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New Industry Body to Promote R&D

In a first, over two dozen defence companies have come together to form a new industry association that focuses on indigenous design and development, taking a cue from the new procurement policy of the government that promotes domestic R&D with special incentives.

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, who is currently finalizing the new procurement policy that could be released in March, is set to speak on self-reliance in defence through design and development at the first event of the new association on Thursday.

The association does not have the big names in defence manufacturing but is a grouping of smaller companies that have been in the sector for several years and have a functioning research department. Companies include Centum electronics, Kineco Private Ltd, Avantel Ltd and Zen Technologies Pvt Ltd.

While industry associations like FICCI and CII have strong defence departments that focus on the sector, DIIA would be the first to focus exclusively on indigenous R&D.

“The focus was always on how to manufacture components or equipment in India.

But the IP has always been owned by someone else.

DIIA's will engage the Government to ensure a policy that encourages design and development of defence equipment with IP ownership in our own hands,” Ashok Atluri, Chairman, DIIA told ET.

Protests at Defence Expo site - Hundreds of protesters opposing the holding of Defence Expo at Betul in south Goa on Wednesday blocked the trucks carrying construction material to the site. Defence Minister and former Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar had announced that `Def Expo 2016' will be held at Betul but the locals are opposed to it, fearing “they would lose their lands permanently“ to Defence Ministry.

IAF has lowest combat power in decade

In a damning reality, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is now at its lowest combat strength in more than a decade.

The IAF has informed the government about the gravity of the situation that the force is now in the middle of the shortage. Three squadrons of the vintage single-engine Soviet Union origin MiG-21 and MiG-27 have been phased out as on January 1 this year, leaving the IAF with only 32 squadrons (some 16-18 planes in each). This is some 10 short of the government mandated 42 squadrons needed to tackle a simultaneous two-front war with China and Pakistan.

In simple words, the IAF will have some 576 fighter jets and will be short of the 750-strong fighter jet fleet mandated by a government sanction to wage a simultaneous two-front war with Pakistan and China.

Of the 32 squadrons, the vintage MiG-21 and MiG-27 will form 11 squadrons. The Sukhoi 30-MKI populates 10 squadron, the 1970's design British Jaguar is in six squadrons, followed by French Mirage 2000 and Soviet Union's MiG-29 in two and three squadrons, respectively. The last three are being upgraded with better missiles and avionics.

The country is now facing the reality of projections on IAF fighter fleet made, separately, over the past 10 years, by the Indian Air Force, strategic thinkers, successive reports of Parliamentary Committees on Defence and the reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). Warnings on the “lackadaisical” pace of induction of new fighter jets into the Indian Air Force and the resultant lose of “combative edge” in battle are now ringing true, sources say.

A senior official admitted: “We are in the middle of the predicted shortage.”

It is the replacements which bother the IAF. The IAF will be raising a squadron of the twin-engine Russian-origin Sukhoi-30-MKI within this year but much depends on the speed of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which is licensed to produce it in India.

HAL, a Ministry of Defence (MoD)-owned public sector undertaking, was mandated by the Cabinet Committee on Security in March 2006 to produce 16 planes annually and deliver 180 in phases by 2017. The project is running three years behind schedule. Till 2011, the HAL had the capacity to produce just eight Sukhoi-30 jets annually, said a report of the CAG in 2014.

The Sukhois were ordered in phases since 1997, the IAF wants 272 of these in its fleet by 2020. The other choice for the IAF is to seek faster induction of the 106 Tejas “Mark-1A” which have been ordered.

The MoD has set a 2018 deadline for the first aircraft to be ready with a target to complete its production by 2022-23. In September, new specifications were agreed upon and the IAF accepted 43 modifications that could be carried out without changing the existing design.

10 squadrons short for two-front war with China, Pak

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The Pioneer
25 Feb, 2016

Rejendra Singh is first coast guard official to become DG

In a break from tradition, the Centre on Wednesday appointed Rajendra Singh as Director General of Indian Coast Guard who is will be the first officer from the maritime security agency to be elevated to the top post.

According to the tradition prevalent till so far, a Naval officer used to head the Coast Guard. The Appointments Committee of Cabinet has approved the appointment of Singh as DG, an order issued by Department of Personnel and Training said.

Singh at present is Additional Director General of the Coast Guard. Singh, who joined the organisation in 1980, has been appointed in place of Vice Admiral HCS Bisht. Bisht is set to take over as Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, the order said.

The DG designate has commanded each class of Coast Guard Ship in service, which includes the Interceptor Boat, Inshore Patrol Vessel, Fast Patrol Vessel, Offshore Patrol Vessel and Advanced Offshore Patrol Vessel.

“In the early 1980s, when smuggling was at its zenith in Indian waters, he was actively involved in apprehending numerous maritime economic offenders whose activities were inimical to national interests,” says Singh’s bio data on the Coast Guard’s website.

He was awarded the Tatrakshak Medal (TM) by the President on August 15, 1990. In recognition of his distinguished service, he was awarded President's Tatrakshak Medal (PTM) on Aug 15, 2002.

Having served in various capacities both ashore and afloat, Singh has an impeccable track record in the field of Operations, Administration, human resource, policy and plans.

The Pioneer
25 Feb, 2016

US defence Secy to visit India on April 9

US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter will visit India in April this year during which he will meet the top leadership here and review bilateral cooperation in the critical sector and also identify new areas of access in the defence procurement market.

Carter is likely to arrive here on April 9 and meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and his Indian counterpart Manohar Parrikar.

"He will be reviewing the existing Defence cooperation and identify new areas," Defence sources said. During his visit in June last year, he had signed the 2015 Framework for India-US Defence Relationship, which builds upon the previous framework and successes to guide bilateral Defence and strategic partnership for the next 10 years.

The new framework agreement provides avenues for high-level strategic discussions, continued exchanges between armed forces of both countries and strengthening of Defence capabilities.

Another area of focus would be the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). Both India and the US have finalised two project agreements for joint development of mobile electric hybrid power sources and next-generation protective ensembles.

Both are also working on taking forward the cooperation on jet engines and aircraft carrier design and construction.

Concerns on the Indian side include lack of transfer of critical technology by the US and its financial and technological aid to Pakistan widely perceived as a haven of terror especially directed towards India.

Deccan Herald
25 Feb, 2016

N-deterrence a factor of stability: Pakistan

Islamabad, PTI: Describing its nuclear arsenal as a "factor of stability in South Asia", Pakistan on Wednesday said it will maintain a full-spectrum deterrence and take steps to effectively respond to the threats to its national security.

During the 22nd meeting of the National Command Authority under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the nuclear watchdog reviewed regional and international security environment.

"NCA took note of the growing conventional and strategic weapons' development in the region. It expressed serious concerns over the adverse ramifications for peace and security on this account," a statement by the army said.

The NCA reaffirmed its determination to take all possible measures to make national security robust, enabling it to effectively respond to the threats to national security without indulging in arms race.

"Reiterating that nuclear deterrence is the factor of stability in South Asia, NCA expressed the resolve to maintain Full Spectrum Deterrence, in line with the policy of Credible Minimum Deterrence,"

The NCA noted that Pakistan has the requisite credentials to become part of all multi-lateral export control regimes, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group, for which it seeks a non-discriminatory approach.

Deccan Herald
25 Feb, 2016

Vietnam Invites India to Explore Resources in South China Sea

Within its 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone South China Sea is rich in hydrocarbons and marine wealth, including fisheries

Vietnam has invited India to explore and exploit natural resources within its 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea region where China has deployed fighter jets and surface-to-air missiles to the consternation of other countries.

The country's ambassador to India Ton Sinh Thanh on Wednesday said that Vietnam has sovereign rights and jurisdiction within 200 nautical miles of the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

“We are determined to protect our rights and maintain regular activities in our sovereign waters. Accordingly, we shall continue to cooperate with other countries, including India, to explore and exploit resources within our 200-nautical-mile EEZ,” Thanh told a select gathering in Delhi.

The comments came at a time when fresh reports from the United States said that Chinese Shenyang J-11 and Xian JH-7 warplanes have been spotted on Woody Island in the disputed Paracel Islands chain over the past few days in the SCS region.

Vietnam claims sovereignty over both Paracel and Spratly Islands. “We have full historical evidence and legal foundation to confirm our sovereignty over these islands, which in fact have been owned and controlled peacefully and continuously by Vietnam since the 17th century when no other countries claimed their sovereignty over these islands. We are determined to protect our sovereignty over these islands,” Thanh said.

The Vietnamese government had awarded India oil blocks in the SCS region amid growing defence partnership between the two countries that saw India placing a satellite tracking system in the country. Despite China's protests India continues to be present in these oil blocks from where ONGC Videsh Limited supplies oil to Vietnam. South China Sea is rich in hydrocarbons and marine wealth, including fisheries.

Deccan Herald
25 Feb, 2016

China deploys fighter jets to island in South China Sea

Washington, AFP: China has deployed fighter jets to the same contested island in the South China Sea to which it also has sent surface-to-air missiles, US officials said.

Citing two unnamed US officials, Fox News said US intelligence services had spotted Chinese Shenyang J-11 and Xian JH-7 warplanes on Woody Island in the disputed Paracel Islands chain over the past few

days. Navy Captain Darryn James, a spokesman for US Pacific Command, confirmed the report but noted that Chinese fighter jets have previously used the island.

Woody Island, which is also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam, has had an operational airfield since the 1990s but it was upgraded last year to accommodate the J-11. "We are still concerned that the Chinese continue to put advanced arms systems on this disputed territory," James said Tuesday. Asked about the jets at a regular briefing Wednesday, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying neither confirmed nor denied their existence.

Hua said only that China's activities in the Paracels all fell within the scope of its sovereign territory and were therefore "in accordance with the principles of heaven and earth, and beyond reproach".

"While you're paying attention to China, have you also paid attention to all the other coastal countries that have occupied China's islands and reefs in the past decades and deployed radar and advanced weapons there?" she asked.

The deployment was reported as US Secretary of State John Kerry hosted his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in Washington.

Last week China confirmed it had placed "weapons" on Woody Island, defending what it said was its sovereign right to do so. A US official told AFP that Beijing has deployed surface-to-air missiles on the island, apparently HQ-9s which have a range of about 125 miles (200 km) Wang had been scheduled to visit the Pentagon earlier Tuesday but the visit was canceled due to a "scheduling conflict," officials said.

On Monday the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies released satellite imagery showing what appeared to be a high-frequency radar installation under construction on an artificial island on Cuarteron Reef in the Spratlys, a group of islands south of the Paracels which is also the subject of territorial disputes.

The Hindu
25 Feb, 2016

Plagiarism hits AIIMS

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here has said that it will look into the allegation of plagiarism against one of its doctors from the Department of Medicine. Senior officials said action will be taken against the physician if found guilty.

Trouble began in 2011 when International Health Research Magazine ' *The New England Journal of Medicine* ' published Dr S.K. Sharma's report on obesity. The publication found that the information in the research paper was copied from another already published research report.

Dr. Sharma was reportedly caught when *The New England Journal of Medicine* demanded clarification over some points mentioned in the research paper.

"Dr. Sharma was reportedly unable to clarify those points in front of the team. *The New England Journal of Medicine* is said to have found that facts stated in page 18 and 19 had been copied," a senior official at AIIMS.

The Hindu tried to contact Dr. Sharma, but he was not available for comments.

A partnership to Mars and beyond

The momentum that grew out of Barack Obama's official state visit to India last year, particularly in U.S.-India cooperation in space, is growing.

Just about a year ago, during an official state visit to India, U.S. President Barack Obama delivered an address to the Indian people. He declared that “the relationship between India and the United States can be one of the defining partnerships of this century”. He spoke about our commonalities “as societies that celebrate knowledge and innovation”, and how “together, we unlock new discoveries — from the particles of creation to outer space — two nations that have gone to both the Moon and to Mars.”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Obama used the occasion of the state visit to issue a joint statement in which, among other things, they “agreed to further promote cooperative and commercial relations between India and the United States in the field of space”.

Today, the momentum that grew out of this official state visit — particularly in U.S.-India cooperation in space — is growing.

I'm deeply honoured this week to represent the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and all of the people of the U.S. here in India. In just a few months, NASA Administrator Charles Bolden will also travel here to participate in the Asia-Pacific Remote Sensing Symposium.

Both of our visits come after a very productive U.S.-India Civil Space Joint Working Group meeting in Bengaluru last September. That meeting was themed around two very significant words; words that late Indian President Abdul Kalam was fond of saying after the completion of a successful activity: “What next?”

Regarding India-U.S. space cooperation, the answer to this question is to turn dreams into reality. The potential flowing from our partnerships extends all the way to Mars (and beyond).

The U.S. is leading a journey to Mars that will send astronauts to the Red Planet in the 2030s. Today, both our great nations are working together to lay the groundwork.

ISRO's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) and NASA's Mars Atmosphere and Volatile EvolutioN spacecraft (MAVEN) have been together in Mars orbit since they arrived at the Red Planet within two days of one another in September 2014. Our high expectations, our dreams for these two spacecraft are being realised as they are both contributing to scientific understanding of Mars and its atmosphere. Our joint Mars Working Group has been very active. Our teams are meeting this week in Bengaluru for their third face-to-face meeting. The working group representatives are considering ways in which we can cooperate on MOM and MAVEN and other missions in the future.

Closer to home, NASA and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) are collaborating on our first-ever joint earth science satellite mission. The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) will acquire critical, first-ever, all-weather, high-resolution radar measurements for use in a wide range of applications such as global food security, freshwater availability, human health, disaster prediction and hazard response, climate monitoring and adaptation, and urban management and planning. This is a significant mission to which both nations are making substantial contributions. Indeed, without the contributions of both India and the U.S., the highly capable NISAR mission would not be possible. Again, we're turning dreams into reality.

Other cooperative activities

The list of other cooperative activities underway today is long. It includes exchange visits of U.S. and Indian researchers and even a joint airborne campaign that involves the flight of an advanced NASA visible/infrared imaging spectrometer instrument on an ISRO aircraft over sites in India. That mission, which began last December and runs through next month, is producing vast amounts of precise data.

These are excellent examples of how, in the past several years, NASA and ISRO have made major strides in developing U.S.-India space cooperation, by communicating often about our respective programmes, identifying mutual interests, and defining areas of potential collaboration.

We have recently taken this engagement to a whole new level. As true partners, we are implementing challenging mission activities and have seen steady engagement at the programme, project, and senior leadership levels.

U.S.-India civil space cooperation dates back to 1963 with the launch of NASA's Nike-Apache sounding rocket from Indian soil. It's our sincere hope that the future will bring new avenues of cooperation in earth and space science, deep space communications, and perhaps research aboard the International Space Station.

It's very exciting that just days ago Prime Minister Modi announced that India will build a Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory facility, and together we will explore gravitational waves, the most exciting discovery in fundamental physics in this new millennium. Albert Einstein's dreams are becoming reality. U.S. and Indian scientists are a part of that reality and are showing that together we can tackle difficult and important scientific questions.

As President Obama put it, "as Americans, we believe in the promise of India. We believe in the people of India. We are proud to be your friend. We are proud to be your partner as you build the country of your dreams."

We are also proud to work with you to help make true the common dreams of humanity — including life here on spaceship Earth, the pursuit of a deeper understanding of our universe, and humanity's place in it.

The Hindu
25 Feb, 2016

Sunita's visit to deepen space cooperation

Captain Sunita Williams, Astronaut with the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) of the U.S., will be in India on a two-day visit beginning on Thursday even as a NASA team is holding discussions with their Indian counterparts to deepen space cooperation.

In Delhi, Capt. Williams has a series of engagements addressing students on her journey as an astronaut and women's empowerment through Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education.

She is also scheduled to discuss the broadening Indo-U.S. space cooperation during the valedictory address on Friday at "The Second Kalpana Chawla Annual Space Policy" organised by the Observer Research Foundation.

Capt. Williams is an American astronaut and United States Navy officer of Indian-Slovenian origin. On her earlier visit to India in 2013 she described herself as a "spiritual person who is rooted to India."

Coinciding with the visit a NASA team lead by the Deputy Administrator Dava Newman is at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) headquarters in Bengaluru for the third face-to-face meeting of the ISRO-NASA Mars Working Group.

The working group coordinates observations and science analysis between the NASA and the ISRO's Mars spacecraft — including India's Mars Orbiter Mission and the NASA's MAVEN which arrived at Mars within days of each other in September 2014 – and explores potential cooperation on future missions to Mars.

Closer to Planet Nine

US astronomers said they may have found a ninth planet beyond Neptune, but said they had no idea where on an estimated 10,000-20,000-year orbit it might be. Now, a French quartet says they have narrowed the search area

Narrowing Down

By studying data from NASA's Cassini spacecraft orbiting Saturn, two zones could be excluded, co-author Jacques Laskar of the Paris Observatory said

Based on mathematical modelling, the French scientists calculated what influence a ninth planet — travelling along the orbit the Americans postulated — would have on movement of other planets

Halfway There

Planet Nine is thought to circle the Sun in a lopsided, highly elongated, oval loop

At its furthest from the Sun, the planet would be too far too away to affect any other planet, limiting astronomers to a searchable zone only half the total orbit

Laskar and his team have reduced the search area by 50% by eliminating two zones in which the modelling does not match reality.

Years to find the Planet

10 times more massive than Earth, Planet Nine's existence was first predicted by astronomers Konstantin Batygin and Mike Brown with modelling and simulations and was said to explain the strange behaviour of a group of dwarf planets beyond Neptune

It would take a very large telescope to spot the planet at that distance.

When they were right

Many other planets have been predicted through modelling over the years, mostly wrongly

In one famous case the science was right -the discovery of Neptune, first predicted from its gravitational pull on Uranus.

Nasa turns to public to help humanoid robot 'see' better

Nasa is asking coders to create algorithms to improve 3D vision of its first humanoid robot in space for maintaining the International Space Station, freeing up astronauts for critical science and repair work.

Humans use glasses to help them see better, but for robots, the fix is in their code, Nasa said.

The Robonaut Vision Tool Manipulation contest offers a total of \$10,000 in prizes for the best algorithms.

Robonaut 2, or R2, is the first humanoid robot in space, currently being tested on the ISS.

Serving as an extra set of hands for station crew members, the robot is looking to help with the more mundane or repetitive tasks that are required for maintaining the million-pound laboratory, freeing up its human colleagues for critical science and repair work.

For example, R2 manages inventory using a radio-frequency identification (RFID) reader and fastens bolts with a drill.

While astronauts can control R2 directly, making the robot more autonomous will make work on the station and on future deep space exploration missions more efficient. One goal is to help R2 “see” better, said Nasa.

In order to use a tool, R2 relies on an algorithm to determine a 3-D representation of the tool. The algorithm works with the robot’s control system and allows R2 to create a plan for grasping objects and completing its tasks.

Existing algorithms assume that high-resolution images are always available, Nasa said.

New algorithms are needed that can determine differences in objects based on noisy, stereo vision data.

The objective for the contest is to create algorithms that will receive a pair of noisy stereo images of common space tools such as an RFID reader, an EVA handrail, or a softbox, among others, and determine the correct 3-D representation of the object in the image pair.

Deccan Herald
25 Feb, 2016

Copper can destroy MRSA 'superbug', says study

London, PTI: Copper can destroy MRSA and MSSA 'superbugs' spread by touching and fingertip contamination of surfaces, a new study has claimed.

Frequently-touched surfaces in busy areas - such as hospitals, transport hubs and public buildings - are at high risk of community-acquired and healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs) caused by methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and methicillin-sensitive Staphylococcus aureus (MSSA).

Bacteria deposited on a surface by one person touching it, or via contaminated body fluids, can be picked up by subsequent users and spread to other surfaces, potentially causing thousands of infections worldwide, researchers from the University of Southampton in UK said.

In previous studies, simulated 'droplet contamination' of MRSA - representing a sneeze or a splash - showed it was rapidly killed on copper and copper alloy surfaces.

However, contamination of surfaces often occurs via fingertips, drying rapidly and potentially being overlooked by cleaning regimes, unlike visible droplets.

"Our latest research shows that in simulated fingertip contamination of surfaces with millions of MRSA or MSSA, the cells can remain alive for long periods on non-antimicrobial surfaces - such as stainless steel - but are killed even more rapidly than droplet contamination on copper and copper alloys," said Sarah Warnes from University of Southampton.

Touch surfaces made from solid antimicrobial copper are already used by hospitals, schools, mass transit hubs, sports facilities and offices around the world to reduce the spread of infections, supporting key infection control measures such as good hand hygiene and regular surface cleaning and disinfection.

The Times of India
25 Feb, 2016

New Wi-Fi system consumes 10,000 times less power

Scientists have demonstrated that it is possible to generate Wi-Fi transmissions using 10,000 times less power than conventional methods, an advance that may help save battery life in smartphones and other devices.

The new Passive Wi-Fi system also consumes 1,000 times less power than existing energy-efficient wireless communication platforms, such as Bluetooth Low Energy and Zigbee. “We wanted to see if we could achieve Wi-Fi transmissions using almost no power at all,” said Shyam Gollakota, assistant professor at the University of Washington.

“That is basically what Passive Wi-Fi delivers. We can get Wi-Fi for 10,000 times less power than the best thing that is out there,” said Gollakota.

Passive Wi-Fi can for the first time transmit Wi-Fi signals at up to 11 megabits per second that can be decoded on any of the billions of devices with Wi-Fi connectivity , researchers said. These speeds are lower than the maximum Wi-Fi speeds but 11 times higher than Bluetooth, they said.

Aside from saving battery life on today's devices, wireless communication that uses almost no power will help enable an “Internet of Things“ reality where household devices and wearable sensors can communicate ` using Wi-Fi without worry ing about power. In real-world conditions, the team found the passive Wi-Fi sensors and a smartphone can communicate even at distances of 100 feet between them.

The Hindu
25 Feb, 2016

Ex-gratia scope for defence personnel extended

The Delhi Cabinet on Wednesday extended the scheme of paying Rs. 1 crore ex-gratia to the families of defence personnel who lose their lives during operations, calamities and disasters.

Earlier, the Cabinet had approved the scheme only to cover war widows, war disabled, prisoners of war, missing in war or operations for Defence, Delhi Police, Home Guards, Civil Defence and other personnel.

Further, to control air pollution arising from the dust on roads, the Cabinet approved a Public Works Department (PWD) proposal for their maintenance.

It was stated that one of the major causes of air pollution was suspended particulate matter (PM 2.5 and PM 10) due to dust on roads and construction sites, and that dust gathered on roads due to improper or non-cleaning of roads — a matter that was further compounded by vehicles and manual sweeping.

In view of the existing situation, the Cabinet also approved the proposal authorising the PWD to carry out mechanised sweeping of roads and introduce a mechanised stack parking system.

The expenditure for this work shall be borne under the Roads and Bridges head.

A policy in favour of the utilisation of 77 government school playgrounds before and after school hours, as well as on holidays, for outdoor sporting activities by the local community was also taken.

Also, a proposal by the Department of Education to allow 77 playgrounds of government schools, which are run in single shifts, for outdoor sports activities for the youth of the areas was approved.

The playgrounds will be allowed for use to entities like sports associations and clubs, strictly for organising sporting events. Individuals interested in athletics can also use these premises for those interested in training and coaching students.

The Hindu
25 Feb, 2016

Excessive social media use is like drug addiction

Can spending excessive time on Facebook or other social media be as dangerous as addiction to cocaine or gambling?

Well, yes, if researchers from California State University, Fullerton, in the U.S. are to be believed.

They say social media obsession may lead to something akin to classical addiction. Excessive use triggers two key parts of the brain associated with rewards: amygdala, which is the integrative place for emotions, behaviour and motivation and striatum, part of the forebrain and a critical component of the reward system.

The findings, recently published in the journal *Psychological Reports: Disability and Trauma* showed that social media-related ‘addictions’ share some neural features with substance and gambling addictions.

The meteoric rise of the Internet usage and emergence of various social media platforms has left many young Indians socially isolated and lonely.

Take Krishnan (name changed), a 15-year-old social media addict in New Delhi, who recently visited Sameer Malhotra, a mental health and behavioural sciences expert.

Hooked on to Facebook for nearly 16 hours a day, he had developed an obsessive personality profile and was neglecting education.

“I have been seeing many youngsters who are in the grip of social media addiction. In the case of Krishnan, I treated him through both counselling and medication, which helped channelise his energy in positive work,” Dr. Malhotra said.

“Facebook addiction is similar to cocaine addiction to a certain level as there are certain neuro-chemicals such as dopamine which operate across brain reward pathways and are responsible for maintaining addictive behaviour,” he said.

According to Dr. Malhotra, teenagers with Facebook addiction-like symptoms may “have a hyperactive amygdale-striatal system, which makes this ‘addiction’ similar to many other addictions.”

Another mental health expert, Samir Parikh, says that preoccupation with social media leads to an interference in one’s social, occupational as well as other areas of functioning.

Physiological changes -“Yes, it could be considered similar to drug addiction to a certain level though it is not exactly the same. The difference is more in terms of the physiological manifestations involved,” Dr Parikh said.

“They all display similar patterns of behaviour like inability to abstain, impairment in behaviour control, craving, diminished recognition of significant behavioural problems, interpersonal issues and a dysfunctional emotional response,” says Birendra Yadav, clinical psychology expert.

“Overcoming any kind of addiction is possible with adequate professional interventions,” Dr. Parikh said. One can build the willpower of the person through counselling and medication, Dr. Malhotra added. — IANS