

Jaishankar to visit Nepal on Jan 4, 5

NEW DELHI, Jan 3 (PTI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will undertake a two-day visit to Nepal beginning on Thursday with an aim to further expand bilateral ties. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Jaishankar will co-chair a meeting of India-Nepal Joint Commission along with his Nepalese counterpart N P Saud.

“External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will visit Kathmandu from January 4 to 5 on the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Nepal, NP Saud for co-chairing the 7th meeting of the India-Nepal Joint Commission,” the MEA said.

Portable desi missile shield trial to begin soon

Eyeing China Row, Similar Russian Systems Being Inducted To Plug Operational Gaps

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New Delhi: India plans to soon begin 'user trials' of its own man-portable air defence missile system, designed to destroy hostile aircraft, drones and helicopters at very short ranges, even as the armed forces are inducting a limited number of similar Russian systems to plug operational gaps in the continuing military confrontation with China in eastern Ladakh.

The very short-range air defence system (VSHORADS), developed by DRDO to neutralise low-altitude aerial threats at ranges up to 6-km, "should be offered for user trials to the armed forces by April-May", a senior defence official told TOI.

"The indigenously-developed 4th generation VSHORADS is technically superior to existing MANPADS (man-portable air defence systems) in the Indian armed

forces because it has a state-of-the-art uncooled imaging infrared seeker," he said.

"The upper range of the VSHORADS has been proven through a series of developmental tests. A few more tests to prove it at ranges less than 1-km, where manoeuvring and controlling the missile becomes critical, are required," he added.

The Rajnath Singh-led defence acquisitions council in January last year had accorded "acceptance of necessity" for procurement of the infrared homing VSHORADS missiles under design and development by DRDO at a cost of Rs 1,920 crore. "Once the VSHORADS successfully completes the user-trials, which will take some time, bulk production can follow," the official said.

Parallely, some Indian companies are pursuing the development of "laser-beam riding VSHORADS" under a "Make-II" cat-



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egory project, where prototype development is funded by the industry.

The armed forces are keeping their fingers crossed. VSHORADS offer a low-cost option that can swiftly be deployed for close air defence protection of crucial

assets in rugged high-altitude areas as well as in the maritime domain. "They have proved their sheer operational versatility and utility during the Russia-Ukraine war," an officer said.

A tri-Service case for procurement of 5,175 VSHORADS and associated equipment was initiated way back in June 2009, which eventually led to the Russian shoulder-fired Igla-S anti-aircraft missile system being selected over the French and Swedish systems in the fray.

But the major project, which was to include an initial off-the-shelf purchase followed by technology transfer to Bharat Dynamics for subsequent production, did not take off.

Consequently, the Army remains critically short of such advanced man-portable air defence missiles despite heightened tensions along the northern borders with China. As a stop-gap measure, the Army and IAF have inked some deals under emergency procurement provisions for a limited number of Igla-S MANPADS over the past three years.

EAM, Ukraine minister discuss peace formula

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Ukraine foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said Wednesday he spoke to his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar and informed him of Russia's recent "escalation of terror and mass air attacks", which caused civilian suffering and destruction. Jaishankar said he had a useful conversation with Kuleba in which they exchanged views on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

In what was his first call of the year, Kuleba said, the two discussed further cooperation on Ukraine's Peace Formula.

"In this regard, I informed my counterpart of Ukraine's vision for the Global Peace Summit of leaders. We agreed to hold the first meeting of the India-Ukraine Inter-Governmental Commission since 2018 in the near future," said the minister, adding that the "re-



The phone conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart came days after Jaishankar paid a five-day visit to Russia during which he held extensive talks with foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and called on President Vladimir Putin

juvenation" of this primary mechanism of bilateral ties will allow us to jointly move forward in a comprehensive manner. There was no read-out of the conversation by the Indian side.

The phone conversation came days after Jaishankar paid a five-day visit to Russia during which he held extensive talks with foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and called on President Vladimir Putin.

"A useful conversation with FM @DmytroKuleb of

Ukraine today. Discussed advancing our bilateral cooperation in the year ahead. Exchanged views on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine," said Jaishankar in a post on X.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had in 2022 put forward a 10-point Peace Plan for ending the conflict that included punishing those responsible for the war crimes, withdrawing all Russian troops from Ukraine, and restoring his country's territorial integrity.

Meghalaya rebels pull out of peace talks

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Guwahati: The proscribed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) of Meghalaya has pulled out of peace talks with the Centre and the state government, citing a deadlock on "fundamental issues" after six months of dialogue.

The outfit's chairman and commander-in-chief, Boby Marwein, and general secretary-cum-publicity secretary Sainkupar Nongtraw

wrote to the Centre's interlocutor A K Mishra on December 31, saying they were "reluctantly withdrawing from the peace talks".

"We have concerns that if these fundamental issues remain unaddressed, our political demands will also be dismissed," states the letter.

The outfit recently issued a death threat to an MLA, Gavin Myllemngap of the governing National People's Party over the cabinet decision to shut down Mawmluh-Cherra

Cements Ltd, a state-run cement company, at Sohra in East Khasi Hills district.

The jolt to the peace process in Meghalaya comes days after neighbouring Assam's pro-talks Ulfa faction inked a tripartite accord with the Centre and the state government, marking a breakthrough after 44 years.

HNLC's general demands, placed before the Centre in 2021, include revoking the tag of "banned" outfit under the Unlawful Activities (Preven-

tion) Act and the withdrawal of all pending cases against its cadre in various courts.

HNLC was first declared a banned organisation in 2000. It was off the list for some years before being outlawed again in 2019 for advocating the secession of Meghalaya from the Indian Union.

The outfit traces its roots to the erstwhile Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC), Meghalaya's first separatist group founded in the mid-1980s.

Maldives, India can solve troops issue through talks

Maldives has over the years turned into a hotbed of geopolitical rivalry, given its strategic location in the Indian Ocean, sitting atop crucial shipping routes. In that context, what sort of foreign policy can one expect your government to follow? If and what are the reasons?

The geographical location of the Maldives makes it quite attractive for external powers to pull the country into their orbit. We have to be vigilant and make realistic assessments. There's very little margin for error — as one small misstep can result in losing the country's cherished values and its independence and sovereignty. Securing the sea lines of communication is as vital to the Maldives, as it is to the wider Indian Ocean region, and global trade and commerce. At the same time, we recognise that the Maldives is too small to get involved in geopolitical rivalry in the Indian Ocean. And we do not want to be pressured into taking sides. My focus, therefore, will be for the Maldives to be contributing to the discussions and discourse about Indian Ocean security with the countries that are taking the lead. Not merely an observer, but an active partner, in upholding the rules-based international order in the region. We need our partners to recognise and respect our interests.

Previous Maldivian governments have committed to an India First policy. What sort of role do you see India playing in terms of your development objectives and maritime cooperation and security?

India is our closest neighbour. That is geographical reality. India is one of our closest friends. We share traditional and cultural roots. That is a historical fact. These realities won't change. The relationship between our two countries is growing at an intensified rate in areas such as trade, commerce, investment and tourism. You would see at the close of 2023, India was the number one tourist-sending destination to the Maldives. As for maritime and security ties, the Maldives and India are connected by sea — we share the same ocean. And in that context, India has been and will continue to play a key role in supporting the Maldives in building the opera-

In an exclusive interview to TOI, his first to an Indian media outlet, Mohamed Muizzu, President of Maldives, tells Sachin Parashar that India not withdrawing its forces from the Indian Ocean archipelago will amount to disregarding the will of the Maldivian people, and will imperil the future of democracy in the country. Excerpts from the interview:



tional readiness of the Maldives National Defence Force. Defence cooperation including in the maritime sector is a long-standing area of cooperation between our countries.

TOI INTERVIEW

Whether it is defence cooperation, or maritime security, or economic or development cooperation, cooperation is based on mutual respect and trust. We respect and trust India, and we are confident that India's relationship with us is also based on the same principles.

You are often described by the international media as a pro-China leader. Will we see a tilt towards China in your foreign policy, similar perhaps to what we saw under Abdulla Yameen when he was the president?

We will not be 'anti' any country. Or 'pro' any country. My government will pursue a 'pro-Maldives' policy. The principle that guides the pro-Maldives policy is protecting and promoting the interests of the Maldives. We will then align it with global public interests in preserving peace and security at global and regional levels, and foster development and prosperity in an inclusive and sustainable fashion. We will strive to increase the country's economic and institutional resilience, helping us play a more credi-

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ble and active role in upholding order in the Indian Ocean.

India is concerned about your insistence on driving out all Indian military personnel. If they go, what happens to Indian assets or platforms like the naval choppers and the aircraft that seem to have played an important role in saving local lives and in facilitating other HADR activities?

In this year's presidential election, Maldivian people have said a very clear 'no' to the idea of foreign military

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personnel being stationed in the Maldives. Right now, it is India that maintains such a presence in the Maldives. To honour this mandate, I have requested India to return the military personnel. I have every reason to believe that India, being the largest democracy in the world, with decades of democratic traditions, will respect the democratic will of the people of Maldives. The presence of foreign military personnel in Maldives, without parliamentary approval, is against the letter and spirit of the Constitution. I have every reason to believe that the bilateral relations that exist between the Maldives and India are sufficiently strong to enable them to solve this issue through diplomatic dialogue. The bilateral relationship between the two countries has sufficient depth to continue the relationship without military personnel being permanently present in the Maldives. I have no doubt that India and indeed any other country that have a stake in the strategic order in the Indian Ocean will recognise and have an interest in respecting the democratic will of the people. If our partners disregard the will of the great majority of the people of the Maldives, the future of democracy in the country will be in peril. I am sure we will not come to this.

The Maldives has also decided to terminate the agreement for hydrographic surveys by the Indian Navy. Why this antipathy for any collaboration with Indian armed forces when other countries have benefited from such cooperation with India?

The government hasn't terminated any agreement. The agreement will expire on a certain date and we have decided not to renew it. The idea and spirit of this agreement is to build the capacity of our national agencies, where none existed, and then transfer that responsibility to our national agency.

In a 1st, Isro arm to use Musk rocket to launch heavy sat

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Bengaluru: In a first, Isro will use the services of an American launcher for launching its over four-tonne heavy satellite. Isro's commercial arm Space PSU NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) will get its 4.7-tonne high-throughput satellite launched by a Falcon-9 rocket of Elon Musk's SpaceX later this year. Till now, India had used the services of France's Arianespace to send its heavy satellites to space as Isro's 'Bahubali' GSLV MK III or LVM-3 rocket has the capability to launch a satellite weighing only up to 4 tonne to the geo orbit.

NSIL plans to launch its second demand-driven com-



The 4.7-tonne satellite which NSIL will launch aims at meeting India's growing broadband connectivity needs

munications satellite, GSAT-20 (renamed GSAT-N2), in the second quarter of 2024. The satellite will be a high-throughput Ka-band satellite aimed at meeting India's growing broadband connectivity needs. NSIL is working with Isro on realis-

ing the GSAT-N2, a cost-effective satellite that will play a significant role in connecting remote and underserved regions of the country. "NSIL will own, operate and fund the 4,700kg satellite, which can provide up to 48Gbps of capacity across 32 beams covering all of India, including Andaman, Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands," the PSU said.

NSIL CMD Radhakrishnan D told TOI: "SpaceX was selected against a request for proposal we had floated last year. There were other bidders too. This marks a new beginning as we launch on a US rocket from their soil. The present agreement is only for this launch and we will look at future requirements as and when we need."

India saw 129 cybercrimes per lakh population in 2023

Delhi Worst-Hit With 755; Next Haryana (381) & T'gana (261)

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Rs 10,319 crore was lost to online frauds between April 2021 and December 31, 2023, although 9-10% of the amount could be saved due to timely intervention, Indian Cyber Coordination Centre (I4C) said

TIMES VIEW: The report drives home the importance of immediately reporting a cybercrime on the helpline: 1930. Prompt action can certainly save your money. Everyone should feed the helpline number into their mobile phones.

spectively issued an ex-parte order for restoration of the money if the owner of the account where the defrauded money is lying does not turn up, the I4C CEO said: "We have had legal consultations in the right forum and created SOPs that are waiting for the last legal vetting".

I4C enables citizens to report crimes through the national cybercrime reporting portal (NCRP). Kumar said the portal has received over 31 lakh complaints so far, 66,000 of which were converted into FIRs. On an average, 5,000 complaints were registered per day, of which 40-50% involve actors from outside the country, particularly China, Cambodia and Myanmar. Kumar said the government is in touch with these countries.

The complaints on NCRP rose by 61% to 15.6 lakh in 2023

from 9.66 lakh in 2022, though the increase was much lower than the 113.7% rise between 2021 and 2022. Cybercrime rate in India (reported cybercrime complaints in NCRP per lakh population) in 2023 was 129, though statewise data shows Delhi leading with a rate of 755, followed by Haryana (381), and Telangana (261).

Customer care, refund-based and KYC expiry frauds constituted 35% of the local-origin frauds, sextortion (mostly originating in Mewat region) 24%, online booking frauds 22%, AePS frauds and biometric cloning 11%, and Android malware 8%, Kumar said. As for frauds with international origin, 38% related to investment and task-based scams, 23% illegal loan apps, 21% gaming frauds and crypto scams, 11% romance scams, and 7% ransomware attacks.

16L bot attacks a minute hit G20 portal as Summit began

New Delhi: Cyberattacks on the dedicated website created by Government of India for the G20 Summit held in September 2023 peaked during the conference with 16 lakh bot attacks witnessed per minute as part of an attempted distributed-denial-of-service (DDoS) attack, according to I4C CEO Rajesh Kumar, reports **Bharti Jain**. However, agencies like the National Informatics Centre and Computer Emergency Response Team were able to secure the portal, he added.

The aim of a DDoS attack is to overwhelm a network by flooding it with superfluous traffic so it can't handle requests from legitimate users.

"The attacks started the moment the website went up months ahead (of the summit). They peaked during the summit. The attackers were trying to do a DDoS attack on the day of the summit. There was a lot of pinging so the website went down," he said.

"When you do a DDoS attack, the attacker creates bots and they act on the attackers' behalf. They send multiple requests that the system can't handle," he said, adding they were treating one DDoS attack involving 16 lakh bots as "one security incident".

New Delhi: A whopping Rs 10,319 crore was lost to online frauds across the country between April 2021 and December 31, 2023, though Rs 1,127 crore, comprising 9-10% of the total defrauded money, could be saved due to timely intervention via the citizen financial cyber fraud reporting and management system (CFCFRMS) and '1930' financial cyber fraud helpline.

Sharing this at a press conference, Indian Cyber Coordination Centre (I4C) CEO Rajesh Kumar said CFCFRMS and the '1930' helpline have benefited 4.3 lakh victims so far. However, acknowledging that many victims face delays in getting the defrauded money back, he said standard operating procedures for timely restoration were being prepared and would be addressed in the next few months.

"This is one aspect to which home minister Amit Shah has asked us to find a solution. So we have consulted the banks," Kumar said, adding that banks were willing to restore the money based on a court order. Citing the Gujarat and Karnataka models where the Lok Adalats and metropolitan magistrate re-

SC: No need to further probe Hindenburg-Adani charges

Court Backs Sebi; Orders Inquiry Into Investors' Loss

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New Delhi: The year-long controversy over Adani group stocks, triggered by short-seller Hindenburg Research's allegation of stock manipula-

FULL COVERAGE: P 17

tion, ended with a whimper on Wednesday as Supreme Court rejected pleas for an SIT or CBI probe, approved market regulator Sebi's investigation and ordered central agencies to probe Hindenburg's role in causing loss to Indian investors.

A bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justi-

ces J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, in a 46-page judgment, disposed of all the PILs on finding that there was no merit in the allegations relating to regulatory failure of Sebi, no substance in the material submitted by the petitioners alleging loopholes in regulatory mechanisms that allo-

wed Adani groups to exploit the stock market to artificially inflate its stock prices, and no illegality in amendments to regulations governing foreign portfolio investments.

Writing the judgment, Justice Chandrachud said, "The facts of this case do not warrant a transfer of investi-

gation from Sebi." The court can transfer a probe to SIT or CBI only in "extraordinary circumstances" when the competent authority shows a "glaring, wilful and deliberate inaction", the bench said. The "threshold for the transfer...has not been demonstrated to exist (in this case)."

UNVERIFIED THIRD-PARTY REPORTS NOT CONCLUSIVE PROOF

> SC says Sebi has completed 22 out of 24 investigations into cases linked to Hindenburg Research's allegations against Adani Group; **2 pending probes to be completed in 3 months**

> **Facts of case 'do not warrant a transfer of investigation from Sebi...'** It should take its investigations to their logical conclusion

> SC sees **no reason to direct Sebi to revoke its amendments to regulations** on Foreign Portfolio Investors and Listing

ADANI GROUP'S

TOTAL MARKET CAP ₹ lakh cr

Jan 24, 2023 The day Hindenburg report was published in the US
19.2

Feb 27, 2023 Lowest since Hindenburg report
6.8

Jan 3, 2024 After SC rejected further investigation into stock manipulation charges
15.1

Obligations and Disclosure Requirements. **No irregularity or illegality in procedure** followed in arriving at the current regulations

> **Reliance on OCCPR report to suggest Sebi was lackadaisical in investigating rejected.** 'Report by a third-party organisation, without any attempt to verify the authenticity of its allegations, cannot be regarded as conclusive proof'

> **Apex court cautions lawyers and members of civil society from filing petitions that lack adequate research and rely on unverified and unrelated material**



—Gautam Adani on X

...TRUTH HAS PREVAILED. SATYAMEVA JAYATE