

# Rajnath meets Putin, affirms India will stand by Russia

## Underlines Fine Balance Struck Between West & Russia On Ukraine

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**New Delhi:** India's expansive strategic partnership with Russia was reinforced on Tuesday, with defence minister Rajnath Singh telling President Vladimir Putin that their "friendship is higher than the highest mountain and deeper than the deepest ocean", while the two countries also inked a wide-ranging protocol on defence cooperation in "ongoing and prospective areas".

In his almost-hour-long meeting with Putin at the Kremlin, Singh also stressed that India "has always stood by its Russian friends and will continue to do so in the future", underlining the fine balance India has struck between Russia and the US-led western countries even during the ongoing Ukraine war.

However, there were several concerns raised by the Indian delegation during the 21st India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Military-Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC) meeting, which was co-chaired by Singh and



India-Russia 'friendship is higher than the highest mountain and deeper than the deepest ocean', Rajnath Singh told Putin in Moscow on Tuesday

his Russian counterpart Andrey Belousov.

Sources said New Delhi asked Moscow to speed up deliveries of the two remaining squadrons of the S-400 Triumph air defence missile systems as well as set up a repair and overhaul facility for them in India, while also ensuring timely deliveries, maintenance support and supply of spares for several other weapon systems and platforms, ranging from Sukhoi-30MKI fighters to T-90S

main-battle tanks.

Moscow was also asked to give more transfer of technology to improve the "maintenance and sustenance" of the IAF's existing fleet of 259 Sukhoi jets, the bulk of them produced by HAL under licence from Russia for over \$12 billion.

With Singh asking Russian defence industries to "explore new opportunities" to enhance their participation in 'Make in India' projects, Belousov said the operationalisation of the

military technical cooperation agreement for 2021-31 would give the necessary impetus to such endeavours.

Dubbing the joint production of AK-203 assault rifles at the Korwa ordnance factory in UP a "resounding success", Singh told Belousov that Russia must expand the production of such products in India and explore exporting them to other countries, the sources said.

Russia still remains India's main weapons supplier, accounting for over 36% of its arms imports, though New Delhi has been focussing on enhancing its own domestic defence production. India has also increasingly turned to countries like the US, France and Israel for military hardware and software over the last two decades.

Around 60% of Indian military's inventory is still of Russian-origin, including fighters like Sukhoi-30MKIs and MiG-29s, warships like aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya, Talwar and Teg-class frigates and Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines, AN-32 medium-lift aircraft and Mi-17 helicopters.

# At WTO, India cites fishing subsidy gap, seeks relook

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The massive gap in subsidies to fisherfolk — \$35 (Rs 3,000) per person annually in India, compared with over \$75,000 (over Rs 63 lakh) in some advanced countries, has forced govt to seek a relook at the global trade negotiations and focus on per capita distribution of subsidies instead of aggregate payout.

The current direction of WTO talks, which are seeking to address overfishing concerns by limiting subsidies, are seen to be skewed in favour of European nations, China and Japan. The countries, citing overall subsidy data, are seeking to cap the support in line with the current spend. This will limit the policy space

for countries like India which may in future want to provide incentives. The position submitted in a paper at the trade body in Geneva are based on learnings from agriculture where the terms of trade rules favour rich nations

“Adopting a per capita distribution of subsidies criterion could provide a more accurate and fair basis for managing overfishing and capacity issues, considering both stock sustainability and livelihood concerns,” India has said. It added the annual aggregate level of fishing subsidies can’t be the correct measure as they include beneficial as well as subsistence subsidies linked to livelihood, which do not contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.

# SYRIAN GOVT SERVICES COME TO 'COMPLETE HALT'

## State workers stay home after rebel takeover

DAMASCUS, Dec 10 (AP)

SYRIA'S Prime Minister said on Monday that most Cabinet Ministers were back at work after rebels overthrew President Bashar Assad, but some state workers failed to return to their jobs, and a United Nations official said the country's public sector had come "to a complete and abrupt halt".

Meanwhile, streams of refugees crossed back into Syria from neighbouring countries, hoping for a more peaceful future and looking for relatives who disappeared during Assad's brutal rule. There were already signs of the difficulties ahead for the rebel alliance now in control of much of the country.

(Contd on page 5)



Syrians celebrate at Umayyad Square in Aleppo, Syria, on Monday.

### Thousands scour Syria's most horrific prison but find no sign of their loved ones

DAMASCUS (Syria), Dec 10 (AP)

THEY came from all over Syria, tens of thousands. The first place they rushed to after the fall of their longtime tormentor, former President Bashar Assad, was here: Saydnaya Prison, a place so notorious for its horrors it was long known as "the slaughterhouse."

For the past two days, all have been looking for signs of loved ones who disappeared years or even

decades ago into the secretive, sprawling prison just outside Damascus. But hope gave way to despair Monday. People opened the heavy iron doors lining the hallways to find cells inside empty. With sledgehammers, shovels and drills, men pounded holes in floors and walls, looking for what they believed were secret dungeons, or chasing sounds they thought they heard from underground. They found nothing.

Insurgents freed dozens of people from the Saydnaya military prison on Sunday when Damascus fell.

Damascus was quiet, life slowly returning to normal, though most shops and public institutions were closed

(AP/PTI)

# Coast Guard seizes 2 B'desh trawlers with 78 fishermen

**New Delhi:** The Coast Guard has seized two Bangladeshi trawlers with 78 fishermen, who were engaged in illegal fishing in Indian waters, in what was described as "a significant operation aimed at safeguarding maritime security" by the force.

A Coast Guard ship, on a patrol along the international maritime boundary line (IMBL), spotted the "suspicious activity" of the two trawlers, Laila-2 and Meghna-5, both registered in Bangladesh, within the Indian maritime zone on Monday.

"The trawlers were intercepted and inspected at sea, and then subsequently, booked under the Maritime Zones of India Act, 1981. Both vessels were escorted to Paradip for further investigation," a Coast Guard spokesperson said.

Ever since the ouster of former PM Sheikh Hasina in Aug, the Coast Guard has stepped-up its deployment and surveillance along the IMBL to thwart attempts of "illegal migration" through the sea route.

Enhanced aerial surveillance has also been put in place by Coast Guard aircraft operating from Kolkata and Bhubaneswar to track any infiltration attempt across the IMBL. TNN

# Cyber crimes, climate change new threats to human rights: President

NEW DELHI, Dec 10 (PTI)

THE human rights discourse so far has been centred on the "human agency" as the violator is assumed to be a human but with AI entering our lives, the "culprit could be a non-human" and an intelligent agent, President Droupadi Murmu said on Tuesday.

In her address at an event hosted by the NHRC here to mark the Human Rights Day, the President also underlined that cyber crimes and climate change are "new threats" to human rights.

Human Rights Day is observed on December 10 every year to commemorate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. The UDHR serves as a global benchmark for the protection and promotion of human rights.

"As we progress into the future, we are confronted with emerg-



President Droupadi Murmu being presented a memento by NHRC Acting Chairperson Vijaya Bharathi Sayani during the Human Rights Day 2024 function, in New Delhi on Tuesday. (PTI)

ing challenges. Cyber crimes and climate change are new threats to human rights," Murmu said.

The digital era, while being transformative, had brought with it complex issues such as cyber

bullying, deepfake, privacy concerns and spread of misinformation, she added. "These chal-

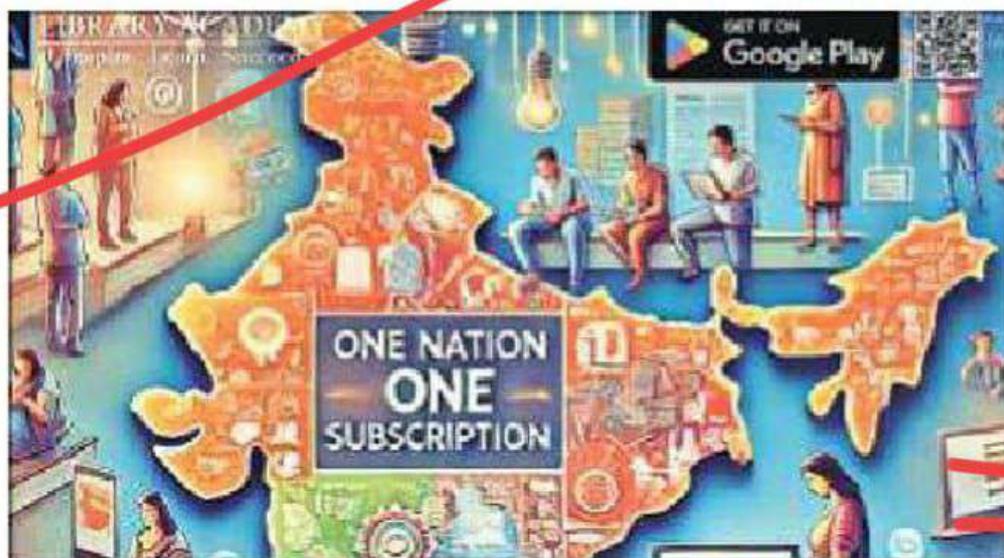
lenges underscore the importance of fostering a safe, secure and equitable digital environment that protect the rights and dignity of every individual," the President said. In her address, she also touched upon the aspect of AI and its impact on human lives.

"Artificial intelligence has now entered our day-to-day life, solving many problems, and creating several new ones too," Murmu said. The human rights discourse so far has been "centred on the human agency", that is the violator is assumed to be a human being, who would have a "range of human emotions such as compassion and guilt," she said.

"With AI, however, the culprit could be a non-human but intelligent agent. I leave the matter for you to ponder over," the President said. The case of climate change too forces us to review the human rights thinking at a global level, she said in her address.

# One Nation, One Subscription to be launched on January 1

Nearly 1.8 crore students from State-funded higher education institutions, including universities and IITs, will have access to research papers published in top journals across the world



NEW DELHI, Dec 10 (PTI)

ABOUT 1.8 crore students from State-funded higher education institutions, including universities and IITs, will have access to research papers published in top journals across the world from January 1 as part of the Government's 'One Nation, One Subscription' initiative.

Addressing a press conference, the Government's Principal Scientific Advisor AK Sood said more than 13,400 international

journals covering science, technology, engineering, medicine, mathematics, management, social sciences and humanities would be made available to researchers under the 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) initiative's first phase.

Under the initiative, 451 State public universities, 4,864 colleges and 172 institutes of national importance will be among the 6,380 higher education and research institutes that will have access to top journals published

by 30 publishers, including Elsevier, Springer Nature, and Wiley. "Earlier, institutions such as IITs or central universities subscribed to a small set of journals related to specific disciplines but, under ONOS, all institutions will have access to 13,400 research journals," said Department of Science and Technology Secretary Abhay Karadikar.

He said the ONOS initiative would be launched on January 1 and access to top journals available for the next three years.

# Israel Says It Destroyed Syria's Navy In Overnight Air Strikes

## Photos Of Port City Of Latakia Show Smoldering Bits Of Ships At Dock

Israel said on Tuesday that it had destroyed Syria's navy in overnight air strikes, as it continued to pound targets in Syria despite warnings that its operations there could ignite new conflict and jeopardise the transition of power to an interim govt. Israel's defence minister, Israel Katz, said that the Israeli military had "destroyed Syria's navy overnight, and with great success." His remarks appeared to confirm Israel's responsibility for the destruction documented in the Syrian port city of Latakia, where photos showed the smoldering remains of ships sunk at their dock.

Katz said that Israel's military "has been operating in Syria in recent days to hit and destroy strategic capabilities that pose a threat to Israel," although he did not indicate what new or immediate risk Syria's navy presented to Israel, which has the most powerful military in West Asia. Israeli warplanes have conducted hundreds of strikes in Syria since the fall of President Bashar al-Assad on Sunday, according to war monitors. Israel has characterised its operations as defensive, saying its military was striking suspected chemical weapons stockpiles in Syria to prevent them from falling "into the hands of extremists." "From here, I warn the rebel leaders in Syria: Those who follow Assad's path will end like Assad," Katz said.

As the Assad govt fell to the rebels, Israeli ground forces advanced beyond the demilitarised zone on the Israel-Syria border, marking their first overt entry into Syrian territory in over 50 years. An Israeli military spokesman on Tuesday denied reports that the military was advancing on Damascus. The spokesman, Avichay Adraee, said the military was inside a buffer zone between Israel and Syria and at other points "in order to protect the Israeli border."

Katz also said Israel has ordered its forces to create a "sterile defence zone" in southern Syria. He gave no details but said the zone, would "prevent the establishment and organisation of terror in Syria".

## HTS RULES IN DAMASCUS, BUT 4 OTHER PLAYERS CONTROL PARTS OF SYRIA

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) seized Damascus on Sunday. President Bashar al-Assad escaped and is now in Russia. But Syria remains fractured — with various players still controlling swathes of the country. Here's a look at the different players and who controls what

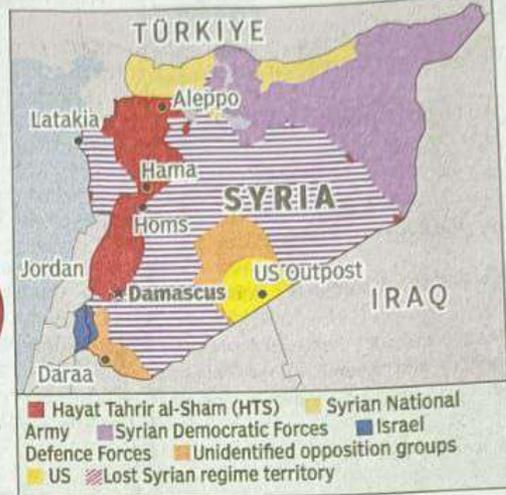
**HTS:** The group started out as an al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, using the name Jabhat al-Nusra, or Nusra Front. It has undergone many name changes over the years, and split not only from the Islamic State (IS) but also from al Qaeda in 2016. It's designated a terror group by the US and Türkiye (though Ankara actively encouraged HTS to rise against Assad this time), but has continued to fight along with mainstream rebel groups against the Assad regime and has backed a quasi administration in Idlib, in northwestern Syria, called the Salvation Govt. The outfit's leader, who for years used the nom de guerre **Abu Mohammed al-Jolani**, has dropped it to use his name Ahmed al-Sharaa.



### Syrian National Army (SNA):

Türkiye has been a key supporter of Syrian rebels over the years. From 2016, it had sent troops into Syria to keep the IS and the Kurdish rebels away from the Syria-Türkiye border. It later helped some of the Syrian rebel groups to come together under the banner of SNA, a rebel outfit which has enjoyed direct support from the Türkiye armed forces. The group, which holds some territory along the Syria-Türkiye border, joined HTS and other rebel groups from the northwest in the offensive against the Assad administration last week, engaging with govt forces and Kurdish-led forces in the northeast.

**Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):** An alliance of the Kurdish, Arab and other groups, supported by US and its allies, SDF was formed following the rise and advance of IS in



Syria. SDF controls most of the Syrian territory east of the Euphrates, including the former IS capital, Raqqa, and some of the country's biggest oil fields. SDF and SDA have been fighting each other around Manbij city. Türkiye regards SDF as a terrorist group.

**Israel Defence Forces (IDF):** Entered buffer zone in Golan Heights for "defensive purposes" on Dec 8.

**United States:** US maintains about 900 troops in Syria, largely split between the At-Tanf base and the country's eastern oil fields. The base sits within a 55 sqkm deconfliction zone near the Syrian border with Jordan, which was established by Russia and the US-led coalition to prevent the two sides from coming into an accidental contact.

Source: Media reports

## Rebels name 'salvation govt' figure interim PM, vow to punish senior officials from Assad govt

**Damascus:** Syria's new interim leader announced Tuesday he was taking charge of the country as caretaker PM with the backing of former rebels who toppled President Bashar al-Assad three days ago.

In a brief address on state television, Mohammed al-Bashir, a figure little known across most of Syria who previously ran an administration in a pocket of the northwest controlled by rebels, said he would lead the interim authority until March 1. "Today we held a cabinet meeting that included a team from the Salvation govt that was working in Idlib and its vicinity, and the govt of the

ousted regime," he said. "The meeting was under the headline of transferring files and institutions to caretake the govt."

Behind him were two flags — the green, black and white flag flown by opponents of Assad, and a white flag with the Islamic oath of faith in black writing, typically flown in Syria by Sunni Islamist fighters.

Meanwhile, Ahmed al-Sharaa, the leader behind the rebel push, has vowed to find and punish senior officials who served in the previous regime. "We will not relent in holding accountable the criminals, murderers, and security and military officers in-

involved in torturing the Syrian people," he said. He gave no details on how the rebels would pursue that course.

In Damascus, banks reopened for the first time in three days. Shops were also opening up again, traffic returned, and cleaners were out sweeping the streets. There was a notable decrease in the number of armed men on the streets. Sources close to the rebels said their command had ordered fighters to withdraw from cities, and for police and internal security forces affiliated with the main rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Shams (HTS) to deploy there. AGENCIES