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Modi, Netanyahu discuss West Asia crisis, strategic ties

nologies, cybersecurity, agriculture, water management, healthcare, entrepreneurship, defence and security, the two countries agreed to elevate their relationship to a "Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Prosperity."

The joint vision outlined during the February visit reaffirmed both countries' commitment to promoting peace, security and shared prosperity through technological innovation and entrepreneurship.

It also emphasised closer collaboration in critical sectors including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, semiconductors, quantum computing, biotechnology, agriculture, water management, defence platforms and space exploration, while supporting India's vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat 2047.

Omar visits flood-hit Rajouri, assures enhanced relief

washed away in the July 19 flash floods. He also visited the flood-hit Aitey area to assess the extensive damage to residential properties, public infrastructure and local connectivity.

Directing the concerned departments to expedite restoration works, he instructed them to undertake necessary protective measures to safeguard vulnerable locations against any future calamities.

The chief minister also visited the severely affected Bela Bus Stand, where he took a first-hand appraisal of the damage to the area, the public infrastructure and commercial establishments. Interacting with local residents and officials, he directed the district administration to ensure the early restoration of essential services and public infrastructure.

Reiterating the government's unwavering commitment to the welfare of the affected people, he said that rehabilitation of affected families and restoration of damaged infrastructure would be taken up on priority to facilitate an early return to normalcy in the district.

He also visited the office of the deputy commissioner, Rajouri, which was declared unsafe following the recent floods. He took stock of the damage caused to the building and assured that the government would take appropriate measures to address the issue and ensure the smooth functioning of the district administration.

He was accompanied by Rajouri MLA Iftkhar Ahmed, Budhal MLA Javed Iqbal Choudhary, Thanamandi MLA Muzaffar Iqbal Khan, his additional chief secretary Dheeraj Gupta, Rajouri DC Abhishek Sharma, SSP Gaurav Sikarwar, ADDC Malikzada Sheraz-ul-Haq and other senior civil and police officers.

Later, chairing a high-level review meeting, Omar said the natural disasters, particularly cloudbursts and flash floods, had become increasingly frequent in Jammu and Kashmir in recent years.

"While the meteorological department provides rainfall forecasts and timely advisories are issued, accurately predicting the precise location of cloudbursts remains a challenge, limiting preparedness in specific areas," he said.

He, however, appreciated the district administration for issuing timely advisories and pre-positioning men and machinery at vulnerable locations, which helped minimise the loss of lives.

He also lauded the prompt rescue, relief and evacuation operations undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

Emphasising the need for enhanced support to affected families, the chief minister said that the existing relief assistance was inadequate to meet the costs of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

He assured that the government would enhance the quantum of relief and provide comprehensive rehabilitation assistance, particularly to families whose houses had been damaged and those rendered landless.

Directing the DC to identify suitable government land, he said that families who had lost both their homes and agricultural land should be provided five marlas of land for rehabilitation.

He instructed the administration to ensure the immediate provision of special free ration to such families.

Reviewing restoration efforts, Omar said the 33 KV power transmission line between Rajouri and Poonch had suffered extensive damage, disrupting electricity supply. While appreciating the temporary restoration carried out by the power development department, he directed the concerned authorities to complete permanent restoration works at the earliest.

Highlighting the critical role of PHE department in restoring drinking water supply, he directed the department to submit proposals for the installation of hand pumps wherever feasible to ensure a reliable source of drinking water in affected areas.

On road infrastructure, he emphasised that roads in hilly and mountainous regions require specialised, resilient engineering designs capable of withstanding natural disasters. Observing that designs suitable for the plains cannot be replicated in mountainous terrain, he directed the Public Works Department to submit recommendations for developing more disaster-resilient road infrastructure.

He also directed that a proposal for the construction of a Mini Secretariat in Rajouri be prepared and submitted. He asked the administration to explore the possibility of monetising government office spaces that would become available after departments are relocated to the proposed complex.

Referring to construction along riverbanks, he said that rivers naturally reclaim their courses during extreme weather events and stressed that construction in such vulnerable areas would not be permitted in future.

He also assured that issues relating to the alternate bus stand, Jal Shakti restoration and other important public infrastructure requirements would be examined sympathetically.

Commending the coordinated efforts of the district administration and all line departments, he urged them to sustain the same level of commitment and ensure that all necessary preventive and mitigation measures are implemented to minimise the impact of such disasters in future.

Among others, the meeting was attended by Rajouri MLA Iftkhar Ahmed, Thanamandi MLA Muzaffar Iqbal Khan, Budhal MLA Javed Iqbal Choudhary, CM's additional chief secretary Dheeraj Gupta, DC Abhishek Sharma, SSP Gaurav Sikarwar, ADDC Malikzada Sheraz-ul-Haq and ADC Ravi Kumar Sihag.

3 held with heroin, cash

During search of the vehicle, police recovered two syringes, including one filled with a suspected narcotic substance and another empty.

A personal search of the driver, who was identified as Mohammad Tabish Saleem of Mendhar in Poonch dis-

trict, led to the recovery of a heroin-like substance, officials said.

A heroin-like substance was also recovered from the co-passenger, who was identified as Mohammad Irfan of Raika, Bahu Fort.

Following the seizure, a case was registered against them at Chhani Himmat police station under relevant provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, officials said.

During investigation, police arrested another accused, who was identified as Aijaz Choudhary alias Ajju Channi Rama, the officials added, saying that two electronic weighing machines, six mobile phones, Rs 28,000 in cash and one syringe were recovered from him.

Officials said the police probe into the incident was still in progress.

Employees asked to complete iGOT Karmayogi training

The circular states that designation-wise virtual training interventions identified under the Capacity Building Calendar had been mapped to the respective iGOT Karmayogi profiles of government officials. The initiative aims to address competency and capacity gaps associated with different posts and improve the efficiency and skill set of government employees.

In accordance with the implementation norms of the Capacity Building Programme, every employee is required to complete a minimum of 50 hours of training annually through the iGOT Karmayogi platform.

The GAD has instructed all concerned employees to immediately enroll in and complete the assigned courses, which will be available under the "Upcoming" tab of the "My Space" section on their respective iGOT Karmayogi profiles.

The circular emphasises that timely completion of the prescribed training modules is mandatory for all employees registered on the GAD's MDO Portal.

The move is aimed at strengthening administrative capacity, enhancing governance standards, and promoting continuous professional development across government departments in Jammu and Kashmir.

Taxation Bill passed

mote domestic electronics manufacturing and make it easier for foreign cloud companies to use Indian data centres by providing "process certainty".

Def Min chairs meeting on strengthening Territorial Army

suggestions to further strengthen the force and enhance its overall effectiveness, it said.

In his address, Singh described the Territorial Army's contribution as "significant" in advancing Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's vision of Viksit Bharat.

He emphasised that while the role of the defence forces revolves primarily around security-related aspects, the Territorial Army contributes in other areas such as environmental conservation and social work as well.

"The Territorial Army is a living embodiment of the 'citizen-soldier' concept. While its members engage in civilian pursuits, they simultaneously don the uniform to safeguard the borders and maintain internal security," Singh said.

He added that when the personnel complete their tenure and return to civilian life, they act as a "vibrant bridge" between society and the military, inspiring people, especially the youth, to join the defence forces.

The Territorial Army stands as a trained, motivated, and potent force, comprising nearly 44,400 personnel and 59 diverse units, the ministry said.

Singh termed the force as "first responders", who provide immediate relief and support during natural calamities. He acknowledged their role in carrying out relief and rescue work, and providing medical aid to those in need during Kerala floods, Odisha cyclone and the recent floods in Assam.

Commending their contribution in environmental management and climate change mitigation, he said the ecological task forces of the Territorial Army have planted approximately 10 crore saplings till date, with the survival rate ranging between 80-85 per cent.

This green initiative is translating the prime minister's 'Mission LiFE' and 'Panchamrit' goals into reality on the ground, he said.

Singh also appreciated the efforts of the Territorial Army deployed in Jammu and Kashmir for taking the 'Har Ghar Tiranga' campaign to greater heights.Jammu Kashmir Travel

The Territorial Army, raised on October 9, 1949, completed 75 years in 2024 and has served the nation in times of war and in humanitarian and environmental protection work through its journey over the decades. It is fully integrated with the regular Army.

Bangladesh to hold presidential election on Aug 20

Commission's senior secretary Akhtar Ahmed told reporters.

In line with the Constitution, the parliament members elect the president, but the EC conducts the procedure to elect the head of state.

Announcing the election schedule, Election Commission Secretariat Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said that voting will be held on August 20 from 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm at the Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) session hall.

Nomination papers will be accepted at the office of the Chief Election Commissioner on August 13. The scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on August 16. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is August 18.

The lawmakers would cast votes to elect the new president inside Parliament on August 20. However, no voting will be held in case of a consensus candidate.

According to reports, Ahmed told journalists that the announcement for the presidential election schedule was made after discussions with Parliament Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, who is serving as Acting President for 90 days in accordance with the Constitution. A new President must be elected within a 90-day timeframe.

Ahmed said that the voter list for the election has been prepared and other remaining administrative procedures will be completed before the election.

Shahabuddin, a 1971 Liberation War veteran and former lower judiciary judge, had taken the oath in April 2023 for a five-year term.

He cited health complications as the reason for his resignation; however, it came amid speculations that Prime Minister Rahman's government was uncomfortable with the largely titular head of state.

Some reports had claimed that Shahabuddin contacted Hasina over the phone, disappointing the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party's top leadership. The former president had dismissed the reports as "baseless."

He was elected to the highest office by the previous parliament and was the only person still holding his constitutional position, long after the violent July-August 2024 student-led street protest that toppled Hasina's Awami League government.

Hasina fled to India and has been living there since August 5, 2024.

Prime Minister Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which currently enjoys a two-thirds majority in the 350-member House, is yet to decide a candidate for the pres-

idential election.

An individual may serve as president for a maximum of two terms.

High-Altitude Wildlife Safari to begin in Ladakh

flora and fauna.

He directed the forest department to introduce guided Jeep Safari on the lines of popular National Parks like Kaziranga, Ranthambore and others, using specially designed open-back vehicles, to be operated by trained local drivers and guides.

The objective behind introducing guided safaris is to prevent incidents of illegal off-roading and disturbing wildlife, besides strengthening sustainable and responsible eco-friendly tourism and enhancing visitor experience.

The decision was taken in the first governing body meeting of the newly constituted Snow Leopard and High-Altitude Nature (SHAN) Conservation Society, chaired by LG Shri Saxena. The Lieutenant Governor has directed the Forest Department to explore the possible safari routes across Hemis National Park, Changthang and Karakoram Wildlife Sanctuaries, apart from areas like Nubra, Zaskar, Sham, Kargil and Drass, that are known to have a sizable presence of elusive snow leopards and vivid avian diversity.

It was also decided that 20 local youth will be selected, trained in birdwatching, bird identification and bird-spotting skills and will be provided with equipment like binoculars. Besides, 10 bird-watching hides will be created at major hot-spots.

Notably, Ladakh is home to India's largest snow leopard population - 477 of the country's estimated 718 snow leopards. Ladakh also supports over 38 mammal species, 340 bird species and 1,800 vascular plant species that have drawn substantial tourist attraction over the years.

The SHAN Society, constituted by the LG on June 16 this year, seeks to formulate a comprehensive roadmap for community-led wildlife conservation, waste management and promoting plastic-free tourism, sustainable livelihood generation and responsible tourism across Ladakh.

SHAN Society envisages a unique model of environment conservation in Ladakh, wherein the government alone will not be responsible for environment protection, but local communities will be made active partners in protecting Ladakh's fragile ecosystem and wildlife. This will instil a sense of custodianship among the people, while creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for them.

Saxena termed Ladakh's unique wildlife and fragile high-altitude ecosystem as its greatest natural asset and said that conservation efforts could only succeed when local communities become equal partners in protecting nature and also benefit economically from it.

"Through SHAN, we are creating a model that integrates wildlife conservation, responsible eco-tourism, environmental education, empowering local communities and creating sustainable livelihoods for them. These efforts aim at conserving Ladakh's natural heritage so that future generations inherit an ecosystem that is richer, healthier and more resilient. Our vision is to establish Ladakh as a global example of community-led conservation and responsible high-altitude mountain tourism," the LG said.

He directed the concerned agencies to complete all preparations before the commencement of the snow-leopard sighting season during the winters this year.

LS passes Bill to allow charges on UPI transactions

sureing a sustainable revenue model for banks, payment service providers (PSPs), and payment infrastructure firms that drive the digital payments ecosystem.

"In the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, in Section 10A, for the words, figures and letters 'the electronic modes of payment prescribed under section 269SU of the Income-tax Act, 1961', the words 'one or more electronic modes of payment as the central government may, by notification, specify' shall be substituted with effect from the date of publication of this Act in the Official Gazette," the Bill said.

Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 prohibits banks and system providers from imposing any charges on electronic payments while Section 269SU of the Income Tax Act requires large businesses with a turnover exceeding Rs 50 crore to accept payments through specific electronic modes, including RuPay debit cards and BHIM-UPI QR codes.

As on date, no bank or payment system provider could impose any charge upon anyone, either directly or indirectly, for using the electronic modes of payment prescribed under Section 269SU of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Speaking on the issue RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Wednesday said it is "premature" to talk about MDR on payment through digital means.

Investment in public infrastructure like payments is necessary, he said, reiterating that someone will have to pay for it.

"The choices before us are simple: either the general public has to pay for it through taxes, or we have to levy the merchant discount rate (MDR), following the 'user pays' model.

"Right now, the government is getting us the amendment. Costs have to be paid by someone. We all want this public infrastructure to strengthen and become more efficient, etc. We continue to do that. That is our focus right now; let us wait and watch for further developments," Malhotra said.

Levy of MDR has become a vexed issue in the country as bankers and other stakeholders in the payment industry have been pressing for it, and the government has so far not moved in the matter, and the usage of digital payments like the UPI platform has continued to grow at a handsome pace.

Some watchers have been expecting MDR to set in for UPI transactions above a certain value between a merchant and customer, and not in the case of peer-to-peer payments.

The important aspect is that someone has to pay for the service, the RBI Governor said.

Malhotra said under the 'use-pays' principle, it is the person or the merchant who is transacting who gets charged through the levy of MDR, but added that even if there is no MDR in place, the general public pays for it through the taxes.

"What is important is that we continue to invest and continue to find the means, whether it is MDR or others. Let us wait and see how the situation evolves," he said.

Policeman shot dead, another abducted in NW Pakistan

rally in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The explosion had occurred when the Swat Peace Rally was in progress right across the police station in Kabal town in Swat district.

The peace rally was organised by Swat Aman Jirga (local tribal council), with participants raising slogans and carrying placards to demand peace in the area. They alleged that police inaction had resulted in deterioration in the security situation in the past few months.

The suicide bomber had attempted to enter the Kabal

Police Station and Police Lines compound but was intercepted by police personnel at the main gate. The attacker then detonated the explosive device, damaging the main gate and preventing entry into the heavily secured compound.

Cabinet clears Rs 23,731 cr GOBARdhan scheme

mud, municipal organic waste and other biomass resources into clean fuel, organic manure, rural income and national economic value, an official release said.

Through assured demand, remunerative and stable pricing, capital assistance, pipeline infrastructure, credit support and technology development, the GOBARdhan scheme will provide a strong and predictable framework required to take India's Compressed Biogas (CBG) sector to national scale, it added.

Amarnath Yatra resumes, 1,801 pilgrims leave for valley base camps

in Ganderbal district. The yatra will conclude on August 28.

Authorities have put in place multi-layered security arrangements along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and at all transit camps to ensure the safe and smooth movement of the yatra convoys. A multi-tier security setup has also been activated in and around the Bhagwati Nagar base camp.

The commencement of the yatra had marked the beginning of the country's one of the most revered spiritual pilgrimages and reflects the coordinated efforts of the administration and all stakeholder departments to facilitate a secure, seamless and memorable pilgrimage experience for every devotee.

Traffic restrictions will remain in force on various stretches of the highway till August 28 when the pilgrimage would come to an end, with daily advisories and sector-wise cut-off timings to regulate traffic, officials said.

Tokyo labels Beijing as its 'greatest strategic challenge'

around them to assert Beijing's sovereignty.

The white paper approved by Japan's cabinet on Tuesday said China's growing military actions are Japan's top security challenge and "must be addressed through overall national strength and cooperation with allies and like-minded nations."

The nearly 600-page white paper contained a detailed assessment of the increasingly volatile regional security environment.

Coinciding with the release of the white paper, Japan showcased its new anti-ship missile, with a range of about 1,000 km.

The missile test brings Tokyo a step closer to fielding an indigenous family of long-range stand-off missiles that could be deployed from the land, sea and air, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

In his preface to the whitepaper, Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi hoped that it would "deepen the public's understanding of Japan's defence and security, and serve as an opportunity for people to reflect on how security is linked to the future of every citizen."

"As the security environment rapidly intensifies, what is needed now is to enhance resilience to crises across the entire Indo-Pacific region," Koizumi wrote, pledging to build and expand "a multi-layered network of allies and like-minded nations, and increase interconnectivity in all aspects, including training, troop deployment, equipment and industrial infrastructure, to improve deterrence across the region."

Tension between China and Japan erupted in November over PM Sanae Takaichi's remarks in parliament that a Taiwan contingency could be a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan that may lead to action from the country's defence forces in support of the United States.

Her remarks angered China as it regards Taiwan as part of its territory and the relations remained tense since then.

"Stability around Taiwan is important for the international community, and our country needs to keep a close watch on the situation," the white paper said.

On nuclear weapons, the paper reiterated Japan's long-held three non-nuclear principles, saying that Tokyo continues to adhere to them "as policy guidelines."

Koizumi, however, has appeared to set the stage for a review of the country's decades-old pledge not to produce, possess or host nuclear arms, saying that the debate over nuclear weapons is the one "we cannot avoid".

Oppn MPs protest in Par complex

bolise the alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple and lined up around them to raise slogans against the government.

The opposition MPs, mostly from the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, lined up behind a big banner that read 'Amit Shah jawaab do', and raised slogans against the Home Minister. Earlier, SP MPs also held a separate protest demanding accountability over the alleged theft of donations from the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The INDIA bloc has vowed to corner the government on issues of alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple and the use of "brutal force" against students during their protests last week.

Earlier in the day, INDIA bloc parties' floor leaders met in Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge's chamber in Parliament complex, and vowed to corner the government on the two issues of "chhanda chori" and "police excesses" against students.

Both Houses of Parliament remain deadlocked over the opposition's demands with most of the legislative business being conducted amid din.

Breach of privilege cases against 2 JKAS officers, MLA reviewed

and JKBOSE secretary (then ACD Ganderbal) respectively. Both these officers were present in person.

The chairman emphasised the need for strict adherence to established legislative conventions and administrative protocols while dealing with the elected representatives.

He said that maintaining the dignity and privileges of the legislators was essential for strengthening the democratic institutions and ensuring harmonious coordination between the legislature and the executive.

He stressed that all government officers should remain fully conversant with the provisions governing the legislative privileges and conduct themselves in accordance with the prescribed rules and procedures while interacting with MLAs. The committee in unison stressed that due protocol and courtesy must be extended to MLAs in discharge of their official responsibilities. They underlined that timely communication, responsiveness to public issues raised by legislators and adherence to established administrative norms were vital for effective governance and public service delivery.

The committee closed the case against then ACD Ganderbal while the replies furnished by Parra and SDM Chadoora against breach of privilege would be taken in the next meeting of the committee.