

Beijing conducts 'combat patrols' in SCS, US holds drills

Beijing: China conducted "combat patrols" Sunday in the South China Sea, its army said, the same day the Philippines, the US, Japan and Australia held their first joint drills in the disputed waters. The maritime activities took place days before US President Joe Biden was due to hold the first trilateral summit with the leaders of the Philippines and Japan, with growing tensions over the hotly contested South China Sea on the agenda.

Beijing's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command said it was organising "joint naval and air combat patrols in the South China Sea". "All military activities that mess up the situation in the South China Sea and create hotspots are under control," it said in a statement, in an apparent swipe at the other drills being held in the waters.

The Philippine military said its drills "demonstrated the participating countries' commitment to strengthen cooperation in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific." AFP

Your embassies not safe after Syria strike, Iran warns Israel

Tel Aviv On High Alert; Netanyahu And His Def Min Say Military Ready For Any Scenario With Tehran

As war touches 6-mth mark, Bibi says Israel one step from victory

Jerusalem: A top Iranian military adviser on Sunday warned Israel that none of its embassies were safe following last week's strike in Damascus blamed on Israel that killed two elite Iranian generals.

Regional tensions threaten to draw West Asia into a wider conflict as Israel's war against Hamas marks six months.

The remarks by General Rahim Safavi, a military adviser to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, signalled that the attack on a diplomatic mission could be met with a similar response. Israel has not directly acknowledged its involvement. Speaking at a ceremony in Tehran for the generals killed in the strike that flattened an Iranian consular building, Safavi said Tehran now viewed confrontation with Israel as a "legitimate and legal right".

Iran's semi-official ISNA news agency published a graphic on Sunday that it said show-



The Iranian embassy in Damascus

cased nine different types of Iranian missiles it says are capable of hitting Israel. The country's army chief said Saturday that Iran's retaliation would be intended to inflict "maximum damage on the enemy".

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu said that Tel Aviv was prepared for any response. "Whoever harms us or plans to harm us, we will harm them." On Sunday, defence minister Yoav Gallant held an "operational situation assessment" with the military, and found the defence establishment to be "ready for any scenario vis-a-vis Iran".

Israel has placed its military on high alert and mobilised additional air defence units. Israeli combat soldiers expecting to go on leave over the weekend were also ordered to remain at their stations. The US is also on high alert for a possible attack by Iran targeting Israeli or US assets in the region. AGENCIES



Palestinians who had taken refuge in Rafah leave the city on Sunday to return to Khan Younis after Israel pulled its ground forces out of the southern Gaza Strip. The withdrawal means troop presence in the territory is at one of the lowest levels since the six-month war began

Israel reduces troops in south Gaza, Egypt to host new truce talks

Israel said on Sunday it had withdrawn more soldiers from southern Gaza, leaving just one brigade, as it and Hamas sent teams to Egypt for fresh talks over a potential ceasefire in the six-month conflict.

Israel has been reducing numbers in Gaza since the start of the year to relieve reservists and is under growing pressure from Washington to improve the humanitarian situation, especially after last week's killing of seven aid workers. The military spokesperson did not give details on reasons for withdrawing soldiers or numbers involved. But defence minister Yoav Gallant said the troops will be preparing for future operations in Gaza. "The forces are exiting and preparing for their next missions," he said at a meeting with military officials, according to a statement from his office, and "also their coming mission in the Rafah area".

Israel says an incursion into the Rafah area, near the border with Egypt, is needed to eliminate Hamas but anxious fore-

ign powers have said it could exact an unacceptable toll on civilians, with more than a million people sheltering there. Israel says it will evacuate civilians before launching an incursion.

Both Israel and Hamas, the group that controls Gaza, confirmed they were sending delegations to Egypt. But PM Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Israel would not bend to foreign pressure and give in to "extreme demands". Hamas says an agreement must secure a complete and comprehensive ceasefire, full withdrawal of forces from areas occupied after Oct 7.

The six-month mark in the war has been met with growing frustration in Israel, where protests have swelled over what some see as govt inaction to help free about 130 remaining hostages, about a quarter of whom Israel says are dead. Hamas-led militants took about 250 captives when they crossed from Gaza into Israel on Oct. 7 and killed 1,200 people. Over 33,100 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli offensive. AGENCIES

Jerusalem: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said Israel was "one step away from victory" in the Gaza war. "But the price we paid is painful and heartbreaking."

He was speaking in a cabinet meeting marking six months of the war that broke out on Oct 7 after an unprecedented attack on Israel by Hamas militants. Though Israel has routed Hamas in much of Gaza, and fighting seems to have slowed, the conflict is being drawn out by Israel's reluctance to either hold ground it has captured or transfer its control to an alternative Palestinian leadership, creating a power vacuum.

By dragging on for so long, the war has become the longest involving Israel since the 1980s. And the ramifications extend far beyond the Gazan border — including increasing domestic pressure on US President Biden, who has continued to supply arms to Israel even as he expresses greater alarm over its actions, and the threat of the violence spilling over into a regional conflict between Israel and Hamas allies, like Iran. AFP & NYT

Houthis target Western ships

Houthi forces in Yemen said on Sunday they had launched rockets and drones at British, US and Israeli ships, the latest in a campaign of attacks on shipping in support of Palestinians in the Gaza war. The Iran-aligned group said it had targeted a British ship and a number of US frigates in the Red Sea, while in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean it had attacked two Israeli vessels heading to Israeli ports. The operations took place during the last 72 hours, spokesperson Yahya Saree said. He did not give further details. Britain and the US have also been launching retaliatory strikes. US forces destroyed a mobile surface-to-air missile system in a Houthi area of Yemen on Saturday, the US Central Command said. REUTERS

Climate change can stoke inflation, stunt growth: RBI

'Frequent Weather Shocks Leading To Higher Food Prices'

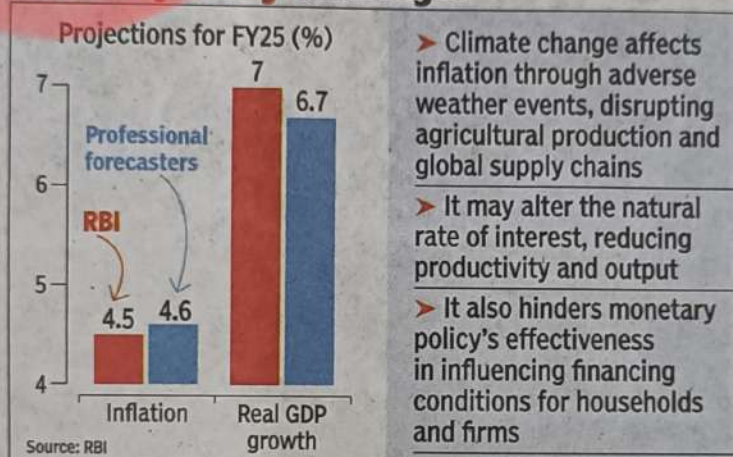
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: RBI has cautioned that frequent shocks to inflation due to climate change can weaken policy transmission and necessitate tighter monetary policy. RBI's monetary policy report noted that climate change can increase inflation and stunt growth.

The report said global average temperatures are rising, with an accompanying increase in extreme weather events, and the economic and social impact is becoming increasingly evident.

It noted three ways in which climate change can impact monetary policy. First, it affects inflation through adverse weather events, disrupting agricultural production and global supply chains. Second, rising tempe-

Monetary Policy Challenges



ratures and extreme weather events may alter the natural rate of interest, reducing productivity and potential output. Third, the aftermath of climate change could hinder the effectiveness of monetary policy in influencing financing conditions for hou-

seholds and firms.

"For these reasons, central banks are increasingly incorporating climate risks explicitly into their modelling frameworks," the report said. If productivity decreases, the natural interest rate may drop. Even if the natural

rate of interest is lower, if inflation rises suddenly, the central bank may need to tighten monetary policy, it said.

The risk of global warming was highlighted by RBI governor Shaktikanta Das in his policy statement as well. "Frequent and overlapping adverse climate shocks pose key upside risks to the outlook on international and domestic food prices," Das had said. At the post-policy press conference, the governor cited IMD's report, which said that in 2024 the hot weather season between April and June will see above-normal maximum temperatures over most parts of the country.

The central bank's observations on climate change risks come when it struggles with persistent hikes in food prices.

Israel embassy security raised after Iran's 'not safe' threat

Security was stepped up around the Israeli embassy in Delhi after a top Iranian military adviser on Sunday warned Israel that none of its embassies was safe following last week's strike in Damascus that was blamed on Israel. Two Iranian generals were killed in the attack. Israel embassy in Delhi has already witnessed two incidents in 2012 and '23 where its embassy or staffers were targets.

Intel agencies have asked local law enforcement units to step up vigil around Jewish establishments, community centres/Chabad Houses in Delhi and Mumbai. Police also ramped up security measures across key transit points in the city, including railway stations and the airport. TNN

GI tags for Miraj's sitars, tanpuras

■ By Sandip Kolhatkar

PUNE, Apr 7 (PTI)

THE sitars and tanpuras of Miraj, a small town in Maharashtra's Sangli district known for its craftsmanship in making musical instruments, have been awarded the coveted Geographical Indication (GI) tags.

These instruments made in Miraj are much in demand among some of the prominent artistes, including those renowned in the field of classical music as well as film industry, the makers claim.

The GI tag denotes the product comes from a particular geographical area, and often enhances its commercial value. The tradition of making sitars and tanpuras in Miraj goes back more than 300 years, with over seven generations of craftsmen having worked towards making these string instruments, the makers say.

On March 30, the Government of India's intellectual property office issued GI tag to the Miraj Musical Instruments Cluster for its sitars and to the Saultune Musical Instrument Producer firm for tanpuras.

The Miraj Musical Instruments Cluster functions as the apex body for both the sitar and tanpura makers in the town, its chairman Mohsin Mirajkar said.

As part of the body, more than 450 craftsmen are engaged in the production of musical instruments, including sitars and tanpuras, he told PTI.



Tanpuras and sitars of Miraj, a small town in Sangli district in Western Maharashtra, known for its sitar making craftsmanship, have been awarded GI tag. (PTI)

The sitars and tanpuras made in Miraj have a high demand, which cannot be met due to the limited resources available locally. Hence instruments from many other parts of the country are often sold under the guise of being Miraj-made, he claimed.

"When we started receiving complaints about such (Contd on page 3)



witnesses significant rise in tourist footfalls

KAZIRANGA, Apr 7 (ANI)

ASSAM'S Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR), which is known as the place with the highest population of one-horned rhinoceros, has experienced a fabulous hike in the number of visitors in 2023-2024.

According to forest officials, Kaziranga Park witnessed the arrival of more than 3.27 lakh tourists during this year, while around 3.15 lakh visited the park during the last financial year 2022-23. Tourist flow is still continuing in the national park and visitors are happy with visiting the park, said the officials.

KNPTR comprises three administrative divisions, viz, the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division,

Bishwanath Wildlife Division and Nagaon Wildlife Division. Tourism in all three divisions has increased, indicating the popularity of non-conventional tourism sites.

According to the data, in 2022-23, a total of 3,10,458 visitors visited the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, 2,610 visitors visited the Nagaon Wildlife Division, and 1,728 visitors visited the Bishwanath Wildlife Division.

In 2023-24, a total of 3,20,961 visitors visited the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, 3,484 visitors visited the Nagaon Wildlife Division and 3,048 visitors visited the Bishwanath Wildlife Division. The park, known for its beautiful landscapes, diverse wildlife and iconic species, is also

a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The key attractions during the tourism season that re-opened post-monsoon in mid-October 2023 were the Jungle Safari and Elephant Safari options.

Added opportunities for a cycling trail in Karbi-Anglong, trekking routes in the Panbari forest range and Chirang added to the attractions.

For nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers alike, Kaziranga offers a plethora of activities, from elephant safaris and jeep rides to birdwatching and nature walks.

New routes under boat safari for dolphin watching and the Panpur and Burachapori jeep and cycling safari circuits were also made operational this year.

Two Indian Navy warships being built in Russia, to be commissioned by year-end

NEW DELHI, Apr 7 (ANI)

TWO Indian Navy warships being built in Russia are likely to be commissioned by the end of this year, after getting delayed due to the Russia-Ukraine war there.

The first warship would be known as INS Tushil, while the other one would be INS Tamal after commissioning.

The stealth frigates are being built as part of the Tushil class warships, which are follow-ons of the six warships of the Talwar class and its follow on frigates.

A team of the Indian Navy, including personnel from the



Chief of Material Directorate, had recently visited the shipyard in Russia, where the frigates are being built and inspected the project, the defence officials told ANI.

The work is now progressing at a good pace and the first warship has also been

launched for sea trials, which are being carried out by the Russian Navy.

The two warships are expected to be commissioned by August and December this year, respectively, they said.

The ongoing conflict in that region created many issues for

the project, including the fitment of the Ukrainian engine on the frigate being built in Russia. Moreover, the workforce from Indian naval shipyards was sent there to fit the engines on the warship, the officials said. The first ship is now undergoing trials in Russian waters and is expected to be ready soon for delivery to the Indian Navy for acceptance trials. Additionally, the Indian team is expected to be there soon. The other two warships of the series being built with Russian support at Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) in India, are also moving ahead.

Pakistan set to repay USD 1 bn against Eurobond

ISLAMABAD, Apr 7 (PTI)

PAKISTAN is set to repay a foreign debt worth USD 1 billion against a 10-year Eurobond maturing in the middle of this month which will reduce stock of debt acquired through the selling of bonds in international markets to below USD 7 billion.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) told 'The Express Tribune' that it was ready to repay the bond anytime and was waiting to receive instructions to do so from Finance Ministry. The move will reduce stock of the debt acquired through selling Eurobonds and Sukuks (bond-like instruments used in Islamic finance).

LS polls

Women SOG team deployed in Jammu

JAMMU, Apr 7 (PTI)

A SMALL contingent of women personnel of the Special Operations Group, a specially-trained counter-insurgency force of the Jammu and Kashmir Police, has been deployed in Jammu ahead of Lok Sabha elections.

Voting for the Jammu parliamentary seat will be held on April 26 in the second phase of elections. The eight-member team, fully equipped with automatic weapons and bullet-proof vests, can be seen carrying out patrolling duties in an

armoured vehicle and conducting searches and vehicle checking in different parts of the city. "The contingent had undergone rigorous training for three months before being deployed on the ground. They are assigned the task of routine motor vehicle checking, area domination and highway patrolling," Superintendent of Police (operations), Kameshwar Puri said.

He said they are being deployed on the directions of the senior officers and the team will augment the strength of the SOG on the ground.