

# Ladakh nomads hold ground against Chinese military

## Army 'Backs' Them To Venture Deep Into Traditional Grazing Areas

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**New Delhi:** The Indian Army's assertive stand in Ladakh since the fatal border clash in 2020 has emboldened the nomadic tribes to reclaim their traditional winter grazing grounds, leading to incidents of arguments with Chinese troops.

Unlike in the past, graziers are venturing deep into their traditional grazing areas and standing their ground when People's Liberation Army troops enter areas inside India's claim line to push them back. Earlier, it was often the Army that curtailed graziers' movement to avoid confrontation with PLA.

According to a video of such an incident that surfaced on social media, undaunted graziers are seen resisting PLA soldiers who came at them accompanied by light armoured carriers. The incident is reported to have taken place on Jan 2, though TOI could not independently verify it. The incident has been re-



A file photo of army reinforcement in the border areas of Ladakh

**A video surfaced on social media, where undaunted graziers were seen resisting PLA soldiers who came at them accompanied by light armoured carriers. The said incident was reported to have taken place on Jan 2, though TOI could not independently verify it**

ported from Kagjung, an open area stretching into the Chinese territory across the Indus as one travels from Dungi towards Demchok in eastern Ladakh. Geo-mapping enthusiasts have claimed that the Chinese entered one

km into India's claim line.

"No doubt our armed forces are always with civilians, resolving the grazing issues with PLA. It's all because of their support that our nomads could bravely face PLA," Councillor Kon-

chok Stanzin, who represents the Chushul constituency in the Ladakh Hill Council, said on microblogging site X, confirming the incident.

Such incidents have been reported almost every winter since the Galwan clashes. Every time, it was the graziers and villagers who pushed back such interference by uniformed troops, or as locals claim, in civvies. Last year, the Army stepped in when graziers were accosted by PLA in the CNN junction area around Demchok. A video of another such incursion a couple of years back showed the villagers and civil authorities rushing towards the intruders with sticks and pelting stones.

These incidents are frequent in Kagjung and Dumchele areas, especially because of the difference in perception and 'illogical' claim lines drawn through the middle of grazing lands in the area. These areas are important as they are the only source of fodder during winter when livestock give birth.

# 91% rain deficit in NW India in Jan, 2nd highest since 1901

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Northwest India recorded just 3.1 mm of rainfall (91% less than normal) in January, the second lowest since 1901, whereas the country as a whole recorded 58% less than normal rainfall in the month, India Meteorological Department said on Wednesday. However, it predicted the monthly rainfall over the country as a whole during Feb is most likely to be "above normal", extremely crucial for Rabi, and could bring relief to farmers.

On the temperature front, it predicted that most parts of the country are likely to witness above-normal minimum (warmer than normal night) temperatures in Feb while northwest, west central, northeast and parts of east-central India are likely to see above-normal maximum (warmer than normal day) temperatures.

Releasing the monthly rainfall and temperature



Manali covered in an envelop of snow after fresh snowfall on Wednesday

outlook, IMD director general Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said though "normal to above normal" rainfall is likely over most parts of northwest, northeast and central India, most parts of south India is likely to get "below normal rainfall".

"Below-normal cold wave days are expected over parts of central India during Feb," he added. The strong El Nino conditions — abnormal warming of surface waters in the central Pacific Ocean — are likely to weak-

en steadily and turn to ENSO-neutral conditions by the end of the spring season.

Most models indicate a transition to La Nina conditions, considered favourable for the Indian southwest monsoon, around July-Sept, Mohapatra said.

Fog prevailed over Indo-Gangetic plains from Dec 25 to Jan 30 and it was one of the longest spells over the region in recent years. Meteorologists attributed this to fewer western disturbances affecting the region.

# Pressure from Iran & Iraq? Militia behind hits on US forces says halting military ops

In a surprise move, an Iran-linked militia in Iraq that the Pentagon said was likely responsible for a lethal drone attack on a US base in Jordan over the weekend announced on Tuesday that it was suspending military operations in Iraq under pressure from the Iraqi government and from Iran. The announcement came shortly after President Biden said that he had decided how to respond to the attack in Jordan on Sunday, though he did not say what that response would be. His comment raised fears in Iraq about a possibly retaliatory US attack on its territory.

The militia, Kata'ib Hezbollah, or Brigades of the Party of God, is the largest and most established of the Iran-linked groups operating in Iraq. It has spearheaded a majority of the some 160 attacks on US military installations in Iraq and Syria that have occurred since Israel began its ground operations in Gaza.

The US military has about 2,500 troops in Iraq training the Iraqi army and about 900 in Syria, supporting the Kurdish Syrian Defense forces in their fight against the Islamic State.

Kata'ib Hezbollah is part of what is known as the Axis of



Palestinians flee Khan Younis in Gaza

## US navy shoots down Houthi-claimed missile

A US navy destroyer in the Red Sea shot down an anti-ship cruise missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels, the latest attack targeting American forces patrolling the key maritime route, officials said Wednesday. The attack late Tuesday night targeted the USS Gravelly, an Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer, the US military's Central Command said in a statement. "There were no injuries or damage reported," the statement said. A Houthi military spokesperson claimed the attack Wednesday morning. AP

Resistance, a network of Iran-backed groups operating in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and occasionally farther afield. The other two Iraqi groups that are believed to have been

involved in strikes US targets — Harakat al Nujaba and Sayyid Shuhada — have not announced they will halt attacks.

The leader of Kata'ib Hezbollah, Abu Hussein al-Hamidawi, said in a statement: "We announce the suspension of military and security operations against the occupation forces — in order to prevent embarrassment to the Iraqi government." It was the first time that the militia had publicly declared a suspension of operations. The statement made clear that Iran had pressured the group to stop the attacks on US troops. The group made a point of suggesting that it chooses its own targets and timing, rather than following Iran's orders. "Our brothers in the Axis, especially in the Islamic Republic of Iran, they do not know how we conduct our Jihad, and they often object to the escalation against the occupation forces in Iraq and Syria," the statement said.

Asked about Kata'ib Hezbollah's announcement, a US defence department spokesman, Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, said at a Pentagon briefing: "I don't have a specific comment to provide other than actions speak louder than words." NYT

# India, Oman ink pact over ~~defence~~ engagement

NEW DELHI, Jan 31 (PTI)

INDIA and Oman on Wednesday signed an agreement that would provide a framework for collaboration in new areas of defence engagement including procurement of military equipment.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was firmed up at a meeting of India-Oman joint military co-operation committee (JMCC) in Muscat. In the talks, the two sides also carried out a comprehensive review of their defence cooperation and explored ways to boost it in



line with their shared strategic interests.

The two sides specifically focused on possible collaboration in the defence industrial sector at the meeting. The Indian delegation at the talks was led by Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane.

It is learnt that the overall situation in West Asia including

security concerns arising out of targeting of cargo vessels in the Red Sea by Houthi militants figured in the talks.

"Both sides reviewed and appreciated the robust defence cooperation between India and Oman," the Defence Ministry said. It said the meeting delved into many new areas of co-operation such as training, joint exercise, information sharing, oceanography, ship building and MRO (maintenance, repair, and operations) facilities that would build mutual trust and interoperability between militaries of both nations.

"They also exchanged views

on regional and global issues of shared interest. Both sides discussed effective and practical initiatives to further boost bilateral defence engagements with focus on defence industries collaboration," the Ministry said in a statement.

The two sides also inked an MoU pertaining to procurement of defence material and equipment which would provide a framework for defence collaboration in new areas.

The MoU was signed over a month after India and Oman unveiled a joint vision document titled 'A Partnership for the Future'.

# UN delegation visits Israel to assess security situation

TEL AVIV, Jan 31 (ANI/TPS)

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ISRAEL'S ambassador to the United Nations is leading a delegation of UN envoys on a tour of the country for the first time since Hamas' Oct. 7 massacre. Prior to the outbreak of the war, Ambassador Gilad Erdan regularly headed missions of UN ambassadors to Israel, primarily for on-the-ground assessments of the country's security needs.

This time, a delegation of nine ambassadors will visit communities in the Gaza envelope and along the northern border, both of which have been severely affected by attacks from Hamas and Hezbollah, respectively. They'll receive an overview of UNRWA's terror links, and meet with returned hostages, the families of hostages still being held and with Oct. 7 survivors.

# Sultan Ibrahim sworn in as Malaysia's 17th King

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 31 (AP)

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THE billionaire sultan who rules Malaysia's Johor State was sworn in as the nation's new King on Wednesday under a unique rotating monarchy system.



Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar, 65, took his oath of office at the palace and signed the instrument of the proclamation of office in a ceremony witnessed by other royal families, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Cabinet members. A coronation ceremony will be held later.

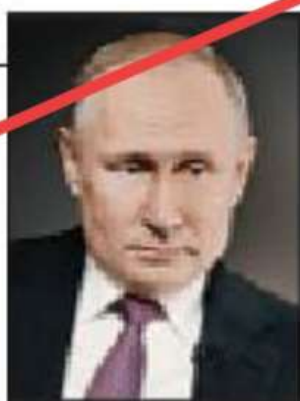
One of the richest men in the country, Sultan Ibrahim has an extensive business empire ranging from real estate to telecoms and power plants. The candid monarch has close ties with Anwar and his rule could bolster Anwar's unity Government, which faces a strong Islamic Opposition.

# Putin vows to make military gains in Ukraine

MOSCOW, Jan 31 (AP)

PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin vowed on Wednesday to push back Ukrainian forces to reduce the threat of attacks on Russian territory as he met with activists running his campaign ahead of the March presidential election that he's all but certain to win.

Asked about plans for the military campaign in Ukraine, Putin said the line of contact needs to be pushed back to "such a distance from our territory that will make it safe from Western-supplied long-range artillery that Ukrainian authorities use for shelling peaceful cities".



**RUSSIA AND UKRAINE SWAP SCORES OF POWS DESPITE TENSIONS OVER A PLANE CRASH LAST WEEK: RUSSIA and Ukraine have exchanged about 200**

prisoners of war each, the countries said Wednesday, despite tensions stemming from last week's crash of a military transport plane that Moscow claimed was carrying Ukrainian POWs and was shot down by Kyiv's forces. After the Jan 24 crash of the Il-76 plane in Russia's Belgorod region near the border with Ukraine, some Russian officials had publicly questioned the possibility of future POW swaps.

# Interim Budget: Measures for economy, select segments to feature in Nirmala's 6th budget

NEW DELHI, Jan 31 (PTI)

FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will on Thursday present the Modi 2.0 Government's last Budget before the general elections, which is likely to contain a mix of measures for the economy and electorally significant segments like farmers and women.

Peppered with political innuendoes, her sixth straight Budget may present a political document with a snapshot of the Modi Government's triumphs over the last 10 years and pointers to how it wants to take the country forward.

With pressure for populist measures off after recent emphatic wins in three States,



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with Ministers of State Pankaj Chaudhary and Bhagwat Karad and her team of officials a day before presentation of the Interim Budget 2024, at her North Block office in New Delhi on Wednesday. (PTI)

she is expected to stick to being fiscally prudent while sprinkling sops on sectors like agri-

culture and engines of the economy that would create jobs and boost consumption.