

US announces mission to counter attacks on commercial vessels in Red Sea

MANAMA (Bahrain), Dec 19 (AP)

THE US and a host of other nations are creating a new force to protect ships transiting the Red Sea that have come under attack by drones and ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin announced early on Tuesday in Bahrain.

The seriousness of the attacks, several of which have damaged the vessels, has led multiple shipping companies to order their ships to hold in place and not enter the Bab el-Mandeb Strait until the security situation can be addressed.

"This is an international challenge that demands collective action," Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said in statement released just after midnight in Bahrain. "Therefore today I am announcing the establishment of Operation Prosperity Guardian, an important new multinational security initiative."

The United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain will join the US in the new mission, Austin announced. Some of the countries will conduct joint patrols while others provide

Intelligence support in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Several other countries have also agreed to be involved in the operation but prefer not to be publicly named, a defence official said on the condition of anonymity to discuss additional details of the new mission that have not been publicly announced.

The mission will be co-ordinated by the already existing Combined Task Force 153, which was set up in April 2022 to improve maritime security in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden. There have been 39 member nations

in CTF 153, but officials were working to determine which of them would participate in this latest effort.

Separately, the United States has also called on the United Nations Security Council to take action against the attacks.

In a letter to council members obtained on Monday by The Associated Press, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said Houthi attacks targeting commercial vessels legally transiting the international waterways continue to threaten "navigational rights and freedoms, international maritime security, and international commerce."

5-day Net ban in Manipur after fresh clashes

Imphal: The Manipur government has shut down mobile internet for five days and curbed gatherings for two months in Churachandpur district following clashes between two student groups late Monday that left several civilians injured, reports **Prabin Kalita**.

The curbs under Section 144 of CRPC orders came ahead of a mass burial on Wednesday in Churachandpur town of 87 tribal victims of the ongoing conflict in the state.

Manipur cops gun down man in outpost: A Manipur cop allegedly gunned down a 32-year-old man inside an outpost late Monday in Jiribam district, reports **K Sarojkumar Sharma**.

Enraged by the killing of Oinam Gandhi Singh (32), a mob on Tuesday damaged the house of Loitam Arunta Singh, the cop with Manipur Rifles (MR), in the Yairipok area of Thoubal district.

Loitam has been arrested.

Military seeking mobilisation of up to 500k troops: Zelensky

Kyiv: Ukraine's military wants to mobilise up to 500,000 more troops to fight Russia's invasion, but Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Tuesday that he has asked them to spell out their plans in detail on what is "a sensitive matter" before deciding whether he grants their wish as the war approaches the two-year mark.

Such a major mobilisation would cost Ukraine around 500 billion hryvnias (\$13.4 billion), Zelensky said. Other aspects to be considered include whether troops currently on the front line would be rotated or allowed home leave after almost 22

months of full-scale war.

Ukrainian ministry of defence statistics say the Ukrainian army had nearly 800,000 troops in October. That doesn't include National Guard or other units. In total, 1 million Ukrainians are in uniform.

Earlier this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the country's military to increase the number of troops by nearly 170,000 to a total of 1.32 million.

Putin said earlier Tuesday that the Kremlin's forces have taken the initiative in Ukraine and is well positioned for the coming year. REUTERS

India star performer: IMF

Contributing more than 16 pc of global growth

- There is a very strong push by the Government to invest in infrastructure and develop the logistics that are needed for a solid basis for growth, Choueiri said

WASHINGTON, Dec 19 (PTI)

GROWING at a robust rate due to economic reforms in key sectors like digitisation and infrastructure, India has emerged as a star performer and is projected to contribute more than 16 per cent of the global growth, the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday.

“What we have been observing for quite some time now is that India has been growing at a very robust rate. It’s one of the star performers when it comes to real growth when you look at peer countries. It’s one of the fastest growing large emerging markets and it’s contributing, in our current projections, more than 16 per cent

of global growth this year,” Nada Choueiri, the Mission of India at IMF, told PTI in an interview.

The IMF on Monday released its annual Article IV consultation with India, according to which the South Asian country, underpinned by prudent macroeconomic policies, is on track to be one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world this year.

Nonetheless, the economy is facing global headwinds, including a global growth slowdown in an increasingly fragmented world, Choueiri said.

There is a very strong push by the Government to invest in infrastructure and develop the logistics that are needed for a solid basis for growth, Choueiri said. India, she said, has a very large and young and growing population and thus has the potential to grow at stronger rates if this potential is harnessed through structural reforms. The Government has done several structural reforms, the flagship one being the digitalisation, which has been building up over many years and has put India on a

strong platform for increased productivity and growth in the future.

The IMF in its annual report recommended that policy priorities should focus on replenishing fiscal buffers, securing price stability, maintaining financial stability, and accelerating inclusive growth through comprehensive structural reforms while preserving debt sustainability. India’s economy has rebounded strongly from the pandemic to become an important driver of global growth.

After surging during FY2022/23, headline inflation has, on average, moderated although it remains volatile. Employment has surpassed the pre-pandemic level and the informal sector continues to dominate while formalisation has progressed, it said.

“The financial sector has been resilient, largely unaffected by global financial stress in early 2023. While the budget deficit has eased, public debt remains elevated, and fiscal buffers need to be rebuilt,” it said.

J&K CAN BE AMONG INDIA'S ECONOMICALLY STRONG STATES

THE restoration of Statehood for Jammu and Kashmir, without the Union Territory of Ladakh, and an expected elected Government by September, next year, come at a time when J&K has established its position as one of India's top performing provinces in terms of economic growth. J&K's State GDP is lately growing at the rate of 10 percent, annually. A key task before the State's forthcoming elected Government would naturally be to take the growth dynamics on a fast-forward mode and generate more employment and revenue. This should be more than possible. Till now, major contributors to the State's economy have been agriculture, horticulture, tourism, handicrafts, limited scale of manufacturing and services. Its huge mineral resources remain largely untapped. The potential needs to be explored and exploited to push the manufacturing sector. This may require a change in the State's land acquisition policy.

The State's economic potential was never tested fully by its erstwhile politically volatile Governments challenged by pro-Pakistan elements and cessationist groups taking advantage of the prolonged presence of Article 370 of the Indian constitution. The Article gave Special Status to the originally designed J&K, a region disputed by India, Pakistan and China. The provision was drafted by N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, a Constituent Assembly member, and was added to the constitution as a 'temporary provision' in 1949.

For unknown reasons, the provision remained untouched until August 5, 2019, when the Parliament abrogated the Article taking away the Special Status to J&K and bifurcated it into Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. While Ladakh is to remain as a Union Territory, the Government assured that Statehood of Jammu and Kashmir "will be restored soon." Last week, the Supreme Court held the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution valid and ordered the Election Commission to conduct elections to J&K Assembly before September 30, 2024. The apex court also direct-

■ BY NANTOO BANERJEE



The State's GDP grew 10 per cent annually in last two years. A NITI Aayog report shows that Srinagar is the richest district in J&K with only 1.51 per cent underprivileged people. The State having a total population of around 1.36 crore is expected to have a gross GDP of over 2.30 lakh crore at the end of the current year.



ed the Centre for the restoration of J&K's Statehood.

The challenges before the new J&K Government after the Assembly election are going to be many. Among the most important of them are: improvement of law and order situation in the valley and creation of proper environment for social, educational, economic growth, and jobs for the youth. More jobs and more wealth with the local people are bound to improve the social and political environment. The new economic and industrial development policies need to be directed at utilisation of the hitherto untapped resources. J&K has India's sole production unit of borax. Sitting on large sapphire resources, the State boasts of having several essential minerals such as coal, graphite, marble, gypsum, magnesite, and limestone.

India's first and only lithium reserves to the tune of

5.9 million tonnes have already been discovered in the State. The union Government eyes more lithium reserves in J&K. It has identified the presence of as many as 30 critical minerals. The State will need to work with both the union Government and private sector entrepreneurs to tap these resources to grow as one of the country's leading economies. Such initiatives are bound to have a positive impact on the society and help establish peace and security in the State.

However, much will depend on political parties trying to come to power to rule the State. As for now, J&K is not doing badly on the economic front compared to many other States of the country.

In terms of per capita income, J&K is well ahead of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Manipur and Meghalaya. There has been a consistent increase in the

per capita income in J&K since the financial year 2011-12. It is moving fast to top the national per capita income average, which is now estimated at Rs.1,45,679. Currently, the per capita income of J&K is Rs.1,36,771 as against Rs.1,20,790, last year. Incidentally, according to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Telangana ranked first among all Indian States with the highest per capita income at current prices at Rs 3,08,732, followed by Karnataka with Rs 3,01,673 and Haryana with Rs 2,96,685. A NITI Aayog report shows that Srinagar is the richest district in J&K with only 1.51 per cent underprivileged people. The State having a total population of around 1.36 crore is expected to have a gross GDP of over 2.30 lakh crore at the end of the current financial year.

However, it would be foolish to ignore the baggage the province was forced to carry since 1949 that primarily stood in the way of the State's economic progress over the last seven decades. The State's economic development will continue to face numerous hurdles such as the issue of political stability after the election, next year, future security concerns, poor physical infrastructure, land ownership issues, limited market access, large Hindu-Muslim divide, educational and skill gaps. J&K is a majority Muslim State. Islam forms the majority religion in 17 out of the State's 22 districts. The State's Muslim population is around 85.67 lakhs, representing 68.32 per cent of the total population.

The Parliament is in the process of enacting a new legislation that seeks to reserve 33 per cent of seats in the State Assembly for women.

The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Second Amendment) Bill, 2023, has already been passed by Parliament. This will have an impact on the State's future political leadership. The elected Government in the State must try to resolve all the pending issues and obstacles in due course for the long-term prosperity of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. (IPA)

Heavy rainfall disrupts lives, train services thrown out of gear in TN

CHENNAI, Dec 19 (ANI)

HEAVY rainfall in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu disrupted life while throwing train services in the State haywire.

Southern Railways in a press release stated that it was taking concerted efforts towards the restoration of traffic and evacuation of stranded passengers at the Srivakuntam Railway Station.

"Unprecedented rainfall had occurred in the districts of Tirunelveli and Tuticorin during the 24 hours from 8:30 hours of December 17, 2023, to 8:30 hours of December 18, 2023, measuring in the range of 670 mm to 932 mm. This has impacted the train operation as track parameters have been breached on certain sections falling in these two districts and as a result, traffic has to be suspended."

Southern Railways said in a press release on Monday, December 18.

It further stated that in the section between Talalyuthu and Gangaikondan (7.71 kms), an Earth slip had occurred on the approach bank of a bridge in



NDRF personnel conduct a rescue operation in a flooded area after heavy rains in Tuticorin district on Tuesday. (PTI)

that section and ballast had also got washed away. "Tirunelveli Station yard has got flooded due to the overflowing of Nainarkulam tank. In Tuticorin station yard, water has risen one metre above the rail level due to abnormal rainfall. In the section between Tattapparai and Milavittan (7.47 kms), the water has gone above danger level across nine bridges. In the section between Srivakuntam and Seydunganallur (12.16 kms) the ballast has got washed away," it said.

MORE FUNDS NEEDED TO COPE WITH CYCLONE DEVASTATION, SAYS CM STALIN: THE southern districts of Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi were among the severely affected by unprecedented rains as they received their annual rainfall on a single day leading to massive inundation, Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin said.

As the State was coping with the relief and rehabilitation of the four districts including Chennai where Cyclone Michaung wreaked havoc on

December 4, heavy rains battered the southern districts of Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Tenkasi and Kanyakumari, on December 17 and 18, he said. Relief and rehabilitation in these districts would be taken up in the same vigour in which the State Government had launched the activities in Chennai and suburbs, Stalin said and added that he would personally visit Thoothukudi on Wednesday to oversee the relief and rehabilitation activities.

Meanwhile, defence, national and State disaster response force teams have joined hands in relief and rescue initiatives while food packets are being delivered to people using helicopters in marooned regions in southern Tamil Nadu, a top Government official said on Tuesday. Speaking to reporters here, Chief Secretary Shiv Das Meena said so far, 10,082 people have been rescued and housed in over 100 relief camps, which includes schools and public halls. Food, milk, drinking water and basic amenities have been ensured.

Focus on overall development of students: President



President Droupadi Murmu with Telangana Governor Tamilsai Soundararajan at the centennial celebrations of Hyderabad Public School in Hyderabad on Tuesday. (ANI)

HYDERABAD, Dec 19 (PTI)

PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday highlighted the need for stakeholders to focus on overall development of students while preparing the curriculum for the future and ensure that they not only acquire academic knowledge but also learn life skills.

She was speaking after gracing the centennial celebrations of Hyderabad Public School here.

"While preparing the curriculum for the future, all the stakeholders should keep in mind the overall development of the students. It should be ensured that students not only gain academic knowledge but also learn life skills as

well," the President stressed.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been designed with this objective, Murmu pointed out.

She also emphasised the need for students to be sensitive to the needy people in their surroundings. They should not only strive for their own development, but also for the progress of others, she said.

Urging the children to develop a passion for things they do in life, Murmu said they must take out time for work which gives them happiness and satisfaction.

"The positive energy they get from doing that work will also increase your ability to do other work," she added.

The President lauded the entire team of the Hyderabad Public School for providing excellent education to

the students in its 100 years of journey.

She said that the institution has inspired its students to achieve excellence in various fields, which has also brought respect and glory to our country.

NAGPUR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
CORRIGENDUM
 Selection of Master System Integrator (MSI) to Design, Implement, Integrate, Operate and Maintain Intelligent and Integrated Traffic Management System (IITMS) in Nagpur City for a period of 5 years.
 In reference to tender Nos.
1) 2023_NMCN_961669_1(653-2023/Electrical) published vide Advertise No 644/PR Date 08/11/2023 e schedule of dates has been extended as applicable as below,
1) Sale & Submission of tender is extended up to 3.00PM of Dt.11 JANUARY 2024
2) Opening of tender is extended up to 3.30PM of Dt. 12 JANUARY 2024
 Other all details remain same.
 Corri. No. 644 PR Date 19.12.2023
 Executive Engineer (Etc.)
 Nagpur Municipal Corporation

CENTRAL RAILWAY
NOTIFICATION
 No: NCP/C/736/STBA/Notification/23 Date: 18/12/2023
 Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Central Railway, Nagpur on behalf of President of India invites tender from individual interested parties fulfilling conditions as prescribed for selection of Station Ticket Booking Agent (STBA) at 34 stations of Nagpur division on commission basis. NSG-6: 1) Palachauri, 2) Malkhed, 3) Tintale, 4) Sonsoan, 5)