

## First-ever estimation

# 718 snow leopards in India; 477 of them in Ladakh: Centre

■ Delhi Bureau  
NEW DELHI, Jun 30

INDIA has an estimated 718 snow leopards with Ladakh reporting the maximum number (477) of these magnificent cats, the Union Environment Ministry said on Tuesday.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) carried out the first-ever 'Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India' (SPAI) with the support of all snow leopard range states and two conservation partners -- the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, and WWF-India -- between 2019 and 2023.

Environment Minister Bhupendra Patel Yadav released the report during the National Board for Wildlife meeting held here on Tuesday.

"The SPAI is the first-ever scientific exercise that reports the snow leopard population of 718 in India," the Ministry said.

The exercise systematically covered over 70 per cent of the potential snow leopard range in the country, involving forest and wildlife staff, researchers, volunteers, and contributions from knowledge partners.

The SPAI used a two-step framework and covered approximately 1,20,000 km of crucial snow leopard habitat across the trans-Himalayan region, including Union territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir, and States such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. The first step involved evaluating snow leopard spatial distribution, incorpo-



rating habitat covariates into the analysis, and aligning with the guidelines of the national population assessment of snow leopards in India by the Environment Ministry in 2019. This systematic approach included assessing the spatial distribution through an occupancy-based sampling approach in the potential distribution range.

In the second step, snow leopard abundance was estimated using camera traps in each identified stratified region.

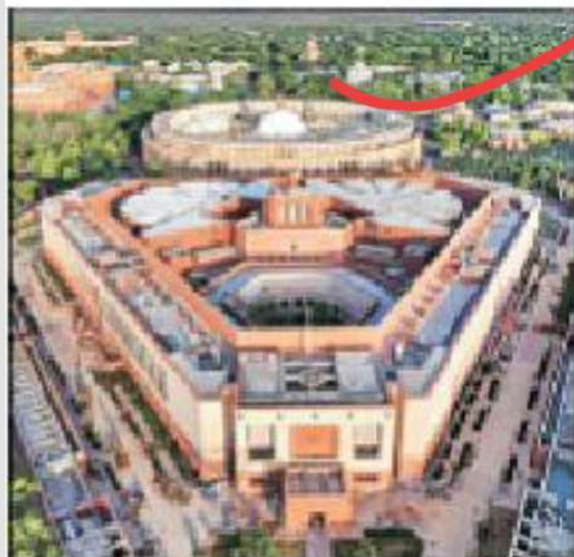
During the SPAI exercise, total efforts included 13,450 km of trails surveyed for recording snow leopard signs and camera traps at 1,971 locations for 180,000 trap nights. Snow leopard occupancy was recorded in 93,392 km<sup>2</sup>, with an estimated pres-

ence in 1,00,841 km<sup>2</sup>. A total of 241 unique snow leopards were photographed. Based on data analysis, Ladakh has an estimated 477 snow leopards, Uttarakhand 124, Himachal Pradesh 51, Arunachal Pradesh 36, Sikkim 21, and Jammu and Kashmir 9.

The snow leopard range in India remained undefined until recent years due to a lack of extensive nationwide assessments for this vulnerable species. Before 2016, approximately one-third of the range (around 1,00,347 km<sup>2</sup>) received minimal research attention. Recent status surveys have significantly increased understanding, providing preliminary information for 80 per cent of the range (about 79,745 km<sup>2</sup>), compared to 56 per cent in 2016.

# Parliament's Budget

## Session begins **TODAY**



NEW DELHI, Jan 30 (PTI)

THE Budget Session of Parliament, the last of the present Lok Sabha, begins on Wednesday with an address by President Droupadi Murmu to a joint sitting, as the Government sought cooperation of opposition parties to ensure the proceedings run smoothly.

All eyes will be on the President's address and the interim budget Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents on February 1, as they are likely to offer a glimpse into the ruling BJP's agenda for the Lok Sabha polls, expected in April-May. Following the customary all-party meeting on the eve of the session, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said the

Government sought the cooperation of all the parties for the short session, even as the main opposition Congress raised issues like the alleged attack on Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra in Assam, the alleged "misuse" of probe agencies and the Manipur situation.

Joshi said the main agenda of the 17th Lok Sabha's brief session, set to conclude on February 9, was the President's Address, the presentation of the Interim Budget and the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address with a reply by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Congress leader K Suresh said the party would raise the issue of unemployment, high inflation, agrarian distress, and the situation in ethnic violence-hit Manipur during the session. Trinamool Congress leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay said the finance minister should include the pending dues to West Bengal on account of various central schemes in the Interim Budget.

"It is unfortunate that a chief minister has to sit on a dharna to demand timely allocation of central dues to the state," he said.



# Philippines, Vietnam to cooperate on disputed South China Sea

HANOI (Vietnam), Jan 31 (AP)

THE Philippines and Vietnam signed an agreement on Tuesday on preventing and managing incidents in the disputed South China Sea during Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's visit to Hanoi.

Several countries, including the Philippines and Vietnam, are locked in maritime disputes with China over its claims of sovereignty over virtually the entire South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping, and high-seas face offs between Chinese and Philippine ships have intensified over the past year

in the contested waters, fuelling fears of a wider conflict.

The Philippines and Vietnam agreed on Tuesday to increase coordination on maritime issues and work to promote trust and confidence.

"Vietnam remains the sole strategic partner of the Philippines in the ASEAN region," Marcos said during a meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart, Vo Van Thuong, referring to the regional grouping of South-east Asian nations.

He added that while maritime cooperation was the "foundation" for this partnership, relations between the two nations had expanded.

The two countries also signed a deal on Tuesday for Vietnam to supply the Philippines with 1.5 million to 2 million metric tons (1.6 to 2.2 million US tons) of rice each year at affordable prices.

Vietnamese rice accounts for 85 per cent of imported rice in the Philippines and the two countries agreed to create a framework for ensuring stable supplies. A rice shortage last year, exacerbated by climate change and some major producers halting exports, resulted in prices soaring globally including in the Philippines.

Marcos arrived in Hanoi on Monday.

# Baloch freedom fighters launch 3 coordinated attacks on Mach jail

- Militants fire 15 rockets at jail, enter railway station
- 5 militants, 2 cops killed in encounter

KARACHI, Jan 30 (PTI)

**AT LEAST** five terrorists of a banned group were killed when Pakistani security forces thwarted at least three coordinated attacks with rockets and sophisticated weapons by mil-

itants on a high-security jail in the country's restive Balochistan province, authorities said on Tuesday.

A senior police official said at least 15 rockets were fired at the Central Mach Jail on Monday night where some dangerous militants and death row prisoners have been incarcerated.

Balochistan's caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai said the Pakistan Army and Frontier Constabulary Balochistan act-

ed swiftly to thwart the attacks during the night.

"Five militants of the Balochistan Liberation Army were killed by security forces during the attack," he said.

"They fired rockets at the Mach jail building but couldn't hit the target," he added.

Unconfirmed reports said at least two policemen were killed while a truck driver was injured in the attack but there was no official confirmation of casualties or injuries.

*(Contd on page 5)*



# Muizzu govt approaches SC over revision of rules that enable oppn to impeach prez

**Male:** Even as the main opposition announced its plan to impeach Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, the government has approached the Supreme Court over the recent amendment to parliament's standing orders which makes the process of impeachment easier, according to media reports on Tuesday. Attorney general Ahmed Usham told Sun.com that his office "filed the case with the SC on Sunday but the court is yet to register the case."

The main opposition MDP on Monday stalled approval of three members of Muizzu's cabinet. Soon after, the MDP announced that it planned to submit a motion to impeach Muizzu. The whole row about the three ministers started after seven lawmakers resigned from parliament in Nov to assume top positions in Muizzu's administration. "But the Elec-

## 'Muizzu should apologise for India remarks'

Gasuim Ibrahim, leader of the Jumhoori Party, has urged Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu to formally apologise to India and PM Narendra Modi and seek "diplomatic reconciliation" to mend bilateral relations. Gasuim's demand referred to remarks by Muizzu - regarded as pro-China - earlier in the month referring to India as a bully without naming the country. Amid a diplomatic row with India over derogatory social media posts by three of his ministers against PM Modi, Muizzu on Jan 13 said, "We may be small but this doesn't give them the license to bully us." Gasuim attributed those unwarranted remarks to former President Abdulla Yameen, who initiated the "India Out" campaign leading to tensions. PTI

tions Commission decided against holding by-polls for those seats as the parliamentary elections are scheduled for this year," the Sun.mv reported. Taking advantage, MDP amended parliament's standing orders so that vacated seats aren't counted when determining the total number of MPs, it said.

Therefore, parliament currently requires 54 votes to impeach Muizzu, instead of the pre-

vious 58, as, according to the amendment to the standing orders, the total number of MPs is now 80, instead of 87. Last week, the MDP announced an alliance with Democrats "to hold the government accountable". "The MDP and Democrats now have 56 MPs between them; 43 from MDP, and 13 from Democrats. They therefore, have the numbers to impeach the president," Sun.com said. PTI



# Navy rescues hijacked vessel with 19 Pak crew members

## Helps Seychelles, Lanka Intercept Another Commandeered Trawler

Rajat Pandit | TNN

**New Delhi:** Indian warship INS Sumitra rescued hijacked Iranian-flagged fishing vessel Al Naeemi with 19-member Pakistani crew off the east coast of Somalia late on Monday night, thwarting the second such piracy within 36 hours. Navy also helped Seychelles and Sri Lanka intercept a third hijacked vessel in the region.

Referring to the Navy's swift action in rescuing several merchant vessels hijacked by pirates or hit by drone attacks in recent days, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said India's "greater capability, our own interest and reputation today warrant that we actually help in difficult situations" in the region.

"We will not be considered a responsible country if bad things happen around our neighbourhood and we say I



INS Sumitra rescued hijacked Iranian-flagged fishing vessel Al Naeemi with Pakistani crew members off east coast of Somalia on Monday

have got nothing to do with this... People look at us much more warmly and friendly as a result of what we do now," Jaishankar said in Mumbai on Tuesday.

India has independently deployed an unprecedented 10-12 frontline warships in Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden, amid the escalating attacks by Houthi rebels of Yemen and Somali pirates that have disrupted mari-

time trade between Europe and Asia over the last few months, as was first reported by TOI.

INS Sumita, a 2,200-tonne offshore patrol vessel deployed for anti-piracy operations in Gulf of Aden, had intercepted hijacked Iranian-flagged fishing vessel Iman and ensured safe release of her 17-member Iranian crew late on Sunday.

This action on high seas

had just about finished when INS Sumitra responded to yet another distress call, from Al Naeemi. Intercepting the vessel, the warship through "coercive posturing" and deployment of her helicopter and boats with marine commandos "compelled safe release of the crew and ship", Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

"INS Sumitra rescued two hijacked fishing vessels and 36 crew (17 Iranian and 19 Pakistani) within 36 hours in the southern Arabian Sea," Commander Madhwal said.

In the third incident, Navy collaborated with the Seychelles Defence Forces and Sri Lanka Navy in the successful interception and rescue of hijacked Sri Lankan-flagged fishing trawler Lorenzo Putha-04 and her six-member crew around 955 nautical miles east of Mogadishu on Monday.



# IMF raises India's growth forecast to 6.7% for FY24

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The IMF has raised its growth projections for India to 6.5% for the next financial year and 6.7% for the current fiscal year ending March, which are lower than government's projections. India is expected to remain the fastest growing major economy, according to the latest World Economic Outlook.

"India is one of the emerging market economies that is doing better... The upward revision is on account of strong growth, driven by a spending push. The difference (with the government estimate) is on account of second half growth slowdown," IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said. The WEO said that growth re-

## LEADING THE PACK

	GDP growth forecast in %	
	2024	2025
India*	6.7	6.5
US	2.5	2.1
Euro area	0.5	0.9
China	5.2	4.6
Brazil	3.1	1.7
Russia	3.0	2.6

\* FY24 and FY25 for India  
Source: IMF WEO

flected the resilience in domestic demand.

The official advance estimates for current fiscal year peg GDP growth at 7.3%, with the finance ministry projecting over 7% expansion next year. The IMF had originally estimated GDP growth for current fiscal at 6% and revised it up-

wards to 6.3% in October before the latest update.

Forecast for the global economy is also better than earlier, with growth projected at 3.1% in 2024, 0.2 percentage point higher than October due to more resilience in the US and several developing countries, as well as fiscal support in China.

"The clouds are beginning to part. The global economy begins the final descent towards a soft landing, with inflation declining steadily and growth holding up. But the pace of expansion remains slow, and turbulence may lie ahead," IMF chief economist wrote in a blog.

IMF cautioned central banks against premature easing, amid signs that inflation was moderating in several countries.



# Singh: India, US key to rules-based int'l order

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Stronger India-US cooperation will act as a force-multiplier for the rules-based world order across the globe, defence minister **Rajnath Singh** said on Tuesday, in the backdrop of China's strong-arm expansionist tactics in the Indo-Pacific region.

Terming India and the US as "natural partners" who must move forward together in strategic and business sectors amid the current global geopolitical scenario, Singh said, "India and the US support a free, open and rules-based international order."

"Due to this, there is a lot of alignment in our strategic interests. Besides, our economic rela-

tionship is a win-win proposition for both the countries. The current relationship is driven by twin congruences of shared values and aligned interests, which is a guarantee for long sustainability and robustness of the ties," he said at a conference held by Indo-American Chamber of Commerce conference.



Our government has laid the groundwork for a strong and self-reliant 'New India',

and investments by the US can play a vital role in realising PM Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat', Singh said.

He said our Aatmanirbhartta policy does not mean cutting off from the global system, but is based on collaboration with friendly countries for shared security and prosperity.