

International

India showcases military might in Republic Day parade

The parade was held in the revamped colonial-era boulevard

NEW DELHI: India showcased its military might with tanks and flyovers by roaring fighter jets in the heart of New Delhi Thursday to mark its annual Republic Day. The yearly parade is a tightly choreographed spectacle of motorbike stunts, traditional dance and camel-mounted soldiers at a time when the emergent Asian power faces onerous security challenges. Republic Day marks the adoption of India's post-independence constitution and Thursday's event is the latest of several ceremonies commemorating 75 years since the end of British colonial rule last August.

For the first time the parade was held in the revamped colonial-era boulevard that hosts India's most important government buildings, following years of renovations at the direction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nationalist government. "We will move together to fulfill the dreams of the heroes of our freedom movement," Modi wrote on Twitter to mark the occasion.

India has benefitted in recent years from an increasing economic heft and diplomatic clout

that has raised its position in global affairs. However, Modi's government is grappling with the urgent task of overhauling its outdated armed forces. Its military establishment is also fretting over a growing assertiveness by China along its vast Himalayan frontier, which in 2019 sparked a lingering diplomatic freeze after a deadly high-altitude confrontation between troops of both countries.

India unveiled its first locally built aircraft carrier last year as part of government efforts to build an indigenous defense industry and reduce reliance on Russia, historically its most important arms supplier. An effort to reform military recruitment to trim down India's bloated defense payroll stalled last year after a backlash from aspiring soldiers, who burned train carriages and clashed with police in heated protests. The parade's guest of honor, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, is the first major world leader to visit India in a year the government is eagerly preparing to host the G20 summit for the first time. —AFP



NEW DELHI: This handout photograph taken on Thursday and released by the Indian Press Information Bureau (PIB) shows (from left to right) India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and India's President Droupadi Murmu attending the Republic Day parade in New Delhi. —AFP



SYDNEY: People hold a banner as they take part in the annual "Invasion Day" protest march through the streets of Sydney on Australia Day on Thursday. —AFP

'Invasion Day' rallies mark divisive national holiday in Australia

SYDNEY: Thousands protested Australia's increasingly divisive national day Thursday as the public debates whether the country's Indigenous population should be recognized in the constitution. Australia Day on January 26 has traditionally celebrated the arrival of European settlers at Sydney Harbor in 1788, and has typically been observed with beach parties and backyard barbecues. But in recent years, it has also become a day of national protest, with some Australians calling it "Invasion Day" and saying it was the start of a cultural genocide by European colonizers. Indigenous activist Paul Silva, speaking to a crowd of thousands at an Invasion Day rally in central Sydney, said the national holiday should be abolished.

"They invaded our lands, killing our extended families, turning our warriors into slaves," he said, as the crowd shouted "shame" in response. "How can this day be celebrated?" Indigenous poet Lizzie Jarrett said Sydney was "ground zero for a genocide

of First Nations people". "You think we're angry? Wouldn't you be angry?" she asked the crowd. Ethan Lyons, 17, said he wanted to acknowledge the "beautiful land" of Indigenous Australians. "We also have to acknowledge the almost 250 years of ongoing theft and destruction," he told the crowd.

Similar rallies took place in major cities across Australia. At a lively protest in Hobart, the capital of the island state of Tasmania, demonstrators carried flags declaring "Stolen Land" and "We are still here". The demonstrations have an added significance this year as Australia's centre-left government pushes to change the country's constitution to better recognize Indigenous Australians.

There is currently no mention of Indigenous Australians in the constitution, adopted in 1901. They were banned from voting in some states and territories until the 1960s. The public will vote on the change—called the Indigenous Voice to Parliament—in a binding referendum later this year. It aims to give Indigenous Australians a greater say in national policy-making as they battle poorer health, lower incomes and higher barriers to education. The Voice proposal has been politically divisive, with several conservative figures deriding it as unneeded and a waste of time. But Indigenous lawyer Noel Pearson said the Voice was "the most important question" currently facing Australia. —AFP

'Long march' helps India's Rahul Gandhi shed playboy image

NEW DELHI: Five months spent traversing his country on foot helped the scion of India's most famous dynasty shed his playboy image—but the road to reviving his dismal political fortunes will be a tougher journey. Rahul Gandhi has for years struggled to challenge the electoral juggernaut of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) holds a near-monopoly on power through nationalist appeals to the country's Hindu majority. Modi has revealed in casting his chief opponent, dubbed an "empty suit" in leaked US embassy cables from 2005, as an out-of-touch princeling more interested in luxury and self-indulgence than fighting to helm the world's biggest democracy.

His Congress party, a once-mighty force with a proud role in ending British colonial rule 75 years ago, is now a shadow of its former self, plagued by infighting and defections. But a decision to invoke one of India's best-known protest traditions, flanked

by ordinary people, has given him an air of authority that had so far eluded him in public life.

"Rightly or wrongly, the BJP's campaign of him being an incompetent person was the dominant perception—he has managed to change that," independent political analyst Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Junior told AFP. Since his long trek began on India's southernmost tip last September, Gandhi has struck a chord with fiery speeches and affectionate interactions with the thousands of bystanders that have lined streets to watch his procession.

The campaign harkens back to the famous 1930 trek by Rahul's unrelated namesake Mahatma Gandhi, whose march to protest a salt tax imposed by British rulers was a seminal moment in India's independence struggle. It has bypassed the country's traditional media in an effort to reach the public directly, with an in-house social media apparatus and interviews with online influencers. Footage of Gandhi on the road shows him with a newly commanding posture, sporting an unkempt salt-and-pepper beard grown during the march and trailed by smiling children. His 3,500-kilometre (2,175-mile) journey—not all by foot—concludes on Monday in the frosty Himalayan foothills of Kashmir, after months spent finessing both his common touch and a voter pitch capitalizing on widespread economic insecurity. —AFP



HYDERABAD: In this file photo India's Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi (center) takes part in the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' march on the outskirts of Hyderabad. —AFP

UAE astronaut says not required...

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sunset, Neyadi said his situation falls under an exception. "I'm in... the definition of a traveler, and we can actually break fast," Neyadi said. "It's not compulsory." "Actually fasting is not compulsory if you're... feeling not well," he said.

"So in that regard, anything that can jeopardize the mission, or maybe put the crew members in a risk, we're actually allowed to eat sufficient food," Neyadi will be the second national from the oil-rich United Arab Emirates to voyage to space. In September 2019, Hazzaa Al-Mansoori spent eight days on the ISS.

The NASA astronauts and Russian cosmonaut were also asked at the Johnson Space center Wednesday whether any of the political tensions on Earth, over Ukraine for example, spilled over into space. "I've been working and training with cosmonauts for over 20 years now and it's always been amazing," said NASA's Bowen, a veteran of three space shuttle missions.

"Once you get to space, it's just one crew, one vehicle and we all have the same goal," Fedyaev pointed to the "very long history" of space cooperation between Russia and the United States. "The life

of people in space on the International Space Station is really setting a very good example for how people should be living on Earth," the Russian cosmonaut said.

NASA officials said they expect the members of SpaceX Dragon Crew-6 to have a five-day handover with the four members of Dragon Crew-5, who have been on the ISS since October. Also currently aboard the ISS are three astronauts whose return vehicle, a Soyuz crew capsule, was damaged by a strike from a tiny meteoroid in December. Russia plans to send an empty spacecraft to the ISS on February 20 to bring home the trio-Russian cosmonauts Dmitry Petelin and Sergei Prokopyev and NASA astronaut Frank Rubio. Their Soyuz MS-22 crew capsule sprang a radiator coolant leak after the meteoroid strike. MS-22 flew Petelin, Prokopyev and Rubio to the ISS in September after taking off from the Russian-operated Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

They were scheduled to return home in the same spacecraft in March, but their stay on the ISS will now be extended by several extra months.

Russia has been using the aging but reliable Soyuz capsules to ferry astronauts into space since the 1960s. Space has remained a rare venue of cooperation between Moscow and Washington since the start of the Russian offensive in Ukraine.

The ISS was launched in 1998 at a time of increased US-Russia cooperation following the Cold War "Space Race." —AFP

sions visited the Nagasaki coast guard, the Fukuoka consulate said, where they laid flowers for the dead crew members and expressed their condolences.

They also visited survivors, conveying a message from China's ambassador to Japan, Kong Xuanyou, while providing clothing, food and drinks, the consulate said. The accident came as a cold snap hit much of Asia, with daytime temperatures on some Japanese islands nearest the rescue site reaching just three degrees Celsius (37 degrees Fahrenheit). The 6,651-tonne Jin Tian is registered in Hong Kong, Japan's coast guard said. In 2020, a cargo ship with 43 crew and 6,000 cattle on board sank off southwestern Japan after being caught in a typhoon. Two crew survived. —AFP

Zionist raid in West Bank kills...

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Meanwhile, Kuwait's Foreign Ministry expressed the State of Kuwait's strong condemnation and denunciation of the brutal aggression of the Zionist occupation forces against the city of Jenin. In a statement Thursday, the ministry affirmed that this aggression is a flagrant violation of the resolutions of international legitimacy and international law, calling on the international community to take swift and effective action to stop these ongoing Zionist violations and to provide full protection for the brotherly Palestinian people.

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf Thursday denounced, in the strongest possible terms, Zionist occupation authorities' continued and recurrent incursions into Palestinian cities, including Jenin.

In a press statement, Al-Hajraf restated the Gulf bloc's unrelenting support for the Palestinian cause, calling on the international community to intervene urgently to stop this atrocious and continued crime against Palestinian people, and to provide international protection for them.

Palestinian health minister Mai Al-Kaila charged that "occupation forces stormed Jenin Government Hospital and intentionally fired tear gas canisters at the pediatric department in the hospital".

The Zionist military denied its forces entered the hospital. "But the activity was not far away from the hospital and it is possible some tear gas entered through an open window," a spokesman said.

Wisam Bakr, director of the Jenin health facility, said Zionist forces fired near the hospital but did not echo the health minister's allegations that the building or pediatric ward were specifically targeted.

'Hit in the neck'

Among those confirmed dead was Majeda Obeid, 61, who lived some meters (yards) from the house targeted by the Zionist forces. Her daughter, Kefiyat Obeid, told AFP that her mother was shot as she peered out her window at the clashes.

"After she finished her prayers, she stopped for a

moment to look and, as she stood up, she was hit in the neck by a bullet and she fell against the wall and then to the floor," the 26-year-old told AFP, as bloodstains soaked into the rug of their home. The military said the incursion targeted Palestinians from the Islamic Jihad militant group who were allegedly behind attacks on Zionist soldiers and civilians and, according to Zionist Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, were planning "to conduct a terror attack in Zionist entity". Three Palestinians were shot in a firefight.

There were no casualties among the Zionist forces, the military said.

Jenin resident Umm Youssef Al-Sawalmi said homes were hit during the raid. "Windows, doors, walls and even the refrigerator, everything was damaged by the bullets" fired by Zionist forces, she told AFP.

Islamic Jihad spokesman Tariq Salmi vowed that "the resistance is everywhere and ready and willing for the next confrontation". The latest deaths bring the number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank so far this year to 30, including fighters and civilians, most of whom were shot by Zionist forces. Saleh Al-Arouri, deputy leader of Palestinian militant group Hamas which rules Gaza, vowed that Zionist entity "will pay the price for the Jenin massacre".

'Bloody massacre'

The Arab League held "the Zionist government led by (Benjamin) Netanyahu fully responsible for committing the horrific bloody massacre" and called for international action. The mounting toll follows the deadliest year in the Palestinian territory recorded by the UN. At least 26 Zionists and 200 Palestinians were killed across Zionist entity and the Palestinian territories in 2022, the majority in the West Bank, according to an AFP tally from official sources.

Zionists has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967. UN peace envoy Tor Wennesland said he was "deeply alarmed and saddened by the continuing cycle of violence in the occupied West Bank". Thousands flocked to funerals in Jenin, as the Palestinian presidency announced three days of official mourning. It charged that Thursday's raid on Jenin was happening "under international silence".

"This is what encourages the occupation government to commit massacres against our people in full view of the world," said Nabil Abu Rudeinah, spokesman for Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas. —AFP

8 dead after ship sinks...

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life-threatening conditions," he added. "We express our deepest condolences to the unfortunate victims." The Japanese coast guard later confirmed the toll given by Lu, adding that the other two dead crew members were from Myanmar. Nine more people remained missing, it said—four from China and five from Myanmar. Officials from local Chinese mis-