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PM Addresses Combined Commanders' Meet

In a first, the Prime Minister's address to the Combined Commanders' Conference, this year in Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun, on Saturday remained confined within the four walls as the Election Commission imposed conditions that there will be no media briefing of the event, unlike earlier years.

The Election Commission directive came after Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat had questioned the timing of the conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in attendance in view of the Assembly polls in the State. Rawat had demanded that the Conference be deferred.

Giving the go-ahead to the Conference, the Election Commission, however, laid down conditions that the Government will have to ensure that the "official visit shall not be combined with any public meeting" and is not used as a platform to make any "announcement" that may "affect" the electoral process.

Normally, the Prime Minister's address is a closed door event where the three Services chiefs brief him about the security scenario, emerging threats and challenges, operational preparedness and related issues. The Prime Minister then gives policy direction and his speech is released to the media.

After taking over as the Prime Minister, Modi had asked the services to hold the annual conference in an operational environment and the first meet was held on board aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya in 2015. The Combined Conference did not take place last year due to the Prime Minister's hectic schedule. It was decided to hold the event at IMA this year.

It was learnt that situation on Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan Army's capabilities and threat posed to Indian security and scenario at Line of Actual Control (LAC) facing China came for review in the conference at Dehradun.

The three chiefs — including Admiral Satish Lanba, IAF chief BS Dhanoa and Army chief General Bipin Rawat — apprised the political leadership about the strategic environment in India's neighbourhood. Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar and National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval also attended the conclave.

Emerging challenge like cyber warfare also came up for discussion apart from issues like modernisation of the armed forces in tune with fast changing warfare fighting strategies all over the world were also discussed, sources said here.

Setting up the post of Permanent Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee as single point military advisor to the political leadership also figured during the conference. The proposal of having 'Theatre commands' for better synergy among the armed forces was also flagged, they said.



India may soon get a tri-service chief

By Rajat Pandit

The country may soon get a new tri-service chief -a four-star general like the Army, IAF and Navy chiefs-to ensure synergy in training, logistics, planning and procurements among the forces.

In the long run, the country will have theatre commands to integrate its air, land and sea assets under single operational commanders for a greater military punch from limited budgetary resources.

AIMING AT SYNERGY

- A tri-service chief will provide **single-point military advice** to Centre
- Bring synergy among the three services; prioritise inter-forces procurements
- Better manage **strategic resources & nuclear arsenal**

These were among the major takeaways from the combined commanders' conference at Dehradun's Indian Military Academy, which had PM Modi and defence minister Manohar Parrikar brainstorming with the military brass. There was no official word on the military deliberations in the backdrop of the Election Commission warning to the government that the conference should not be used as a platform to make any public speech or announcement that may "affect" the electoral process in poll-bound Uttarakhand.

But sources said the PM received a series of presentations on Saturday on issues ranging from operational preparedness and infrastructure development along the borders with China and Pakistan as well as the longpending reforms in the country's higher defence management.

Admiral Sunil Lanba, General Bipin Rawat and Air Chief Marshal B S Dhanoa attended the huddle.

The proposed reforms range from creating the post of the fourth four-star general and theatre commands to re-energizing joint training and doctrines. "Unified structures, first in the shape of tri-service organisations or agencies and then full-fledged commands to handle space, cyberspace and special operations, are also on the anvil," said a source.

The NDA government acknowledges the crucial reform to have a chief of defence staff (CDS) or a permanent chairman of the chiefs of staff committee (CoSC), in addition to the three existing chiefs, cannot be delayed any longer.

"The post of a permanent chairman of CoSC (which currently comprises the three service chiefs, with the seniormost acting as the head) or CDS is likely to be created within this year," said the source. "Issues about how he will relate to the government as well as the three chiefs, who will continue to operationally run their forces, have been fine-tuned. The Cabinet, however, will take the final decision," said the source.

DEFENCE REFORMS: MISSING IN ACTION

HISTORY

1999 | Army & IAF commanders squabble over operations during Kargil conflict

2001 | GoM report recommends a chief of defence staff (CDS). Holds existing chiefs of staff committee (CoSC) has 'serious weaknesses' in giving single-point advice

2001-2003 | Tri-service structures like integrated defence staff, Andaman & Nicobar Command, Strategic Forces Command, Defence Intelligence Agency, etc, come up. But CDS post kept in cold storage

2012 | Naresh Chandra Taskforce recommends permanent CoSC chairman (diluted version of CDS)

2016 | Lt Gen D B Shekatkar committee suggests re-balancing of defence expenditure to boost combat potential as well as new 4-star general as 'chief coordinator'



WHY A NEW TRI-SERVICE CHIEF?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ➤ Provide single-point military advice to government | strategic resources & nuclear arsenal |
| ➤ Bring synergy among 3 services in doctrinal, planning, procurement & operational matters | ➤ Integrate service HQs with defence ministry & reduce civil-military divide |
| ➤ Prioritise inter-service procurements to build long-term military capabilities | ➤ Around 70 countries (the US, UK, France, Germany etc) have CDS-like post for integration in military planning & operations |
| ➤ Better manage country's | |

WHY THEATRE COMMANDS?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ➤ India has 17 single-service commands (Army 7, IAF 7 & Navy 3), with HQs in different places around the country | ➤ Theatre commands will be much more cost-effective, save on desperately needed resources & infrastructure |
| ➤ Only 2 unified commands: Andaman & Nicobar Command (set up in Oct 2001) & Strategic Forces Command (established in Jan 2003 to handle nuclear arsenal) | ➤ Future battles will require integrated land-air-sea operations with unity of command |

Pak frees Indian soldier who strayed across LoC

Islamabad claims it convinced him to go home after he deserted; soldier's village celebrates

Pakistan returned on Saturday an Indian soldier who strayed into its territory after a cross-border strike against militant hideouts last September. Islamabad's Inter-Services Public Relations said sepoy Chandu Babulal Chavan "deserted" his post and he had to be "convinced to return to his country".

A Pakistani statement called the decision "a gesture of goodwill and in continuation of our efforts to maintain peace and tranquility along the LoC (Line of Control) and WB (international border)".

Officials in New Delhi insisted that he inadvertently crossed over to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on September 29. His grandmother died of a heart attack two days later and his family feared for his well-being. The family at Borvihir in Maharashtra's Dhule district was overjoyed with the news of his release by Pakistan.

"We are celebrating all the festivals on a single day. It is really unbelievable," sister Roopali Patil said.

The 22-year-old soldier enlisted with 37 Rashtriya Rifles was handed to Indian authorities at the Wagah border checkpoint around 2.30pm. Brother Bhushan Chavan, who is also a soldier, thanked the army for its efforts.

"I am grateful to the villagers and everybody who prayed for not just my brother but for a soldier of this country," he said.

Indian officials welcomed the Pakistani move, but pointed out that the neighbours had always returned soldiers and civilians who have strayed into each other's territories along the long border. Chavan strayed into Pakistani territory hours after India's "surgical strikes" on militant bases across the LoC, the de facto border between the two countries, in Jammu and Kashmir.

The strikes followed a militant attack on an army base in Kashmir's Uri in which 19 soldiers were killed. The two incidents exacerbated the already tense situation between the neighbours, leading to skirmishes along the border in Jammu and Kashmir.

Family of Indian soldier who crossed LoC thanks govt

Residents of Chavan's Village at Borvihir in Maharashtra Celebrated after Hearing about His Release

Bhushan Chavan, the elder brother of Chandu Chavan, an Indian soldier who inadvertently crossed the Line of Control (LoC) in September last year, had thanked the defence ministry for efforts taken to ensure his return. Minister of state for defence Subhash Bhamre had earlier on Thursday said that Pakistan had committed to release the soldier, who inadvertently strayed across the Line of Control last year.

Bhushan, who is also with the Indian Army and currently posted in Jamnagar in Gujarat, said, "I am thankful to the government. I, particularly, thank minister of state for defence Suresh Bhamre, who personally pursued the matter." He said his entire family had been waiting for Chandu's return.

The family had been through a tough time since he went astray. His grandmother Lilabai had died of shock after learning about his crossing. Chandu's sister-in-law Sheetal had told Hindustan Times that the family was unable to lead a normal life and have even a proper meal because of the two incidents that happened in quick succession. Bhushan had then taken a month's leave to pursue his brother's return.

The brothers' parents died when Chandu was two years old and his grandmother took care of them. Their grandfather was a government officer and also looked after their ancestral farm. Meanwhile, residents of Chavan's village, Borvihar in Dhule district of Maharashtra, started celebrations outside a local temple after hearing about his release. Residents even distributed sugar to express their happiness.

Roopali Patil, Chandu's maternal sister, said, "We are celebrating all the festivals on a single day. It is really unbelievable," she said.



Sun, 22 Jan, 2017

India asked to stop work on J&K hydro projects

Pakistan urges the World Bank to form a court of arbitration to mediate the dispute over the Indus Waters Treaty between the two countries

Pakistan's two parliamentary committees in a rare joint resolution asked India to immediately suspend work on two hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir and agree on the constitution of an arbitration court to resolve the water dispute.

The National Assembly's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Water and Power held a joint sitting in Islamabad on Friday to discuss water issues with India. A joint resolution adopted at the meeting asked India to halt the construction work, *Dawn* reported.

The resolution also called upon the World Bank to constitute a court of arbitration to adjudicate on issues raised by Pakistan against India's ongoing construction of Kishanganga and Ratle hydro projects. — PTI



Sun, 22 Jan, 2017

China appoints new navy chief

China has appointed Vice-Admiral Shen Jinlong as the new naval chief as Asia's largest navy rapidly expands its fleet amid tensions over its assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea.

Vice-Admiral Shen, 60, who had led China's South Sea fleet, has been appointed as the new commander of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), state-run China Daily reported.

Shen in the capacity of the PLA Navy commander had a video chat on Friday morning with officers and sailors of the 25th escort fleet in the Gulf of Aden, a navy news release said.

He has replaced Admiral Wu Shengli, 71, to take charge of the largest navy in Asia, the daily said.

Although the navy did not disclose when the transition took place, observers believe it was this week.

Shen, a Shanghai native, had been commander of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla under the North Sea Fleet and then commander of the Navy's Lyushun Logistic Support Base.

In 2010, he was appointed president of the Dalian Naval Academy and promoted to the rank of rear admiral. The next year, he became president of the Naval Command College in Nanjing.

In 2014, Shen led three warships to take part in the Rim of the Pacific Exercise in Hawaii. After the exercise finished, the ships paid a 5-day visit to San Diego, California.

He was named deputy commander of the South Sea Fleet as soon as he returned to China in August that year. In December 2014, he replaced Lieutenant Admiral Jiang Weilie, who was named deputy chief of the PLA Navy, to become the fleet's commander.

Shen was chosen because he has rich experience gained through posts in front-line combat units, institutes and a major fleet's commanding body, it quoted a senior researcher with PLAN as saying.

"He has theoretical and practical knowledge and front-line commanding experience, and he is just 60. This makes him a suitable choice," the senior researcher said.

The change of command came as China is rapidly expanding its naval fleet to back its growing assertiveness over territorial claims in the South China Sea.

New US President Donald Trump is also sharply critical of China reinforcing the artificial islands in the SCS with heavy weapons.

In the past 10 years, PLAN expanded rapidly taking delivery of about 100 advanced ships and submarines as well as a large number of new aircraft.

It commissioned around 20 new ships in 2015 as well as last year and is believed to have deployed several new-generation nuclear submarines during this period, the Daily reported.

The navy now has a carrier battle group headed by its first aircraft carrier Liaoning, which just completed a long-distance, live-fire drill in the Western Pacific Ocean and South China Sea.

A second aircraft carrier is being built with plans for third. The Navy's aviation force has carried out several long-range, combat-ready drills.

Moreover, the navy has gained extensive experience of large, sophisticated operations through its active participation in escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and multinational naval exercises in the past several years, the report said.

China's claims over almost all of the SCS is contested by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. *(This story has not been edited by Business Standard staff and is auto-generated from a syndicated feed.)*



Sun, 22 Jan, 2017

How ISRO plans to launch 103 satellites on a single rocket

The mission will break Russia's record of sending 37 satellites at one go

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will set a record when it launches 103 satellites in one go on a single rocket in the first week of February.

Explaining how all the satellites will be placed in orbit, Dr. K. Sivan, Director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), Thiruvananthapuram, said: "The satellites will be separated from the launch vehicle in different directions. The separation angle and time of separation will be such that one satellite will not collide with another."

The satellite separated from the launch vehicle will have a relative velocity of one metre per second. So after 1,000 seconds the distance between a satellite and the rocket will be 1,000 metres. "The satellite that gets launched first will move at a relatively faster velocity than the next satellite that is launched. Due to different relative velocities, the distance between the satellites will increase continuously but the orbit will be the same," he said.

"When the vehicle reaches the orbital condition, we will wait for the disturbances to die down before the preparation for separation begins," Dr. Sivan explained. At an orbital altitude of around 500 km, it would take the vehicle 90 minutes to complete one orbit. "So we have sufficient time to launch all the 103 satellites," he added.

Even one degree difference in separation angle combined with relative velocity will ensure that no two satellites would collide. “The satellites will be injected into orbit at different locations at different angles, at different times and different orientations,” Dr. Sivan said.

In June last year, ISRO launched 20 satellites in one go. It took about 26 minutes to launch all the 20 satellites. In 2008, ISRO launched 10 satellites in a single mission. The highest number of satellites launched in a single mission so far has been 37 by Russia in 2014; NASA launched 29 satellites in one go in 2013.

ISRO’s workhorse PSLV (C37) with 103 satellites will be launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh. With the exception of three satellites from India, the rest are from other countries.



Sun, 22 Jan, 2017

New technique for faster diagnosis of HIV

Scientists have developed a new method for medical testing that may lead to faster diagnosis of HIV, Lyme disease, syphilis and rotavirus infections. Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in the U.S. combined cutting-edge nanoscience with a magnetic phenomenon discovered more than 170 years ago to create the method for speedy medical tests.

“I see no reason why a variation of this technique could not be in every hospital throughout the world,” said Shawn Putnam, an assistant professor at UCF. The team coated nanoparticles with the antibody to BSA, or bovine serum albumin, which is commonly used as the basis of a variety of diagnostic tests.

By mixing the nanoparticles in a test solution, the BSA proteins preferentially bind with the antibodies that coat the nanoparticles.

However, Mr. Putnam’s team came up with a novel way of measuring the quantity of proteins present.

He used nanoparticles with an iron core and applied a magnetic field to the solution, causing the particles to align in a particular formation.

As proteins bind to the antibody-coated particles, the rotation of the particles becomes sluggish, which is easy to detect with laser optics. — PTI



Sun, 22 Jan, 2017

Tax-free withdrawal limit for PF may rise

Labour Ministry has sought fourfold increase in threshold

The Labour Ministry has sought a fourfold increase in the threshold limit for tax deduction on provident fund withdrawals, from the existing Rs.50,000 to Rs.2 lakh, in the coming Budget.

This means that if the proposal gets a go-ahead, you may be able to withdraw provident fund savings of up to Rs.2 lakh without any tax deduction even if you have not completed five years of continuous service.

At present, provident fund withdrawals of more than Rs.50,000 before completing five years in service attracts income tax of up to 34.608%.

“No tax is required to be deducted on provident fund withdrawal of less than Rs.50,000. However, even this limit appears to be too low and may be enhanced to Rs.2 lakh keeping in view the deliberations in the meetings of the Central Board of Trustees,” the Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) wrote in a recent letter to the Labour Ministry, which has since been forwarded to the Finance Ministry for inclusion in the Union Budget for 2017-18.

The Centre had last year increased the threshold limit of PF withdrawal for deduction of tax (TDS) from Rs.30,000 to Rs.50,000.

PAN card

The Labour Ministry has also requested the Finance Ministry to remove tax deduction of 34.608%, known as the maximum marginal rate, for workers who do not furnish PAN card details.

While a 10% tax is deducted for workers disclosing PAN details, 34.608% tax is deducted for workers who do not have a PAN card. “It would not be out of place to mention that only such persons are required to have a PAN who are above the taxable limit,” the EPFO wrote. “The total revenue impact on this count would be less than Rs.10 crore,” according to the EPFO.

“Guaranteed service of five years in the lifetime of an employee is not available under either Central or State legislations. The said provision may be amended to incorporate five years of (PF) deposits from the first month of contribution.” The Finance Act of 2015 had first introduced the deduction of income tax on payment of accumulated provident fund balance due to an employee with less than five years of service.

Service tax exemption

The Labour Ministry has also sought retrospective service tax exemption for the EPF scheme. EPFO was exempted from the purview of service tax from April 2016.

The Labour Ministry has now said the exemption should come into effect retrospectively arguing that EPF is a social security scheme and doesn't come in the category of 'banking and financial services.'