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Thu, 17 Aug, 2017

Army, PLA meet in Leh

To ensure peace along the banks of the Pangong lake in Ladakh, where soldiers of India and China got into a scuffle and pelted stones at each other on Tuesday, local commanders of both the countries held flag meeting on Wednesday in Chushul in Leh to defuse tension.

China has said it is not aware of the reports of People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers entering into Indian territory in Ladakh.

The flag meeting or Border Personnel Meeting (BPM) was held twice on Wednesday, once in the morning and later in the afternoon in Chushul, which is located in eastern Ladakh. Chushul is one of the five mutually agreed meeting points at the 4,000 km long Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The other four points are Daulat Beg Oldie (Ladakh) Bum La and Kibithu (Arunachal Pradesh) and Nathu La (Sikkim). The BPM meetings are part of confidence building measures to address issues like transgression and such incidents on the ground and prevent them from escalating into major confrontation.

Sources said the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to maintain peace and tranquility. This assurance came after the soldiers of two armies got into clash at Pangong Lake. The fight erupted after the Chinese soldiers twice tried to enter the Indian side in two areas — Finger Four and Finger Five — between 6 am and 9 am.

When the Indian patrol stopped the Chinese soldiers, they started pelting stones. The Indian team formed a human chain and carried out a banner drill asking the Chinese to go back to their positions. The drill is part of mutually agreed process to address such issues on the LAC, they said.

“Stating that incidents and issues to ensure strengthening of existing mechanism for maintaining peace and tranquility were discussed,” officials said one-third of the lake is controlled by India and two-thirds by China though each side has claims over the remaining part.

Asked to comment on the incident, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hu Chunying said, “I am not aware of the information,” reports PTI from Beijing.

She said the PLA troops always patrol along the Chinese side of the LAC. “The Chinese side is committed to peace and tranquility of the China-India border,” she said.

“We urge the Indian side to abide by the LAC and relevant conventions between the two sides,” she said.

Of the 135 km long lake, 45 km is with India and 90 km with China. The mountains sloping on the sides of the river form finger like structures. As per this, India holds till 4th finger but claims till the 8th finger, while China holds from 8th finger beyond but claims till 4th finger. So to enforce their claims each side regularly patrols till their claim area.

“We normally stop them at 5th finger area. That is when scuffles happen. Stone pelting is not unusual. It happens once in a while,” they said.

Meanwhile, the two armies exchanged sweets on the occasion of India's Independence Day. Army sources confirmed that “sweets were exchanged between Indian Army and PLA troops in multiple border locations, including in the area of Doklam”.

However, the ceremonial BPM normally held to commemorate national days did not take place. Such ceremonial meetings held on the occasion of Independence Day and Republic Day besides PLA Day (China). Incidentally, China had not invited the Indian Army on the occasion of PLA Day on August 1. These developments came against the backdrop of continuing stand-off at Doklam in Sikkim since June 16.

U.K. seeks to work together with India over N. Korea crisis

By Vidya Ram

Boris Johnson says the countries could persuade China to pressure Pyongyang

Britain hopes to work with India to exercise influence over China on North Korea, the country's Foreign Secretary has said. Speaking at a 70th Independence Day event in London on Tuesday evening, Boris Johnson expressed his hope that the two allies could work together to "persuade our friends in China of the truth... it's in the Chinese government's hands to exercise that economic pressure to achieve the diplomatic resolution that we need," he said.

"Never mind what you are hearing from the White House... let's focus on the real cause of the current crisis, when North Korea is recklessly and wantonly threatening its neighbours and those further afield with nuclear strikes."

"We stand shoulder to shoulder with India in our determination to ensure stability in the Asia Pacific region... In all those efforts to secure peace and security, the indispensable foundation of trade and prosperity... we are working ever more closely with India."

More than trade

"This relationship is about so much more than trade and so much more than... the interchange of goods and services. It's about the things that make the trade happen and at a time when the world is full of promise and full of threats and when global trade has actually been declining as a share of global growth, our relationship with India is about the safety, security and freedom that make that trade possible... We are shoulder to shoulder with India in tackling the threat of extremism and terrorism."

Mr. Johnson's remarks mark a shift away in Britain from rhetoric focussed largely on trade cooperation with India in the wake of the Brexit referendum to a more holistic discussion of the relationship.

Senior figures in India have expressed their concerns about the focus on boosting trade. Last year, Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told the BBC that India was no longer being treated as "old friends" but that relationship had become a tight "tight professional engagement."

Y.K. Sinha, India's envoy to the U.K., said in June: "India must be recognised as bearing the brunt of this for decades. ...if this isn't recognised, bilateral cooperation will not be a success."

Mr. Johnson also acknowledged factors that stood in the way of greater cooperation, including over visas, and student visas in particular. "We have to get the visa system right," he said adding that he hoped India too would recognise Britain's ambitions for increased access to good and services markets in India.

High Commissioner Sinha said he hoped the countries would continue to increase cooperation on intelligence sharing when it came to combating terrorism.

India aims to widen oil import sources

Places first order for shale crude with the U.S., says prices lower than for supplies from Gulf countries

Indian Oil Corporation placed India's first ever shale oil order two days ago with the U.S., according to company Chairman Sanjiv Singh, who said that the prices from the U.S. were very competitive even when compared with those from Gulf nations.

Speaking after his meeting with Turkmenistan Deputy Prime Minister Rashid Meredov in New Delhi on August 14, Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said that, regardless of the current tensions between India and China on the border, China was showing keen interest in maintaining business relations between the two countries.

Mr. Pradhan added that the increasing oil imports from new sources such as the U.S. was also putting pressure on OPEC countries to reduce the 'Asian premium' on oil prices they charge Asian countries, including India.

"Two days ago, we gave the first shale oil order, the first time shale oil will come to India," Mr. Singh said, also speaking following the meeting between the two ministers. "And, the U.S. is giving at prices competitive with the Gulf prices. We bought four cargoes [the] day before yesterday."

"The government supported us in this case," Mr. Singh added. "We used to buy oil on an FOB (Free On Board) basis. Now, these small shale producers cannot give a complete supply, so we have allowed them to aggregate and ship it to us. It is their ship that will deliver to us."

Under the FOB model, the buyer takes delivery of the item as soon as it leaves the seller's shores, which means that shipping costs are borne by the buyer. The deal with U.S. companies by IOC and BPCL, for 3.5 million barrels and 1.9 million barrels respectively, has PetroChina transporting the oil on behalf of the U.S. companies.

China's 'red carpet'

"Recently, several ministers have travelled to China and found that, whatever is happening on the border or on the diplomatic front, the Chinese do not want to let business stop between the two countries," Mr. Pradhan said. "They are showing the red carpet for Indian business."

Mr. Pradhan was also optimistic about the diversification of oil imports, including from countries like the U.S., as it would put pressure on the OPEC countries to do away with the Asian premium, something India has been arguing for. The increasing cooperation between India and the U.S. was mentioned by President Donald Trump as well.

"We have been asking for the Asian premium to be removed for a while now," Mr. Pradhan said. "Now, the market dynamics are forcing them to reduce the Asian premium. What was going slow through bilateral engagements, is now being achieved. The American shale oil and gas are coming at a new normal price, and gives us leverage."

THE ASIAN AGE

Thu, 17 Aug, 2017

Missile engine built in Ukraine

Pyongyang can make missile engines without imports, says US intel.

Kiev: Ukraine's space agency said on Wednesday that an engine type reportedly used in North Korean missiles was made at a Ukrainian factory, but solely for use in space rockets supplied to Russia.

The development came after an expert report published on Thursday said Pyongyang's recent rapid progress in developing a long-range missile appeared to have come after it refurbished rocket engines procured from a plant in the former Soviet Union. These could have been bought from corrupt workers at arsenals in Russia or Ukraine and smuggled to North Korea by criminal networks at some point between the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Ukraine's current crisis, the International Institute for Strategic Studies said.

"Such engines were made up to 2001 by Ukraine's Yuzhmash (plant)," Ukraine's acting space agency chief Yuriy Radchenko told journalists. He said the RD-250 engines were used in Cyclone-2 and Cyclone-3 space rockets supplied to Russia. Both the engines and the space carrier rockets "were made at Yuzhmash in the interests of Russia," Mr Radchenko said. In total, 233 such rockets were produced, used in space launches.

The space agency chief said that according to Ukrainian information, “Russia today has between 7 and 20” of the Cyclone rockets and could do whatever it wanted with the engines and blueprints. “They have these engines, they have the documentation. They can supply these engines from the finished rockets to whoever they want.”

The IISS report suggests Kim Jong-Un’s regime, which successfully tested intercontinental ballistic missiles in July, has abandoned attempts to modify the Russian-built OKB-456 rocket engine and has now switched to the once Ukrainian-made RD-250.

During the Soviet era, the RD-250 was produced at the Yuzhmash plant in Dnipro, a city that is today in Kiev government-held central Ukraine, 150km from an active frontline held by Russian-backed separatists. Ukraine did not act as a supplier of the engines to any other country, Mr Radchenko said.

Meanwhile, North Korea likely has the ability to produce its own missile engines and intelligence suggests it does not need to rely on imports, US Intelligence officials said on Tuesday.

The assessment disputes a new study by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies that said that the engines for a nuclear missile North Korea is developing to hit the United States likely were made in factories in Ukraine or Russia and probably obtained via black market networks.

The New York Times cited the study on Monday. The newspaper’s report said that classified assessments by US Intelligence agencies mirrored the IISS finding. “We have intelligence to suggest that North Korea is not reliant on imports of engines,” one US Intelligence official said. “Instead, we judge they have the ability to produce the engines themselves.” He did not disclose any details of what underpinned the assessment on the high-performance liquid-fueled engines, called RD-250’s.

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SUIT THAT LETS YOU FLY UNDER WATER

AFP



A swimmer glides through water in the Mediterranean sea off the coast of Monaco, wearing a prototype of an ‘Oceanwings’ wetsuit. Manufactured by Aqua Lung, a diving equipment manufacturing company, the wetsuit – made of with neoprene membranes – allows divers to ‘fly’ through water

