

# Toll in ferry-Navy craft collision rises to 14

MUMBAI, Dec 19 (PTI)

THE body of a 43-year-old man who was among the two missing passengers after a Navy craft rammed into their ferry off the Mumbai coast, was found on Thursday, police said.

The body was found near the ferry, police said. The death toll in the tragedy has now gone up to 14. Search operation continues to locate a seven-year-old boy who is still missing a day after the tragedy, a police official added.

A naval helicopter and boats of the Navy and Coast Guard were deployed on Thursday to look for the missing passengers. Eight boats, including those from the Navy and Coast Guard are involved in the Search and Rescue (SAR) operation, the official said.

Of the 113 persons on board both the vessels, 13 died on Wednesday and 98, including two injured, were rescued.

There were six persons on board the Navy craft, of which two survived, the official said.

Thirteen persons, including



Security personnel during a search operation for missing people a day after a ferry-Navy craft collision in Mumbai, on Thursday. (PTI)

Navy personnel and two contractual naval employees, were killed when the Navy craft dashed against the passenger ferry 'Neel Kamal', carrying more than 100 passengers from the Gateway of India to the Elephanta Island, on Wednesday afternoon.

**NAVY INSTITUTES 'BOARD OF INQUIRY':** THE Indian Navy on Thursday instituted a 'Board of Inquiry' to probe the collision of a naval boat and a passenger fer-

ry off the Mumbai coast a day earlier which killed 13 persons, including a naval sailor.

The Navy said Search and Rescue (SAR) efforts had continued through the night of December 18 - 19 in the vicinity of the accident.

Two persons from the ferry are still reported to be missing and SAR operations to this end are in progress by eight Navy craft and a naval helicopter aug-

## Ferry was packed beyond capacity: Police

MUMBAI, Dec 19 (PTI)

THE Mumbai police on Thursday said the ferry 'Neel Kamal' that capsized after being hit by a Navy craft off the Gateway of India had a capacity of 90 passengers but had over 100 persons on board.

Thirteen persons, including Navy personnel and two contractual naval employees, were killed in the accident on Wednesday afternoon and 98 were rescued. According to the documents issued by the Maharashtra Maritime Board concerning the boat, it had permission to carry 84 passengers and 6 crew members but the ferry was carrying over a hundred persons, a police official

said. Police have gathered all the documents related to the boat, he said.

A case has been registered against the Navy craft driver at the Colaba police station, the official said. The BNS sections invoked in the FIR included those related to causing death by negligence, actions that endanger the personal safety or life of others, rash or negligent navigation of a vessel and acts of mischief that cause wrongful loss or damage to individuals or the public.

There were two German nationals and one Canadian on board 'Neel Kamal' at the time of the mid-sea collision and they were safely rescued, he said.

mented by a Coast Guard vessel. "A Board of Inquiry has been ordered into the accident to establish the facts of the case," the Navy said.

Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K

Tripathi offered condolences to the grieving families of those who tragically lost their lives in the accident and wished for a speedy and full recovery of those who were injured.

# Nepal to host first-ever international balloon festival

KATHMANDU, Dec 19 (ANI)

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NEPAL will host its first-ever International Balloon Festival next week in the tourism capital of Pokhara in Central Nepal, the organisers said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference, the organisers, Balloon Nepal Pvt Ltd announced the commencement of the International Balloon Festival along the Pame Phant of Pokhara commencing from December 24th, 2024, to January 1st, 2025.

“Taking the adventure tourism in Nepal to a new height, the BYD International Balloon Festival is set to start from 24 December 2024. Marking a milestone in the Himalayan Nation’s adventure tourism-post-pandemic scenario nearly two dozen balloons will soar high over 9 days on the sky of tourism capital,” a press release issued by the organisers read.

As per the organisers, the festival and the flights on the hot air balloon will give a new perspective of Pokhara’s scenic beauty to the attendees.

“A balloon that will take off from the Pame area will offer a panoramic view of the Pokhara Valley, including the majestic snow-capped ranges of Annapurna, Machhapuchhre, and Dhaulagiri. The stunning sunrise and sunset views can be a major attraction for the tourists,” Sabin Maharjan, organiser of the festival briefed the media.

# Forces bust camps of 2 banned militant organisations in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 19 (PTI)

SECURITY forces busted camps of two banned militant organisations while conducting search operations in Manipur's Imphal East district, police said on Thursday. A hideout of the banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) at Makou Pourabi in Imphal East district was busted on Wednesday during which one air gun, one mobile handset and one bulletproof helmet were seized, they said.

Another training camp of the proscribed PREPAK also at Makou Pourabi was destroyed

## Centre reimposes Protected Area Permit in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 19 (PTI)

THE Union Ministry of Home Affairs has reimposed the Protected Area Permit in Manipur in view of security concerns arising out of influx from neighbouring countries, a State Government statement said.

The statement issued late on Wednesday night said, "With

this reimposition, the movement of foreigners visiting Manipur will be closely monitored, and they are required to obtain the necessary Protected Area Permit (PAP) in accordance with the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958.

It said the Centre has reimposed the Protected Area Permit in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram.

on Wednesday during which one INSAS LMG magazine, bayonet, five wooden dummy guns, two walkie-talkie sets, and cartridges were seized.

Police also arrested nine cadres of the banned militant outfit Kangleipak Communist Party (Peoples' War Group) during the last two days for their involvement in extortion activities.

On Wednesday police arrested two members of KCP (PWG) who were involved in extortion activities from Mantripukhri bazar in Imphal East district and recovered demand letters and cash receipt notes of the outfit.

# US sanctions Pakistan's aerospace for proliferation of long-range missiles

WASHINGTON, Dec 19 (PTI)

THE United States on Wednesday slapped sanctions on four Pakistani entities, including the State-owned flagship aerospace and defence agency -- National Development Complex (NDC) -- on charges of them contributing to Pakistan's ballistic missile programme.

In light of the continuing proliferation threat of Pakistan's long-range missile development, the United States is designating four entities for sanctions which targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, the State

Department said.

In addition to the NDC, the three other entities are Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, Affiliates International and Rockside Enterprise. All three are based in Karachi, while the NDC is in Islamabad.

The NDC has worked to acquire items in furtherance of Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme -- including special vehicle chassis intended to be used as launch support equipment for ballistic missiles and missile-testing equipment.

The United States assesses that the NDC is responsible for Pakistan's development of bal-

listic missiles, including the SHAHEEN-series ballistic missiles, the State Department said.

Akhtar and Sons Private Limited has worked for the NDC to supply a range of equipment to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme. Affiliates International has facilitated procurement of missile-applicable items for the NDC and others in support of Pakistan's ballistic-missile programme.

Rockside Enterprise has worked for the NDC to supply a range of equipment to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme, the State Department said.

# After talks, China highlights broader consensus to improve ties

## Both nations share “very much similar gist and elements”

BEIJING, Dec 19 (PTI)

AS NATIONAL Security Advisor Ajit Doval left Beijing after his crucial talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to normalise ties, China on Thursday said that the readouts issued by both countries after the talks shared “very much similar gist and elements” highlighting broader consensus.

Special Representatives for the border question, Wang and Doval, held “substantive talks” and reached a six-point “consensus” on the China-India boundary question in a “positive and constructive attitude,”

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing here while replying to a question on the outcome of talks.

“The two sides’ readouts share very much similar gist and elements,” he said.

After the talks, China said a six-point consensus was reached between the two sides.

Lin said that it is important to channel the two countries’ respective valuable resources into development and revitalisation, make sure that the boundary question is appropriately placed in bilateral relations, jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in border areas, and strive

to bring China-India relations back to a healthy and steady track at an early date.

Doval left Beijing on Thursday. The Special Representatives dialogue was regarded as significant as it was the first structured engagement between the two countries after relations were frozen for over four years due to the military standoff in eastern Ladakh.

Constituted in 2003 to comprehensively address the vexed dispute of the India-China border spanning 3,488 km, Wednesday’s meeting, which was held after a gap of five years, was the 23rd conference between the

two countries.

Commenting on the talks, Long Xingchun, a professor from the School of International Relations at Sichuan International Studies University, said the resumption of the Special Representatives’ meeting sends a signal that both sides are willing and confident to resolve border disputes through peaceful negotiations.

The meeting is beneficial for fostering mutual trust between the two countries and contributes to the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the border regions, Long told Global Times.

# Commerce Ministry may face possible repeat of 2011 trade data error

NEW DELHI, Dec 19 (PTI)

THE Commerce Ministry this time around may witness a repeat of 2011 when a discrepancy of about USD 9 billion was detected in the trade data for the April-November period.

This time, the issue involves suspected errors in calculating gold import figures for November 2024. In 2011, there was over-reporting of export data on account of miss-classifications and double counting due to problems in the computer software, which was getting upgraded. Noticing an unusual surge in the gold imports in November this year, pushing the country's trade deficit to a record, a commerce ministry official on Wednesday said that DGCIS (Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics) has taken up detailed examination of the gold import data and reconciliation would be done with the data received by CBIC (Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs).

The country's gold imports in November reached a record high

of USD 14.86 billion, registering a four-fold increase, mainly on account of festival and wedding demands. The jump in gold imports pushed the trade deficit (the difference between imports and exports) to a record USD 37.84 billion in November.

Trade experts and jewellers have mixed opinions on the matter, with some suspecting a possible error in the data compilation, while others are stating that double-counting is "very" unlikely. The downward correction in import data, if any, would lower the trade deficit figures, they added. "The gold import data in November looks different. It should not be this much high," an official of the gems and jewellery industry said.

However, a trade expert said that it is "very" unlikely that the bill of entry data has been double-counted. Economic think



tank GTRI said there is speculation that some gold imported may have been double-counted. However, gold entering the Indian border through a bill of entry filed at Customs

alone is the country's import, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said, adding that movements within the country, such as for use in SEZs, EOUs (export oriented units), or Gift City, should not qualify as imports and should not be included in total import data. "DGCI&S and CBIC may need to verify if there has been any deviation from this practice. The Government must address these concerns to ensure trust in data integrity," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

A major challenge for economic analysts is the lack of detailed data, he added.

"While India has an excellent system for capturing and sharing trade data at a granular lev-

el, its production data, managed by MOSPI (Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation) or ASI (Annual Survey of Industries), is outdated and cannot be integrated with trade data. This leaves trade negotiators without a clear understanding of domestic production performance for specific products," Srivastava said.

Exports and imports take place mainly from two places-- airports and seaports. SEZ (special economic zones) numbers are counted separately as these zones are treated as foreign entities in terms of provisions related to customs.

All exporters fill shipping bills as per customs rules before a consignment is ready for imports/exports. Export data is collected from that bill as all the details are there. And for imports, there is a bill of entry.

There is a process of online filling of shipping bills/bills of entry through the customs portal. There are various export points in India. Units in SEZ follow the process through their portal integrated with the customs platform.