

Govt should work at hiking defence budget, ensure more funds for DRDO to develop weapons: Panel

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New Delhi: The government should work towards hiking the country's overall defence budget, given that it now stands at just 1.9% of the projected GDP for 2023-24, as well as ensure additional funds for DRDO to develop advanced weapon systems, a parliamentary panel has said.

In reports tabled in Parliament on Wednesday, the standing committee on defence expressed surprise the defence ministry (MoD) has not taken any action towards arriving at a "definite benchmark percentage for defence expenditure" that it had recommended earlier.

Though the defence secretary had stated the MoD may not be able to absorb 3% of the GDP, which is the "global ide-

₹50,000 crore deal for 26 Rafale-Marine fighter jets moves towards finalisation

New Delhi: In another step towards an early finalisation of the estimated ₹50,000 crore deal for 26 Rafale-Marine fighter jets and associated equipment, France has now submitted its bid to the defence ministry. Sources said the French detailed letter of acceptance (LoA), with its offer, pricing and other details, was submitted on Wednesday in response to India's letter of request (LoA) issued in mid-October for the proposed acquisition of 22 single-seat jets and four twin-seat trainers, along with weapons, simulator, spares, crew training and logistics support. **TNN**

al parameter" for defence expenditure, the panel said fixing at least a definite parameter will help form the right trajectory for the country's military modernisation in the "prevailing security scenario in the world today".

"The recent wars in the international arena should act as a grim reminder that the nomenclature of war has

Pakistan amid the continuing military confrontation in eastern Ladakh, which is into its fourth successive winter now, as was reported by **TOI** earlier.

This year's defence budget of ₹5.9 lakh crore (\$72 billion), in fact, drops to a mere 1.5% if the huge defence pension allocation of ₹1.3 lakh crore for around 35 lakh servicemen and defence civilians is excluded from it.

With little left for military modernisation after day-to-day operating costs and salaries, the 14-lakh armed forces continue to grapple with critical operational shortages on several fronts, ranging from fighters, submarines and helicopters to modern infantry weapons, anti-tank guided missiles and night-fighting capabilities.

Putting Kashmir on the global tourism map

Indians are travelling to the Valley in droves. So would foreign tourists, if getting there and staying there were easier

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

By the time 2023 ends, more than 2 crore Indians will have likely holidayed in Kashmir. Tourist numbers can be much bigger, though. India's "heaven on earth" is close, by flight time, to the Gulf and Southeast Asia, where plenty of people with money and wanderlust are always looking for new places to add to their been-there-done-that list.

The problem is that while Kashmir checks every box on a global tourist's list — breathtaking natural beauty, glorious summers, snow-clad winters, skiing, trekking and fabulous local cuisine — it falls short on two vital parameters.

EDITOR'S PICK

One, safety — most countries have strongly-worded travel advisories on the region, dissuading many of the foreign tourists.

Two, connectivity — although Srinagar is an international airport, no international flight lands there.

Add to this Pakistan's refusal to accord overfly rights to any international flight headed to Srinagar. This pretty much kills the financial viability of any flight from the West or the Gulf to Kashmir.

The now belly-up GoAir had started a Srinagar-Sharjah flight in 2021. Pakistan denied overflying clearance to this flight. That led to GoAir scrapping the route.



Getty Images

NUMBERS GAME: Although the number of foreign tourists in Kashmir has gone up from 4,000 in 2022 to 31,000 in the first eight months of this year, they are still a tiny minority of those holidaying in the Valley

So, although the number of foreign tourists in Kashmir has gone up from 4,000 in 2022 to 31,000 in the first eight months of this year, they are still a tiny minority of those holidaying in the Valley.

The Valley's travel trade reckons both must change. They point to relative peace in Kashmir for over two years and ask that GOI work with foreign governments to change advisories. And while no one expects Pakistan to change its stand, the travel trade wants better connectivity with domestic airports.

They point to airports in tourist hotspots like Dehradun and Agra. Direct flights from there to Srinagar can, they say, up tourist trade in the Valley, attracting both domestic and foreign travellers.

There's some hope, perhaps. GOI hosted a G20 tourism event in Srinagar in May. Arvind Singh, then Union tourism secretary, says "many diplomats at the event in Srinagar said they would like to see more of

their citizens travelling to this beautiful place...". Some diplomats felt, Singh says, travel advisories for Kashmir should be reviewed. And they all agreed, he recalls, direct air connectivity and charter flights will bring in foreign tourists.

IHCL — owner of Taj Hotels brand — MD and CEO Puneet Chhatwal says India needs new destinations and more tourism circuits like the Delhi-Agra-Jaipur triangle. He reckons Srinagar-Dehradun-Agra can be another triangle. And in Kashmir itself, destinations beyond the Srinagar-Gulmarg-Sonmarg triangle can be developed, he says.

Nakul Anand, chairman of Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH), says direct connectivity with large global cities to major tourist destinations of India will be a big boost to local tourism. That's the first step he says, and it will incentivise tourism developers to create new travel

destinations. MakeMyTrip co-founder and group CEO Rajesh Magow concurs. He also makes a point that's already playing out in Kashmir and other tourist attractions across India — high tariffs, whether for flights or hotels.

Kashmir has only a few top-flight hotels and very few budget options. The Khyber in Gulmarg is pretty much sold out till late January — 95% of bookings are by Indians — with daily tariffs upwards of ₹50,000.

Airfares are at record levels, too, for Kashmir. For instance a return fare to celebrate Christmas and New Year in Srinagar is in the range of ₹34,000-48,000 from Mumbai and ₹26,000-32,000 from Delhi, show travel portals. That is almost thrice the off peak levels and comparable to return fares to nearby international destinations.

If Kashmir is to become an A-list destination in the global tourist map, getting there and staying there has to be easier and cheaper.

Jalandhar univ will not host Indian Science Congress in Jan

Jalandhar: The 109th edition of the Indian Science Congress will not be held at Lovely Professional University, which was scheduled to host it in Jalandhar from January 3 to 5, 2024. While the university is refusing to give the reasons for the last-minute change, LPU registrar Monika Gulati is learned to have sent a communique to Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) president Arvind Saxena on December 17, stating that "unforeseen challenges" had arisen for the university in fulfilling its hosting responsibilities. When contacted, LPU vice-president Aman Mittal refused to comment. Sources said there were issues between the department of science and technology (DST) and ISCA. **TNN**

RTI abuse has triggered paralysis in bureaucracy: Delhi high court

Vineet.Upadhyay | TNN

New Delhi: The Delhi high court has said that it has been coming across various cases where the abuse of Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, has led to "paralysis and fear" among government officials.

The single judge bench of Justice Subramonium Prasad said the RTI Act is meant to further good governance and the unfortunate misuse of the same will only dilute its importance as well as make government servants dither from carrying out their duties.

"Right to Information Act, 2005 was brought out with a laudable objective of bringing about transparency in the functioning of the government. The Act was brought in to provide for secure access to information to every citizen, and to prevent corruption and to hold governments



CONCERN OVER MISUSE

and their instrumentalities accountable.

However, this court is now seeing increasing abuse/misuse of the RTI Act and this case is a classic case of abuse of the Right to Information.

The purpose of the RTI Act is meant to further good governance, and unfortunate misuse of the same will only dilute its importance as well as make government servants dither from carrying out their activities (sic)," said the bench. The court was hearing a plea moved by one Shishir Chand challenging

an order passed by the Central Information Commission (CIC) directing its registry to not entertain any further cases from him concerning the untimely demise of his younger brother on account of alleged medical negligence of one Dr Atul Chhabra of Jamshedpur's Tata Memorial Hospital.

Rejecting Chand's appeal against the Central Public Information Officer (CPIO)'s order, the CIC held that he had abused the process of Right to Information by making repeated attempts to reopen the same issue again and again.

Total 15 RTI applications were filed by Chand seeking information about the doctor in question, among other details. The high court also said that this will also prevent doctors from taking steps in emergent situations fearing the consequences of the same.

In Solapur, China repays debt to 'a son and friend'

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Mumbai: For all the friction in Sino-Indian ties, China continues to nurture the memory of its association with an Indian doctor dating back to the pre-World War II period.

The Chinese consulate in Mumbai and a Chinese firm in Pune have spent ₹50 lakh to upgrade a school in Solapur, hometown of Dr Dwarkanath Kotnis.

Born in 1910 in Solapur, Dr

Kotnis was part of a medical team which travelled to China to support troops and citizenry in 1938 during the Japanese invasion. It is said the team went on Nehru's request. In China, he met a Chinese nurse and they married.

He, however, fell ill amid harsh working conditions and died on December 9, 1942. Legendary filmmaker V Shantaram had presented his story in Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani (1946), based on a script by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas.

Last year, on the 80th death anniversary of Dr Kotnis, the consul general announced that a Dr Kotnis Friendship School would be set up to pay debt to the man China considers as a "son and friend."

Consul general Kong Xianhua, Pune-based Chinese firm Yapp India's CEO Chen Huazhu and Solapur municipal commissioner Sheetal Teli Ugale jointly inaugurated the school upgraded Solapur municipal corporation Camp Number 1 Camp High School.

Kong said his government was keen to "sow the seeds of friendship" among young Indians.

"One day they will carry forward the spirit of Dr Kotnis and hold high the torch of China-India friendship," he said. The consulate has also written to the government of India, proposing that the civic school be renamed as Dr Kotnis Friendship School as a symbol of the Chinese people's gratitude to Dr Kotnis for his "sacrifice".

"We want to make our contribution to Solapur to repay Dr Kotnis's sacrifice to the Chinese people and honor his heroic deeds," said the consul general. More will be done to help Solapur achieve all-round development, he added.

A statement from the Chinese consulate said ₹50 lakh was spent to upgrade the school with a new drinking water system, development of a sports ground, CCTVs, beautification, etc.

Full report on www.toi.in

Forgery FIR turns spotlight on art industry scourge

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Mumbai: The recent forgery case against two people for allegedly duping an investment banker of Rs 17.9 crore by selling him fake paintings, has turned the spotlight back on the well-known art industry scourge. Insiders say they are more disappointed than shocked by the instance in which banker Puneet Bhatia was, according to his FIR, sold paintings by a lawyer and an art dealer claiming they were by renowned artists such as Manjit Bawa and F N Souza.

"I'm not surprised," says art critic Vishwas Kulkarni for whom the incident brought to mind the scandals that rocked the art world in the early 2000s — a time when dubious dealers saw much money to be made in the gold rush to have a Husain or a Gaitonde on the wall. Notably, in 2009, when S H Raza went for an exhibition of his own paintings at Dhoomimal Gallery in Delhi, he discovered to his shock that several of the artworks were fake.

The fake market bloated as the art world became a profitable place to make a decent investment in the 2010s "a little

like how shell companies became the norm for white-collar criminals in the wake of India's economic boom," says Kulkarni, who runs an art investment consultancy. He adds, "For every prominent banker filing an FIR for being sold a fake Manjit Bawas, there are a hundred prominent bankers who are not — out of the shame of being duped or out of sheer ignorance. While M F Husain is the biggest artist to be forged, F N Souza and Jamini Roy are among the other names, says art historian Tasneem Mehta, managing trustee and director, Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum.

Typically, paintings by such renowned artists are sold through reputable galleries and those who are not familiar with the artists or their work tend to rely on the galleries for information.

"Buyers should educate themselves by consulting senior artists rather than placing complete trust in galleries," says art curator Satyendra Rane who came across a painting by Husain recently at a gallery whose owner claimed it was an original from 1976. Upon inspection, he noticed Husain's signature, but the painting appeared freshly done.

"When I examined the back of the canvas, it was new," says Rane. "If someone claims a painting is from 1976, the canvas, and the paint, should show signs of ageing."

However, replete with blowing machines that age artworks to imitate the wear and tear of time, techniques used by forgers and art artists have grown so sophisticated that forensic experts too cannot tell the difference between fakes and blueprints at times. Reports have pointed to Kolkata being a huge market for fakes.


The best way to safeguard from fakes is with a "provenance check" — "a paper trail tracing the journey of an art work from point of origin to end dealer," says Kulkarni.

Besides looking for literature on the work, "one can also take help of art conservation teams to do forensic tests, go to museums and galleries to view works on a regular basis, collect small works and connect with artists' family or friends," Abhinav Khanna, independent art advisor says. Khanna also cautions: "Only buy from well-known dealers that have a website and articles published in media."

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09.05.1937 to 20.12.2023

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Mr. M S Viraraghavan who attained the feet of the
Lord on 20th December 2023.

He served the Nation with distinction as a member of the Indian Administrative Services. He was a long standing and valued member of the Board of Directors of TVS Srichakra, where his sage guidance played a significant role in the Organization's growth. As much for his work, if not more, he will be remembered for his love for roses and for the years he dedicated to growing and creating new rose hybrids.

Mr. Viraraghavan was a man of varied interests and touched the lives of all those who had the fortune of knowing him. His cheerful charm and spirit will be greatly missed. He was an inspiration to us and will live in our hearts forever.

In his passing we honour a life well lived.

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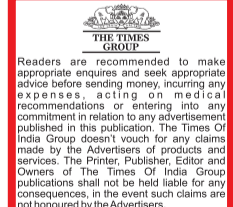
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(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Mohamed Hussain Aiubkhan (Borrower) Mohamed Abdulla A (Co-Borrower) M Benasir Butto (Co-Borrower) Loan Account No. LHTRI00001338557 & LHTRI00001338611	Building on Old Survey No. 758/7A, Sub Division No. 758/7A2, 758/7A3, 758/4, 758/5, 758/6, 758/7A, 758/7B, 758/8, 758/12A, 758/12B, Plot No 48 Part, R Dis. No. 7645/88, Bhagavan Sri Sheshathri Nagar, Balakrishnapuram Village & Panchayath, Dindigul- 624403	Rs. 24,98,305/- December 15, 2023	Rs. 35.52, 106/- Rs. 3,55,220/-	January 15, 2024 11:00 AM- 03:00 PM	January 25, 2024 02:00 PM- 03:00 PM

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