

N-W India braces for rains, storms this weekend: IMD

NEW DELHI, Apr 11 (PTI)

A SPELL of moderate rainfall is expected over the mountains and the plains of north-west India this weekend due to two back-to-back western disturbances and high moisture incursion from the Arabian Sea, the IMD said on Thursday.

States and UTs, including J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and north-west Uttar Pradesh, could also experience

thunderstorms, lightning strikes, hailstorms, and gusty winds between April 13 and 15.

“An intense western disturbance as a cyclonic circulation lies over west Iran in middle and upper tropospheric westerlies, and another one in middle tropospheric westerlies runs along longitude 72 degrees east to the north of latitude 32 degrees north. High moisture feeding from the Arabian Sea into north-west India is likely during April 13-15,” the IMD said.

China sanctions 2 US defence cos

BEIJING, Apr 11 (AP)

CHINA on Thursday announced rare sanctions against two US defence companies over what it said is their support for arms sales to Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy Beijing claims as its own territory to be recovered by force if necessary.

The announcement freezes the assets of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems and General Dynamics Land Systems held within China. It also bars the companies' man-

agement from entering the country. Filings show General Dynamics operates a half-dozen Gulfstream and jet aviation services operations in China, which remains heavily reliant on foreign aerospace technology even as it attempts to build its own presence in the field. The company helps make the Abrams tank being purchased by Taiwan to replace outdated armour intended to deter or resist an invasion from China.

General Atomics produces the Predator and Reaper drones

used by the US military.

Chinese authorities did not go into details on the company's alleged involvement with supplying arms to Taiwan.

Beijing has long threatened such sanctions, but has rarely issued them as its economy reels from the COVID-19 pandemic, high unemployment and a sharp decline in foreign investment. "The continued US arms sales to China's Taiwan region seriously violate the one-China principle," China's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

ADB raises India's GDP growth **FORECAST** for FY25 to 7%; to remain major growth engine in APAC region

NEW DELHI, Apr 11 (PTI)

THE Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Thursday raised India's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7 per cent, from 6.7 per cent earlier, saying the robust growth will be driven by public and private sector investment and improvement in consumer demand.

In its April edition of the Asian Development Outlook, ADB said India would remain "a major growth engine" in the Asia and Pacific region.

For the 2025-26 fiscal, ADB has projected India's growth at 7.2 per cent. Growth will be robust despite moderating in FY2024 and FY2025, it said.

The growth estimates for the current fiscal is lower than 7.6 per cent estimated GDP expansion in 2022-23 fiscal. Strong investment drove GDP growth



in the 2022-23 fiscal as consumption was muted, ADB said.

The Manila-based multilateral institution in December last year projected the Indian economy to expand by 6.7 per cent in the 2024-25 fiscal.

"The economy grew robustly in fiscal 2023 with strong momentum in manufacturing and services. It will continue to grow rapidly over the forecast horizon. Growth will be driven primarily by robust investment demand and improving consumption demand. Inflation will contin-

ue its downward trend in tandem with global trends," said the Asian Development Outlook.

ADB's growth forecast for the current fiscal is in line with the projections made by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The RBI last week had said GDP growth in the current fiscal is projected at 7 per cent on expectations of normal monsoon, moderating inflationary pressures and sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sectors.

The triggers for growth in FY2024 will come from higher capital expenditure on infrastructure development both by Central and State governments, rise in private corporate investment, strong service sector performance and improved consumer confidence.

Growth momentum will pick up in FY2025.

CHINA'S MISCHIEF IN ARUNACHAL

BY LT GENERAL
M K DAS

ON MARCH 30, 2024, China continued its absurd tactics of renaming 30 county administrative centres, villages, townships, mountain peaks and rivers/lakes in Arunachal Pradesh in Tibetan or Chinese characters. China refers to Arunachal Pradesh as Southern Tibet and calls it 'Zangan'. China has done such renaming exercise in Arunachal Pradesh earlier too, that is in the years 2017, 2021 and 2023. China also issues maps of Arunachal Pradesh with the new names so as to bolster its claim over the state.

Located in the India's North East, Arunachal Pradesh is the largest State in terms of area of the seven sisters which make the North East Region (NER) but has the least population density in the country. Earlier it formed part of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and it became a full-fledged State in February 1987. It borders Bhutan in the west, Myanmar in the east and States of Assam and Nagaland to its south. The strategic importance of Arunachal Pradesh lies in the fact that it shares 1129 kms of boundary with China's Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) demarcated by the McMahon Line during British India in 1914 and now disputed by China. Therefore, this boundary is called Line of Actual Control (LAC). The entire LAC with China is 3488 km long, stretching from Aksai Chin in the West to Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. It may be noted that China still controls 15,500 sq km of Indian territory in Aksai Chin of Ladakh, which it captured after 1962 war.

China continues to irritate India on its claims over Arunachal Pradesh. Right after granting asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959, followed by 1962 war and India's struggle with economy coupled with not-so-great diplomacy led to some altercation with China from time to time. The 1967 stand-off between two armies at Nathu La in Sikkim was followed by Sumdorong Chu stand-off in Arunachal Pradesh in 1987. It was followed by 72-day stand-off at Doka La on India-China-Bhutan trijunction in 2017.

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The relations between India and China have followed a different trajectory after the violent Galwan clash of June 15-16, 2020 in Eastern Ladakh and still uneasy peace prevails in the region after massive build-up of troops and creation of infrastructure on both sides.

So, what is the real interest of China in Arunachal? One reason is the importance of Tawang monastery which is the second largest monastery of Tibetan Buddhism in the world. The second is its bigger interest in the disputed Aksai Chin from where it is building a highway, close to the LAC to connect Xinjiang to Tibet which would facilitate troops and logistics build-up. One factor which is generally not mentioned is huge water and mineral resources including hydrocarbons available in plenty in Arunachal Pradesh. Ultimately the State is a great bargaining chip for China while discussing the border dispute with India.

But what about India's historical linkage with the region? It is here that poor chronicling of Indian history hurts our rightful claims. It is believed that Arunachal finds mention in the Mahabharat and the Kalika Puran. During the British rule, it was part of Assam, the mother State of India's North East. After Independence, it was called NEFA and directly ruled by the MEA till it became a Union Territory in 1972, followed by grant of Statehood in 1987. The State of Arunachal has close historical and cultural linkage with Assam and Nagaland. On the contrary, the LAC is located in the rugged and inhospitable terrain and there is not much connectivity with the TAR. I feel that the young students, particularly from Arunachal must research the history with right earnest to document our ancient linkage with the State and the region.

The regular irritants from China are stapled visas to the residents of Arunachal and regularly raising the bogey of any VIP visit including the inauguration of Sela tunnel by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on

March 9, 2024. Now that Lok Sabha elections are round the corner, China once again will object to any legitimate democratic activity in the State. With due regard, one did not find much support to Indian cause from the revered Dalai Lama as far as the recent controversy is concerned.

The latest input is about China's plan to develop 175 more villages opposite the LAC in Arunachal Pradesh. These settlements would further enhance military preparedness of China by acting as border security villages. But most discomforting is the news from Microsoft that China plans to meddle in the forthcoming elections in India by swaying public opinion through false narratives created by artificial intelligence. It would be interesting how the government copes up with the latest challenge.

India has responded to the cartographic and other adversarial activities of China much better. The development of infrastructure and connectivity in the region is much better. A large number of projects are ongoing to further improve the border villages through the pet scheme called First Village. Mana in Uttarakhand was officially designated as the first village of the country by the Prime Minister in October 2022 and he stated that every border village should be the first village and not the last village of the country. Militarily, India is much stronger in terms of permanent deployment of troops but we have to match up with China's huge arsenal quickly.

As competing economies and rivals in the region, India and China would inevitably clash with each other. The growing rise of India as a likely superpower by 2047 will face China's challenge in one way or another. In the physical and kinetic domain, not much may happen in the immediate future but in other unseen spheres, we are likely to witness much more intervention from China. Our collective might as a nation would be needed to thwart the notorious designs of China.

*(The author is retired Lt General, PVSM, SM**, VSM)*

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Essar Power **APPOINTS** Ankur Kumar as CEO of Renewables Division

NEW DELHI, Apr 11 (PTI)

ESSAR Power on Thursday



announced the appointment of Ankur Kumar as the Chief Executive Officer of its Renewables

Division. Ankur will play a key role in advancing Essar's commitment to transitioning into green energy and establishing a robust renewable ecosystem in India, a company statement said.

With over 24 years of experience in renewable energy and public infrastructure sectors, Kumar brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role, the statement said. Previously serving as the CEO at ACME Solar Holdings Pvt. Ltd, Ankur spearheaded the strategic expansion of the com-

pany into green hydrogen & ammonia businesses, while also enhancing their geographical footprint.

Commenting on the appointment, Prashant Ruia, Director, Essar Capital said, "Essar is aggressively pursuing its vision of transforming sector landscapes to green. With Ankur Kumar joining us, we hope to further our plans in renewables. His wealth of experience and demonstrated leadership will help drive Essar Power towards a more sustainable future."

Essar Power has a power generating capacity of 1,285 MW across three plants, in India and Canada. Essar has invested about USD 4.2 billion in the power portfolio, which includes USD 1.5 billion of equity. Essar Power has planned to foray into the renewable sector with a major focus on PV solar, battery storage, electric vehicle, , integrated water and power projects.

LeT terrorist killed in encounter in Pulwama



Security personnel stand guard after an encounter between security forces and terrorists in Pulwama on Thursday. (ANI)

SRINAGAR, Apr 11 (PTI)

ALASHKAR-E-TOIBA (LeT) terrorist was killed in an encounter with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district on Thursday, police said. This was the first encounter between terrorists and security forces in Jammu and Kashmir in more than three months.

The security forces had launched a cordon-and-search operation in Fressipora village in the Rajpora area of the south Kashmir district following inputs about the presence of terrorists there, a police spokesperson said.

He said the search operation turned into an encounter after the terrorists opened fire on the forces, who retaliated.

In the ensuing encounter, a terrorist was killed, the police spokesperson said.

The slain ultra was identified as Danish Sheikh, a resident of Srinagar. He was affiliated with the proscribed TRF, the spokesperson added.

TRF or The Resistance Front is an offshoot of the LeT.

According to the police spokesperson, arms, ammunition and incriminating materials were found from the site of the encounter.

Adani converts airstrip with no ATC to renewable energy park w of Paris

KHAVDA, Apr 11 (PTI)

A NARROW airstrip that doesn't even have an Air Traffic Controller (ATC) to guide incoming airplanes and whose only infrastructure is a portable toilet and a make-shift office in a container in the midst of miles of barren land bordering Pakistan is an unlikely gateway to the world's largest renewable energy park.

Khavda at its peak will generate 81 billion units that can power entire nations such as Belgium, Chile and Switzerland, executives said.

The airstrip was even smaller in December 2022, when Adani group head Gautam Adani, who was then the second richest person in the world, first used a small aircraft to reach the barren area that didn't even have a pincode and got its name from a village 80-kilometers away.

The land hardly had any vegetation due to its highly saline soil, leave alone any habita-



tion. But the area with second best solar radiation in the country after Ladakh and wind speeds five times of plains, served as an idle location for a renewable energy park.

An 18-km drive from the airstrip through dusty arid land is the site for his group's Khavda renewable energy park spread over 538 square kilometers (roughly five times the size of Paris). When Adani first landed at Khavda, he joked if anyone could even find a mosquito in the area, his executives said. But since then, his group has not just laid solar panels that will convert sun rays into electricity and wind mills to

harness wind blowing at the speed of 8 meters per second, but also built colonies for workers, put up desalination plants to make saline water pumped out of 700 meters below ground portable and utilities such as mobile phone repair shops.

Adani Green Energy Ltd, India's largest renewable energy company, will invest about Rs 1.5 lakh crore to generate 30 megawatts of clean electricity at Khavda in Gujarat's Kutch, it's Managing Director Vneet Jaain said. "We have just now commissioned 2,000 MW (2 GW) of capacity at Khavda and plan to add 4 GW in the current fiscal (financial year end-

ing March 2025) and 5 GW every year thereafter," he said.

Air traffic controller or ATC at Bhuj, some 160-km away, is the last guide post for airplanes going to Khavda. But its reach is only till 'Tent City' and pilots are virtually on their own for the last leg of 80-km or so including landing.

The outer flange of the energy park is just one km from the International Border with Pakistan. The one-km buffer is manned by BSF.

Executives said the airstrip was built in just 35 days in an area where even tractors had to be modified so they could operate in land that doesn't easily absorb water.

The area has its own set of challenges - heavy dust storms during March to June, no communication and transport infrastructure, nearest habitable area being 80-km away, water not seeping under soil during rainy season, even ground water being saline and it being a restricted zone.

India, US to reactivate observation system for Indian Ocean

NEW DELHI, Apr 11
(PTI)

INDIA and the US have decided to reactivate the Indian Ocean Observing System (IndOOS), a network of 36 moored buoys in the high seas to collect high-resolution ocean and atmospheric data for weather forecasts.



The IndOOS array of buoys fell into neglect and disrepair during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to gaps in observational data considered crucial by weather forecasters, particularly since the links between the Indian Ocean Dipole phenomenon and monsoon were established. The reactivation of IndOOS was discussed last month during a meeting of Earth Sciences Secretary M Ravichandran with Rick Spinrad, Administrator of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the US. The moored buoys are part

(Contd on page 5)

ELECTORAL BONDS SBI refuses to disclose details under RTI Act

■ SBI claimed that it is personal information held in a fiduciary capacity

NEW DELHI, Apr 11 (PTI)

THE State Bank of India (SBI) has refused to disclose under the RTI Act the details of the electoral bonds furnished to the Election Commission (EC), claiming that it is personal information held in a fiduciary capacity, even though the records are in the public domain on the poll panel's website.

Holding that the electoral bonds scheme was "unconstitutional and manifestly arbitrary", the Supreme Court directed the SBI on February 15 to furnish the complete details of the bonds purchased since



April 12, 2019 to the EC, which would publish the information on its website by March 13.

On March 11, the court dismissed the SBI's petition seeking an extension of the deadline and ordered it to disclose the details of the electoral bonds to the EC by the close of business hours on March 12.

RTI activist Commodore

Lokesh Batra (retired) approached the SBI on March 13 seeking the complete data of the electoral bonds in the digital form, as provided to the EC after the Supreme Court's order.

The bank denied the information citing two exemption clauses given under the Right to Information (RTI) Act -- section 8(1)(e) that is related to

records held in a fiduciary capacity and section 8(1)(j) that allows withholding personal information.

"Information sought by you is containing details of purchasers and political parties and hence, cannot be disclosed as it is held in fiduciary capacity disclosure of which is exempted under sections 8(1)(e) and (j) of the RTI Act," the response furnished by the central public information officer and deputy general manager of the SBI said on Wednesday. Batra had also sought the details of the fees paid by the SBI to senior advocate Harish Salve to defend its case against the disclosure of the electoral bonds' records, citing that the records are held in a fiduciary capacity and the information is personal in nature.

(Contd on page 5)

India, Mauritius tighten scrutiny on investments

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: India and Mauritius have signed a protocol to amend the double taxation avoidance agreement (DTAA), which included a principal purpose test (PPT) to decide whether a foreign investor is eligible to claim treaty benefits.

The introduction of PPT could result in more scrutiny of investments, with experts suggesting that authorities will test if obtaining tax benefits under the treaty was one of the main objectives of routing investments via the African nation.

"The introduction of the PPT aims to curtail tax avoidance by ensuring that treaty benefits are only granted for transactions with a bona fide purpose. However, application of PPT to grandfathered investments remains

ambiguous, highlighting the need for explicit guidance from the CBDT. Furthermore, omission of the phrase "for encouragement of mutual trade and investment" in the treaty's preamble suggests a shift in focus towards preventing tax evasion over promoting bilateral investment flows," said Rakesh Nangia, chairman of Nangia Andersen India.

In Feb, the Mauritius govt had agreed to amend the tax treaty with India to comply with OECD norms and amendments were signed last week.

In past there were several "post box" entities, which operated out of Mauritius only to take treaty benefits. Now, such companies are likely to face the test as the preamble itself makes it clear that instead of "encouragement of mutual trade and

investment", now the idea is to there are no "opportunities for non-taxation or reduced taxation or avoidance (including through treaty shopping arrangements aimed at obtaining reliefs in this Convention for the indirect benefit of residents of third jurisdictions".

The move is expected to make market players nervous as large flows are routed by funds via Mauritius and everyone is awaiting further cues from govt, which has so far remained silent. Due to tax benefits offered by DTAA, foreign investment, both direct and institutional or portfolio, have been routed by Mauritius. With amendment of the treaty in 2016, when capital gains benefits were taken away, Mauritius, which has been the largest source of FDI, has now slipped to fourth spot.

Pakistan can seek our help if it can't fight terror, we'll sort it out: Rajnath

Says Those Living In POK Now Feel Only India & PM Modi Can Improve Their Lives

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bhopal: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday offered Pakistan 'help' in countering terrorists on its soil. "If Pakistan cannot take care of terrorists operating from its soil, they should approach us for help. We will sort it out for them," Singh told ANI.

Singh's remark comes in the wake of an interview to a TV channel where he did not scotch a report in 'The Guardian' that alleged India's role in a spate of targeted killing of terrorists in Pakistan who were on Delhi's 'wanted' list.

Later on Thursday, while addressing BJP rallies in Madhya Pradesh's Satna and Rewa, Singh recalled how the Modi govt scrapped



The people of POK might want it to merge with India, Singh said

Article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir "in the blink of an eye". "Jammu & Kashmir is buzzing with development today. Those living in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

'Missed mother's last rites as Indira govt denied parole'

Rajnath Singh on Thursday said the then Congress govt under late Indira Gandhi had kept him away from his mother's cremation. "Congress keeps crying foul about democracy, but let me remind them that my mother passed away when the Congress govt put me in jail during the Emergency. I was denied parole to attend her last rites," he told ANI. TNN

(POK) now feel that if anyone can improve their lives, it's India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the defence minister said.

"The people of POK

might want it to merge with India. As far as POK is concerned, it was, is and will be ours," Singh asserted.

He said that India's global standing has gone up during PM Modi's tenure. "The Russia-Ukraine war was paused on the intervention of PM Modi for the safe exit of Indian students," he said. Singh also recalled how, on PM Modi's request, eight former Indian Navy officers, who were awarded death sentences by a court in Qatar, were set free.

Singh said the perception of other countries towards India has changed. "In another 25 to 30 years, India will become a superpower," he said, adding "US ambassador Eric Garcetti has said that if any country wants to explore possibili-

ties for the future, it can come to India. Now the whole world has the same view towards India."

He asserted that BJP does not discriminate between religions and cited the ban on triple talaq to say the party upholds the dignity of women and said, "By abolishing triple talaq, the govt has given equal rights to all women of the country. Whether BJP remains in power or not, humiliation of women will not be allowed on Indian soil."

"People say BJP always talks of Hindus and Muslims. I want to say that we do not discriminate between Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jews. We believe in taking everyone along." Singh said, adding: "We believe everyone born in Bharat is a child of Bharat Mata."

Diplomats expelled, Canada axes dozens in India missions

Visa Centres Functioning As Usual: Official

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New Delhi: Canada has retrenched dozens of Indian staffers from its diplomatic missions in India apparently because of the reduction of Canadian staff available to “effectively manage and maintain in-country operations”. India had last year expelled 41 Canadian diplomats to ensure parity in diplomatic presence, following which Canada had shut in-person operations in its Mumbai, Chandigarh and Bengaluru consulates.

There was no official word on the number of employees retrenched but it doesn't apparently exceed 100. Confirming the “staff reductions”, a media relations official in the high commission said the decision was sadly necessary given the departure of Cana-



Despite the strained ties, Canada has maintained it has strong connections with Indian citizens, and will continue to welcome them

dian staff last year.

“We wish to express our sincere gratitude for the resilience, dedication and service of our local staff in India. Canada will continue to deliver core services to its citizens in India, including consular support and for trade and business development, so that the citizens of our two countries can continue to benefit from the longstanding ties between Canadians and Indians,” said the official, adding that Canada's visa application centres in India are oper-

Lindy Cameron to be first woman British high commissioner to India

London/New Delhi: The UK on Thursday appointed Lindy Cameron as its new — and first woman — high commissioner to India. She will succeed Alex Ellis, who will be transferring to another assignment. The British high commission in New Delhi said Cameron will take up her appointment during the course of this month, with the incoming envoy taking to social media to express her excitement at getting started in the new role.

In a post on X, Cameron said: “Immensely proud to be appointed the next British high commissioner to India. Huge thanks to Alex Ellis for leaving such a great legacy. So looking forward to working with the amazing UK In India team. I can't wait to get started!” PTI

ating “as normal”.

Despite the strained ties, Canada has maintained it has strong connections with Indian citizens, and will continue to welcome them. India had not expected Canada to shut its services in the consulates as its decision to expel diplomats was meant only to seek parity in diplomatic representations only in the respective high commissions in Delhi and Ottawa.

India had expelled the diplomats after a spat with Canada that resulted from prime

minister Trudeau's allegation that Indian govt officials were involved in the murder of Khalistani radical Hardeep Nijjar in the Vancouver area. Indian govt accused the diplomats of interfering in its internal affairs.

Trudeau raised the Nijjar issue again on Wednesday, while testifying before a committee that is probing allegations of foreign interference in Canadian election, saying his govt remains committed to protecting the freedoms of Canadians.

Beijing echoes Modi's remarks, says 'sound & stable' ties with India vital

Beijing: China on Thursday said "sound and stable ties" with India serve common interests of both countries as it reacted to **PM Modi's** recent comments that for New Delhi,



ties with Beijing are important and the "pro-longed situation" at the borders should be addressed urgently.

"China noted PM Modi's remarks," Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said here. "Sound and stable China-India relations... are conducive to peace and development in the region and beyond," she said.

PM's comments were called "a welcome move that may give a timely boost to bilateral ties" by state-run China Daily, which stated in its editorial, "Modi's latest remarks could be interpreted as a gesture of

“ We hope India will work with China, approach bilateral relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective, keep building trust and engage in dialogue and cooperation, and **seek to handle differences appropriately to put the relationship on a sound and stable track**

(Boundary question does not represent entirety of China-India relations, and it should be placed appropriately in bilateral relations and managed properly

—Chinese foreign ministry

goodwill, as the two sides try to find a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement to their border disputes at an early date and turn the final page on them.” PTI

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