

January 2nd news:

International:

China develops underwater surveillance networks in Indian Ocean

China has developed a new underwater surveillance network to help its submarines get a stronger lock on targets while protecting the nation's interests along the maritime Silk Road, which included the Indian Ocean, a media report said on 1st January.

The system, which has already been launched, works by gathering information about the underwater environment, particularly water temperature and salinity, which the navy can then use to more accurately track target vessels as well as improve navigation and positioning, the Hong Kong-based South China Post reported.

The project, led by the South China Sea Institute of Oceanology under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), is part of an unprecedented military expansion fuelled by Beijing's desire to challenge the US in the world's oceans, the Post said.

After years of construction and testing, the new surveillance system was now in the hands of the navy, which reported "good results", the oceanology institute said in its latest briefing in November, according to the report. But China still has some way to go before it can compete with the world's only true superpower

The Chinese system is based on a network of platforms - buoys, surface vessels, satellites and underwater gliders - that gather data from the South China Sea, and the Western Pacific and Indian oceans, the paper quoted the report by Oceanology Institute.

That information is then streamed to three intelligence centres - in the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, the southern province of Guangdong, and a joint facility in South Asia - where it is processed and analysed

In recent years, China has stepped up naval expeditions to the Indian Ocean to fight the pirates in Gulf of Aden. These expeditions included large naval ships accompanied by submarines. China is silent about the reasons to deploy submarines for anti-piracy operations. China is also seeking to establish logistic bases in the Indian Ocean, much to the chagrin of India.

The first such base was opened by China in Djibouti last year and it acquired the Hambantota port of Sri Lanka on 99 years lease for debt swap and currently developing the Gwadar port in Pakistan as part of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

China is involved in maritime disputes in the South and East China Seas. It claims almost all of the South China Sea and has also laid claims on the Senkaku islands under the control of Japan in the East China Sea, believed to harbour vast natural resources below their seabed. For submarines patrolling the sea route, or "road", element of China's global trade and infrastructure development plan known as the

'Belt and Road Initiative', which included the 21st century Maritime Silk Road, the system's ability to not only measure, but also predict temperature and salinity at any location, any depth and at any time will be invaluable. Submarines use sonar (sound navigation and ranging) to locate, identify and attack other vessels.

Pakistan prohibits Hafiz Saeed outfits from taking charity

Pakistan has prohibited collection of donations by Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed-led Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF) as well as several such organisations named in a list of banned outfits by the UN Security Council.

The decision was taken by Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), the financial regulatory agency under the finance ministry, on December 19, sources said. It warned that non-compliance with the ruling could result in a heavy penalty.

The implementation of the plan would mark the first time Pakistan has made a major move against Saeed's network, which includes 300 seminaries and schools, hospitals, a publishing house and ambulance services. According to counter-terrorism officials, the JuD and FIF alone have about 50,000 volunteers and hundreds of other paid workers.

The US has declared JuD and FIF as terrorist fronts for LeT, the militant organisation that Washington and New Delhi blame for the 2008 attacks in Mumbai in which 166 people were killed.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international body that combats money laundering and terror financing, too has warned Pakistan that it faces inclusion on a watch list for failing to crack down on financing terrorism.

National:

Nagaland declared as 'disturbed area' for 6 more months

The entire Nagaland has been declared as "disturbed area" for six more months, till June- end, under the controversial AFSPA, which empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior notice.

In a gazette notification, the Union Home Ministry said it is of the opinion that the area comprising the whole of Nagaland is in such a "disturbed and dangerous condition" that use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary.

A home ministry official said the decision to continue the declaration of Nagaland as "disturbed area" has been taken as killings, loot and extortion have been going in various parts of the state which necessitated the action for the convenience of the security forces operating there.

The AFSPA has been in force in Nagaland for several decades. It has not been withdrawn even after a framework agreement was signed on August 3, 2015 by Naga insurgent group NSCN-IM general

secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and the government's interlocutor R N Ravi in presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The framework agreement came after over 80 rounds of negotiations spanning 18 years with the first breakthrough in 1997 when the ceasefire agreement was sealed after decades of insurgency in Nagaland.

Bilateral:

India and Pakistan exchange 27th list of nuclear installations

India and Pakistan on 1st January exchanged the list of nuclear installations and facilities covered under the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear installations between the two countries. The exchange took place through diplomatic channels simultaneously at New Delhi and Islamabad. The Agreement, which was signed on 31st December 1988 and entered into force on 27th January 1991 provides, inter alia, that the two countries inform each other of nuclear installations and facilities to be covered under the Agreement on the first of January of every calendar year. This is the twenty-seventh consecutive exchange of such list between the two countries, the first one having taken place on 1st January, 1992.

Economy:

Iron, steel cos' GNPA for PSBs in basic metals 24%: Govt

Iron and steel sector accounts for about 24 per cent of total gross non-performing assets (GNPA) in basic metal and metal product category for public sector banks (PSBs), according to the Ministry of Steel.

The share of gross non-performing assets (GNPA) for iron and steel in basic metal and metal product category as on September 30, 2017 is 23.70 per cent for public sector banks

As per the National Steel Policy, 2017, the Indian steel industry contributes approximately 2 per cent to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The benefit of RBI schemes namely 5/25 Scheme and Scheme for Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets (S4A) for restructuring of debts of stressed companies can be availed by steel companies.

Public sector banks have been reeling under high non-performing assets (NPAs). Their NPAs have increased more than two-and-a-half times to Rs 7.33 lakh crore as of June 2017, from Rs 2.75 lakh crore in March 2015.

The RBI's internal advisory committee had identified 12 large stressed cases worth over Rs 5,000 crore, accounting to 25 per cent (Rs 1.75 lakh crore) of total gross non-performing assets, for proceedings under the insolvency and bankruptcy code.

The RBI in its second list of big defaulters released in August had asked banks to resolve 28 large accounts till December 13 or report them by December 31 to NCLT for insolvency proceedings. Of these,

banks are set to refer as many as 23 accounts for insolvency proceedings. These 28 accounts together account for 40 per cent of bad loans or around Rs 4 lakh crore.

Some of the large accounts which are likely to go to the NCLT include Uttam Galva Metallic, Uttam Galva Steel, Visa Steel and Essar Projects, among others.

Environment:

GAIL commissions India's second largest rooftop solar plant in UP

GAIL India Ltd on 1st January said it has commissioned the country's second largest rooftop solar power plant. It has installed a 5.76 MWp (Mega Watt peak) solar plant at its petrochemical complex at Pata in Uttar Pradesh.

The plant over the roofs of warehouses covers a total area of 65,000 square meters. Over 79 lakh KWh of electricity is targeted to be generated for captive use of India's largest gas-based petrochemicals plant.

Tata Power Solar had in December 2015 commissioned a 12 MW solar rooftop project in Amritsar, which produces more than 150 lakh units of power annually and offset over 19,000 tonne of carbon emissions every year.

India is planning to have 40 GW of rooftop photovoltaics (PV) by 2022. The Captive solar power initiative of GAIL will reduce carbon emissions by 6,300 tonnes per annum and help India achieve climate goals

Arunachal Pradesh Becomes Second Open Defecation Free State In North-East

Arunachal Pradesh has been declared Open Defecation Free. It has become the second state in the North East after Sikkim to achieve the status with the declaration of Upper Subansiri, Siang, and Changlang districts as officially Open Defecation Free.

The project, undertaken under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin), was carried through after the state government provided an additional incentive of eight thousand rupees per toilet, in addition to the state's matching share and the support given by the Centre, raising the cost to 20,000 rupees. The state has achieved the ODF status before the the national target, which is October next year.

Sports:

Vidarbha wins Ranji trophy

Vidarbha has created history by winning the Ranji Trophy for the first time with a thumping nine-wicket win over Delhi at the Holkar stadium in Indore on the fourth and penultimate day of their final. After conceding a 252-run first innings lead, Delhi were bowled out for 280 in their second innings, setting a target of merely 29 runs for Vidarbha.

Vidarbha lost only one wicket and took only five overs to chase down the target which gave them their first Ranji Trophy title.

Persons in news:

Vijay Keshav Gokhale: Vijay Keshav Gokhale will be the new Foreign Secretary. He will replace the incumbent. Dr S. Jaishankar, completes his tenure on the 28th January. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved Gokhale's appointment. A 1981-batch IFS officer, Mr Gokhale is currently holding the charge of Secretary Economic Relations in the External Affairs Ministry.