security personnel cordon off an area after an encounter, at Redwani Village in Anantnag district, on Tuesday.

(PTI)

SRINAGAR, May 7 (Agencies)

TWO terrorists were killed in an encounter with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam district, officials said here on Tuesday.

A top commander of the banned militant outfit Lashkar-e-Toiba's frontal organisation

The Resistance Front (TRF) was among the two killed.

The security forces had launched a cordon-and-search operation in Kulgam's Redwani village late on Monday night following information about the presence of terrorists in the area, they said.

However, the search opera-

tion turned into an encounter, which was on till last reports came in, the officials said.

The house in which the terrorists were hiding caught fire on Tuesday morning during the exchange of fire between the two sides. Police officers said at least two bodies were seen at the encounter site and efforts are on to retrieve those.

"The identity and group affiliation of the slain ultras can be revealed only after the bodies are retrieved," he added.

IGP Kashmir V K Birdi told reporters that the top TRF commander identified as Basit Dar is one of the two terrorists killed by the security forces in the encounter in the Redwani area of Kulgam district. "The identity of the second slain terrorist is being ascertained. Firing exchanges have stopped, but searches are still going on in the area," police said.

It must be recalled that Kulgam is part of the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha where voting is scheduled for May 25.

CEASEFIRE TALKS ON KNIFE'S EDGE

Israeli Army seizes Gaza side of Rafah border

CAIRO, May 7 (AP)

AN ISRAELI tank brigade seized control on Tuesday of the Gaza Strip side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt as Israel moved forward with an offensive in the southern city even as ceasefire negotiations with Hamas remain on a knife's edge.

The development came after hours of whiplash in the Israel-Hamas war, with the militant group on Monday saying it accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated cease-fire proposal. Israel, meanwhile, insisted the deal did not meet its core demands.

The high-stakes diplomatic moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope alive — if only barely — for an accord that could

bring at least a pause in the 7-month-old war that has devastated the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli incursion overnight appeared to be short of the full-fledged offensive into Rafah that Israel has planned, and it was not immediately known if it would be expanded. President Joe Biden on Monday urgently warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against launching an offensive on the southern Gaza city, hiking pressure for a ceasefire.

Aid groups say an attack would be catastrophic for the around 1.4 million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom fled Israel's onslaught elsewhere in Gaza.

The Israeli 401st Brigade entered the Rafah crossing early on Tuesday morning,

the Israeli military said, taking "operational control" of the crucial border point. Footage released by the Israeli military showed Israeli flags flying from tanks that seized the crossing area. Details of the video matched known features of the crossing.

The military also carried out a flurry of strikes and bombardment across Rafah overnight, killing at least 23 Palestinians, including at least six women and five children, according to hospital records seen by The Associated Press.

The Rafah crossing is the main route for aid entering the besieged enclave and exit for those able to flee into Egypt. Both Rafah and the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza, the other main aid entry point, have been closed for at least the past

two days. Though smaller entry points still operate, the closure is a blow to efforts to maintain the flow of food, medicine and other supplies that are keeping Gaza's population alive.

Jens Laerke, a spokesman for the UN humanitarian affairs office, warned that an assault on Rafah could break the fragile aid operation. He said all fuel entering Gaza comes through Rafah, and any disruption will halt humanitarian work.

"It will plunge this crisis into unprecedented levels of need, including the very real possibility of a famine," he said.

The Israeli military claimed it seized the crossing after receiving intelligence it was "being used for terrorist purposes".

India withdraws 51 military personnel from Maldives

■ The Maldivian Government earlier announced that two batches of Indian soldiers had left the country

MALE, May 7 (PTI)

INDIA has withdrawn 51 of its soldiers from the Maldives so far, the Government here has said ahead of the May 10 deadline set by President Mohamed Muizzu for the complete withdrawal of Indian military personnel from his country.

The Maldivian Government earlier announced that two

batches of Indian soldiers had left the country. However, the exact figure was not disclosed previously. The Chief Spokesperson of the President's Office Heena Waleed, in response to questions regarding the issue, said on Monday, that a total of 51 Indian soldiers have been repatriated so far.

"All Indian military personnel in the country will be withdrawn from the Maldives by May 10. As of now, 51 soldiers stationed at two platforms have been repatriated," Heena was quoted as saying by the Edition.Mv news portal.

She however refused to disclose the exact figure of the

Indian soldiers stationed in the Maldives, stating the details would be shared at a later date, Sun.Mv. News portal reported.

According to previous announcements by the Maldives Government, 88 Indian soldiers were stationed in the country to operate two helicopters, a Dornier aircraft and at the Senahiya military hospital. The two helicopters and the Dornier aircraft were gifted by India.

President Muizzu, widely seen as a pro-China leader, had set May 10 as the deadline for the withdrawal of the Indian military personnel from his country.