

How China's profiting from trade with Russia amid war

Heihe: On China's snowy border with Russia, a dealership that sells trucks has seen its sales double in the past year thanks to Russian customers. China's exports to its neighbour are so strong Chinese construction workers built warehouses and 20-story office towers at the border this summer.

The border town Heihe is a microcosm of China's ever closer economic relationship with Russia. China is profiting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has led Russia to switch from the West to China for purchases of a variety of products including cars. Russia, in turn, has sold oil and natural gas to China at deep discounts. Trade between Russia and China



Russian PM Mikhail Mishustin with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Russia-China trade surpassed \$200 billion in the first 11 months of 2023, a level the countries had not expected to reach until 2024

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Russia's war in Ukraine has also gotten an image boost from China. State media

disseminates a steady diet of Russian propaganda in China and around the world.

Xi Jinping, China's top leader, and Russian President Vladimir Putin have made numerous public demonstrations of the nations' close ties. China's exports to Russia soared 69% in the first 11 months of this year compared with the same period in 2021, before the invasion of Ukraine. "Maintaining and developing China-Russian relations well is a strategic choice made by both sides on the basis of the fundamental interests of the two peoples," Xi said as he met Wednesday with Russian PM Mikhail Mishustin.

The biggest winners for China from the surge in trade with Russia have been its vehi-

cle manufacturers. The sales helped China overtake Japan this year as the world's largest car exporter. German manufacturers such as Mercedes-Benz and BMW used to be strong sellers in Russia, but they have pulled out in response to sanctions on the country.

The US has warned China against sending armaments to Russia, and has not yet uncovered evidence that it is doing so. But some civilian equipment China is selling to Russia, including drones and trucks, also has military uses. Beijing's embrace of Russia has also provided a modest but timely boon to China's construction industry. The economy has struggled to heal from scars left by three years of "zero Covid" policy. NYT

Parl passes bill to ease periodical, newspaper registration process

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Parliament on Thursday passed a bill to replace a British-era law governing the publishing industry and simplify the process of registration of periodicals.

Information and broadcasting minister Anurag Thakur said the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023, which was passed by voice vote in the Lok Sabha, will make the registration of periodicals a one-step process as against the eight-step process in the archaic law.

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"This bill is simple, smart and has a simultaneous process for registration of newspapers and periodicals. Earlier newspapers or magazines had to pass through an eight-step registration process. This can now be done at the click of a button," he said and added that the bill is truly "Bharatiya" and encourages entrepreneurship in the media sector.

The new bill makes the

ONLINE REGISTRATION

Salient features of the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023

- Bill provides for simple online mechanism to apply for title verification and grant of certificate of registration by the Press Registrar General to a periodical as a simultaneous process
- No requirement of furnishing any declaration before local authority or its authentication by local authority
- A person who has been convicted by any court for an offence involving terrorist act or unlawful activity, or having done anything against the security of the State not permitted to bring out a periodical
- Facsimile edition of a foreign periodical can be printed in India with prior approval of the Central government and its registration with the Press Registrar General



process of allotment of title and registration of periodicals simple and simultaneous, through an online system without the requirement of any physical interface.

This would enable the Press Registrar General to fast track the process, thereby ensuring that publishers, especially small and medium publishers, face little difficulty in starting a publication.

Most importantly, the publishers would no longer be required to file a declaration with the district magistrates or the local authorities and get such declarations authenticated. Furthermore, printing presses would also not be required to furnish any such declaration; instead only an intimation would be sufficient. The entire process presently involved eight steps and consumed considerable time.

Introducing the bill, Tha-

kur said "The bill reflects yet another step of the Modi Government towards jettisoning the mentality of slavery and bringing new laws for new India".

The minister further added that it has been the priority of the Government to end criminality, improve ease of doing business and ease of living through new laws and accordingly, efforts have been made to substantially decriminalise the colonial era statute. For certain violations, financial penalties have been proposed instead of conviction as earlier. Further, a credible appellate mechanism, headed by the chairperson, Press Council of India has been provided for.

Stressing upon the ease of doing business aspect, Thakur said title registration process, which sometimes took 2-3 years, would now be done in 60 days.

Rajya Sabha passes new Telecom Bill

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The new Telecommunications Bill, which allows the government to temporarily take control of telecom services in the interest of national security and provide a non-auction route for allocation of satellite spectrum, has been cleared by Parliament.

The bill, which will replace the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885 and the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1933 after presidential assent, was passed by Rajya Sabha through a voice-vote after a short debate without the participation of the opposition on Thursday.

The bill, which was cleared by Lok Sabha on Wednesday, also provides for stopping transmission and intercepting messages in case of public emergency, in the interest of the public and to prevent incitement for committing offences. Procedures and safeguards related to interception will be prescribed by the central government.

Replying to the debate, communications minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the new bill is being brought to replace two colonial-era laws in keeping with the "aspirations" of a new India.

"In the last nine-and-half-years, India's telecom sector has emerged from a difficult period to become a sunrise sector," he said.

RETAIL INFLATION

For farm workers rises to 7.37% in November, 7.13% for rural labourers



NEW DELHI, Dec 21 (PTI)

RETAIL inflation for farm workers rose to 7.37 per cent and that for rural labourers climbed to 7.13 per cent in November, mainly due to higher prices of certain food items. Retail inflation in October was 7.08 per cent and 6.92 per cent for farm workers and rural labourers, respectively, according to an official statement.

Food inflation stood at 9.38 per cent and 9.14 per cent for agricultural and rural workers, respectively, in November compared to the respective figures of 8.42 per cent and 8.18 per cent in October 2023, and 6.19 per cent and 6.05 per cent recorded in the corresponding month of previous year (November 2022), a Labour

Ministry statement said.

According to the statement, point-to-point rate of inflation based on the CPI-AL (Consumer Price Index-Agricultural Labourers) and CPI-RL (rural labourers) stood at 7.37 per cent and 7.13 per cent in November this year as compared to 7.08 per cent and 6.92 per cent, respectively, in October 2023.

The two comparable numbers were 6.87 per cent and 6.99 per cent in November last year, the ministry said.

All-India Consumer Price Index for agricultural labourers in November this year increased 12 points to 1,253, while the index for rural workers advanced 11 points to 1,262. The two indices were 1,241 points and 1,251 points, respec-

tively, in October this year.

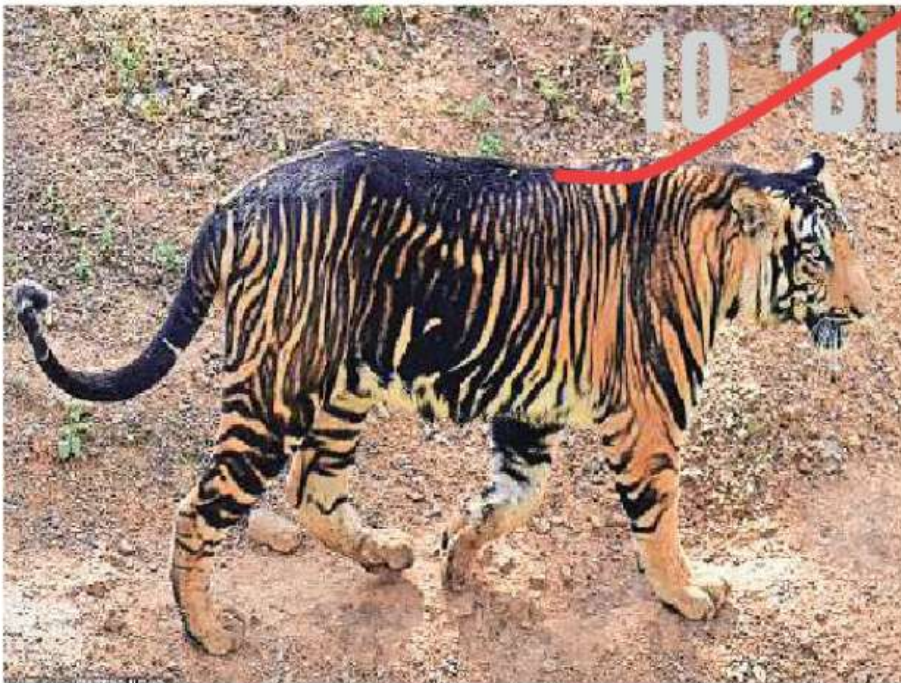
Major contribution towards the rise in general index of agricultural labourers and rural labourers came from the group of food items to the extent of 10.85 and 10.50 points, respectively, driven by a rise in prices of rice, wheat atta, pulses, onion, turmeric whole, garlic, mixed spices, etc.

There has been an upward trend in the index across all the States except West Bengal (both CPI-AL and CPI-RL indices decreased) and Himachal Pradesh (CPI-AL index decreased).

In case of agricultural labourers, the index increased 1 to 10 points in 11 States, rose 11 to 20 points in four States and went up more than 20 points in three States. With 1,453 points, Tamil Nadu topped the index table whereas Himachal Pradesh stood at the bottom with 958 points.

The benchmark for rural labourers increased 1 to 10 points in 11 States, climbed 11 to 20 points in five States and jumped more than 20 points in three States.

Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with 1,439 points each topped the index table whereas Himachal Pradesh stayed at the bottom with 1,015 points.



10 'BLACK TIGERS' found in India, all in Odisha

NEW DELHI, Dec 21 (PTI)

THERE are a total of 10 "black tigers" in India, all exclusively found in Odisha's Similipal, the Government informed the Parliament on Thursday.

Union Minister of State for Environment, Ashiwini Kumar Choubey, told the Rajya Sabha that "melanistic tigers" have been documented only in the Similipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha.

As per the 2022 cycle of the pan-India tiger estimation exercise, the Similipal Tiger Reserve has 16 tigers, out of which 10 exhibit melanism, he said. The Minister said that the Similipal Tiger Reserve has been

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UNESCO prize for T2 of Kempegowda airport

BENGALURU, Dec 21 (PTI)

THE Terminal-2 (T2) of the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) here has secured recognition as one of the 'World's Most Beautiful Airports' and has been awarded the 'World Special Prize for an Interior 2023' by the UNESCO's Prix Versailles, the Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL) said on Thursday.

It is the only Indian airport to receive this recognition, said BIAL, which operates the KIA.

Indian Navy deploys second guided-missile destroyer in Gulf of Aden

NEW DELHI, Dec 21 (PTI)

THE Indian Navy has deployed a second frontline ship in the Gulf of Aden to augment its anti-piracy mission, following the hijacking of a Malta-flagged cargo vessel by pirates.

The Navy now has stealth guided-missile destroyer INS Kochi and INS Kolkata in the region, officials said.

The Navy swiftly responded after receiving a call for help from MV Ruen, the Malta-flagged hijacked vessel, on December 14.

Days later, it evacuated one of the 18 crew members onboard the vessel off the coast of Somalia to provide medical care after he was injured by the

pirates.

“In a swift response, Indian Navy’s maritime patrol aircraft deployed to investigate the incident arrived overhead MV Ruen on December 15 and established communication with the crew,” a Navy spokesperson said.

“All 18 crew (no Indians onboard) were reported to be safe in the citadel. Concurrently, in response to the incident, INS Kochi on anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden was also diverted immediately to render assistance,” he said.

The official said INS Kochi intercepted MV Ruen in the early hours of December 16 and launched its integral helicopter to assess the situation.

PARLT NOD

The Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bills will now go to the President for her assent

NEW DELHI, Dec 21 (PTI)

THREE new bills that seek to overhaul the colonial-era criminal laws, making punishments more stringent for crimes such as terrorism, lynching, and offences endangering national security, were approved by Parliament on Thursday.

The Bills were passed in the Rajya Sabha by voice vote. The Lok Sabha had approved these on Wednesday.

The Bills that repeal and replace the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act will usher in a new era in the criminal justice system, Home Minister Amit Shah said while replying to a debate in the Upper House of Parliament.

The Bharatiya Nyaya

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NEW ERA
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Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter Session on Thursday. (PTI)

(Second) Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bills will now go to the President for her assent, upon which these will become laws. Just like in the Lok Sabha, the legislations were

passed in the Rajya Sabha in the absence of most Opposition MPs, who were suspended for unruly behaviour while pressing for a discussion on the December 13 security breach in Parliament.

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5 jawans killed, 2 hurt as terrorists attack Army vehicles in J&K

POONCH/JAMMU, Dec 21 (PTI)

FIVE soldiers were killed and two injured when heavily-armed terrorists ambushed two Army vehicles in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Thursday, officials said. The bodies of two of the slain soldiers were mutilated, they said.

The vehicles carrying the personnel to the site of a cordon-and-search operation came under attack at a blind curve at Dhatyar Morh between Dhera Ki Gali and Bafliaz under the jurisdiction of the Surankote police station around 3.45 pm, according to the officials.

Two former Chief Ministers of Jammu and Kashmir -- Ghulam Nabi Azad and Mehbooba Mufti -- strongly condemned the attack.

The People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF), an offshoot of Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), claimed responsibility for the ambush. Jammu-based defence PRO Lieutenant Colonel Suneel Bartwal said a joint search operation was launched in the general area of Dhera Ki Gali in the Thanamandi-Surankote region on Wednesday night on the basis of "hard intelligence" about the presence of terrorists. As additional forces were moving to the site, the ultras fired upon the Army vehicles -- a truck and a



An Army vehicle after being ambushed by terrorists in Poonch district on Thursday. (PTI)

Maruti Gypsy. The troops swiftly responded to the attack, the defence spokesperson said. In the ongoing operation, five soldiers were killed and two injured, the official said. The injured have been admitted to a hospital.

The operation is in progress and further details are awaited. Disturbing images and videos emerging from the site showed blood on the street,

broken helmets of soldiers and shattered windscreens of the two Army vehicles.

The officials have not ruled out the possibility of the soldiers engaging in hand-to-hand combat with the terrorists during the intense confrontation. They said there was a possibility that the terrorists had walked away with the arms of the targeted soldiers. As the operation continues, authorities are dili-

gently working to gather more information and do away with the threat posed by terrorists in the region.

The ambush came weeks after a major gunfight in the Dharmasal belt of the Bajimaal forest area in nearby Rajouri district that left five Army personnel, including two captains, dead last month.

A top commander of the LeT, Quari, who masterminded several attacks, including the killing of 10 civilians and five Army personnel, and one of his associates were killed in the two-day-long encounter in November. The stretch between Dhera Ki Gali and Bafliaz on the boundary of Rajouri and Poonch districts is densely forested and leads to Chamrer forest and then Bhata Dhurian forest, where five soldiers were killed in an ambush on an Army vehicle on April 20. In May, five more Army personnel were killed and a major-rank officer was injured during an anti-terrorist operation. A foreign terrorist was also killed in the operation. This year, Rajouri, Poonch and Reasi have witnessed a series of encounters that have left 54 people, including 19 security personnel and 28 terrorists, dead so far, the officials said, ascribing the uptick in violence to "desperate attempts from across the border" to revive terrorism in the region.