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MAKE IN INDIA ON NEW DEFENCE MINISTER'S AGENDA



Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman (*left*), with her predecessor Arun Jaitley, as she takes charge at her office at South Block in New Delhi on Thursday. Sitharaman vowed to enhance the country's military preparedness and ensure the welfare of soldiers. She also listed defence indigenisation and resolving long-pending issues among her priorities. Immediately after assuming office, Sitharaman approved a grant of over ₹13 crore which will be released to 8,685 ex- servicemen, widows and dependants out of the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund. The new defence minister also said there was a need for "big play" of the Make in India initiative in overall defence capability. Army Chief General Bipin Rawat on Thursday called on Sitharaman and apprised her of the overall security preparedness of the army and the situation along the borders with China and Pakistan.

PHOTO: PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

Fri, 08 Sep, 2017

Sitharaman's to-do list for next 16 months

By Arun Kumar Singh

The new defence minister needs to ensure India makes up its known shortcomings.

Nirmala Sitharaman's recent appointment as defence minister is indeed welcome news, though she has only about 16 effective months in office, till December 2018, because after that politicians will be in "poll mode" till the crucial 2019 general election. There were mixed responses to her appointment – that she was the "right person for the job, but has very little time to do anything important, given the long lead times of major

defence shortcomings”; and that she had been put there by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to create more openings for women in the armed forces – basically in combat roles in the Army and serving on naval warships (with three women fighter pilots soon to be posed to the IAF’s SU-30 MKI squadrons). The day after she was appointed, an even before taking charge officially, the new Raksha Mantri was briefed at her residence by the three service chiefs while outgoing defence minister Arun Jaitley flew to Tokyo for a pre-arranged meeting with his Japanese counterpart. A number of suggestions have appeared in the media on what the new minister should do, with some even suggesting banning all imports, unmindful of its consequences given the looming external and internal security threats. Based on my 10 years’ service at Naval HQ and Coast Guard HQ, I would propose certain minimum steps and reforms that are essential and feasible in the 16 effective months available to Ms Sitharaman.

I am sure the top political and military leadership is fully aware that, notwithstanding the Doklam standoff between India and China ending on August 28 (though later reports indicated that troops on both sides had only withdrawn 150 metres each), and the subsequent successful BRICS summit at Xiamen, China, on September 3-5, with its declaration naming Pakistani terror groups, India shouldn’t get lulled into a false sense of security. China is totally preoccupied right now with the continuing crisis in the Korean peninsula, which got further aggravated with North Korea testing a 100- kiloton hydrogen bomb on September 3-4, thus stealing the limelight from President Xi’s BRICS summit. Should the situation in the Korean peninsula cool down and the present status quo remains in the tension-filled disputed South and East China Seas, Beijing (fully aware that the Doklam standoff had raised New Delhi’s stature globally) may well be tempted to “teach India a lesson” through a “limited military intrusion” along the disputed 4,000-km Line of Actual Control after the winter snows melt by April 2018, that could escalate into a war. India’s Army Chief has, in fact, warned that China’s “salami-slicing land grab tactics” on Indian territory, along with Pakistan’s implacable hostility, could lead to a two-front war.

China would also be aware of the reports in the Indian media, quoting a CAG report, that the Indian Army has ammunition only for eight to 10 days of “intense fighting”, against the need to have stocks for at least 40 days of intense fighting.

The only way to deter such a scenario is for Ms Sitharaman to give top priority to making up the acute shortages in not only ammunition but also spare parts for the Army, Navy and Air Force. Having personally seen this while serving at the Naval HQ during the 1999 Kargil war and the December 2001 post-Parliament attack standoff with Pakistan, I can vouch that this is a major task, will also involve imports of ammunition and spare parts, and may require action beyond what the press reported as “authorising the three service vice-chiefs to purchase emergency needs”.

The strategic roads and other infrastructure along the LAC with China is years behind schedule and desperately needs a new results-oriented leadership.

The second key priority for the new defence minister is to finalise, ideally by December 2018, the long-awaited reforms badly needed by the MoD itself and its arms like DRDO, HAL, Public Shipyards, ordinance factories and the like. The three service headquarters need to be fully integrated with the MoD, and the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) created, preferably with five-star rank (that would put him a run above the three chiefs, of four-star rank). The CDS should be the sole adviser on military matters to the defence minister and to the Cabinet Committee on Security whenever required. The CDS should also take direct charge of the Strategic Forces Command (SFC), which operates our nuclear deterrent when so ordered by the Prime Minister, who heads the Nuclear Command Authority.

After the CDS is in place, the next government, after the 2019 elections, could consider implementation of Joint Theatre Commands, akin to what the Americans and the Chinese already have (as explained in my article in this newspaper on August 7). In addition, India’s defence PSUs, to further indigenisation, should have professional result-oriented CEOs; while the much-touted “Make in India” partnership of PSUs, the Indian private sector and foreign defence manufacturers must be given a boost by the defence minister as nothing has happened in critical areas like Project 75(i) submarines, Mine Counter-Measures Vessels, the aircraft-carrier Vikrant being built at the Kochi shipyard is almost nine years overdue and needs fighter jets by

2021 on commissioning , while all the three services face acute shortages of helicopters. The Air Force needs over 200 fighter jets, beyond the 20+83 LCA Mk-1 jets ordered (building at the rate of six to eight aircraft a year, increasing to 16 per year by 2019). Obviously, increasing LCA Mk-1 and later LCA Mk-2 production rate is vital, but some “Make in India” fighter jets for the Air Force and Navy is unavoidable. The indigenisation of the Army’s 155 mm artillery guns is proceeding at a snail’s pace while there are indications that the indigenous Akash surface-to-air missiles with 25-km range have serious reliability problems, with high failure rates, while our ordinance factories can’t even make a suitable rifle for our soldiers. The time has come for the new defence minister to sack a few non-performers and bring in some professionals who will ensure results and quality control.

Finally, the military needs to play a much greater role in indigenisation. The Navy has succeeded as it created a new cadre of submarine and ship designers over 60 years ago and is reaping the benefit of highly-trained designers, engineers and electronic experts working in DRDO-sponsored projects, with almost 95 per cent participation in the ATV nuclear submarine project and 70 per cent participation in “Systems and Weapons Integration Projects”. Post-retirement, most of these highly-trained specialists work in shipyards, and private sector giants like Tata, Larsen & Toubro, etc. Ms Sitharaman, will do a great service to the nation if she can get the Army and IAF to emulate the Navy, set up a Directorate of Indigenisation, Weapon and Platform (Aircraft, Tanks, Artillery, etc) design teams at Army and Air Headquarters, and set up an organisation like the Navy has to coordinate directly with the private and public sectors industries to procure India-made equipment.

To conclude, the new defence minister needs to ensure India makes up its known shortcomings and is capable of deterring any misadventure by China and Pakistan by April 2018, kickstart long-pending manufacture of submarines, aircraft and guns, carry out much-needed military reforms, give a greater push to indigenisation and “Make in India”, while finding competent people to head DRDO, HAL and similar bodies, and to induct an Indian-made 7.62 mm rifle for the Indian soldier before December 2018. All other issues can be pursued by the next government after the 2019 general election.

Vice Admiral Arun Kumar Singh retired as Commander-in-Chief of the Navy's Eastern Naval Command in 2007. A nuclear and missile specialist trained in the former Soviet Union, he was also DG Indian Coast Guard.



Fri, 08 Sep, 2017

Def supplies from India helpful: Hanoi

By Sachin Parashar

After India's denial that it has already supplied BrahMos anti-ship cruise missiles to Vietnam, Hanoi has underlined the significance of defence ties between the two countries saying it will continue to purchase military equipment from India to defend its sovereignty. In an exclusive interaction with TOI, Vietnam's ambassador to India, Ton Sinh Thanh, said Vietnam would continue to seek greater Indian role in exploring oil and gas blocks off the coast of Vietnam in South China Sea, despite the opposition from China, as these fell in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone.

Accusing China of having changed the status quo in South China Sea (SCS), the ambassador said people could see for themselves if the situation there was similar to the one witnessed at Doklam where Indian and Chinese soldiers were a standoff for two months. “The status quo in SCS has been changed by Chinese construction of artificial islands and installation of military equipment that threaten the freedom of navigation in that area. So you can see for yourself whether it is similar to what happened in Doklam,” said Thanh.

On BrahMos missiles, Ton said that while he had no “specific information” about what equipment was being purchased by Vietnam from India, he asserted that Vietnam will buy military equipment only for self-defence.

U.S. backs sale of fighters to India

By Varghese K George

Congress told of strategic importance

The Trump administration has told the U.S. Congress that it “strongly supports” the sale of F-18 and F-16 fighter planes to India, built by American companies Boeing and Lockheed Martin respectively. Both companies have offered to assemble these planes in India, should New Delhi decide to buy them.

President Donald Trump is in principle against companies relocating facilities abroad and a written submission to a Congressional subcommittee by Alice Wells, acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, clarified the administration’s position on the issue.

Enthusiastic backing - U.S. lawmakers and bureaucrats, in general, have been enthusiastic supporters of proposals to sell these fighters to India, and are now presenting them as deals that could reduce America’s trade deficit with India and create more jobs in America than they relocate — issues that are on top of Mr. Trump’s agenda.

‘Will reduce deficit’ - Ms. Wells mentioned the strategic significance — “defence cooperation with India is so vital to U.S. interests because we need India to be a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific” — but also added that America needs to do more to reduce the deficit. She said exports to India support over 2,60,000 U.S. jobs “across all 50 States.”

F-16 and Gripen, built by Swedish company Saab, are competing for the proposed single engine fighter acquisition for the IAF. French Rafale and Boeing’s F/A-18 are competing for the contract for the Navy’s twin engine fleet for its aircraft carriers. Lockheed Martin and Tata have formed a joint venture to make F-16, while Saab announced a JV with the Adani group last week for Gripen.

Business Standard

Fri, 08 Sep, 2017

Boeing flags inexperience of private sector 'strategic partners'

Says global experience demands public-private partnership to leverage experience of public sector

By Ajai Shukla

In New Delhi on Thursday, the world’s largest aerospace corporation, The Boeing Company, openly expressed what many global arms vendors have complained about in private: The Indian private sector is not yet capable of manufacturing complex military aircraft under transfer of technology (ToT).

Pratyush Kumar, Boeing’s India chief, proposed that highly experience defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs) – like Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) – be coopted, since that is where aerospace expertise and experience lies in India. Speaking “from the vantage point of a company that has been in the aerospace industry for 100 years, across the world,” Kumar in effect proposed a major reorientation of the defence ministry’s new Strategic Partner (SP) policy.

The policy aims at creating capable defence manufacturers in the private sector, to compete with the DPSUs and Ordnance Factories (OFs) that have historically dominated defence manufacture in India. The policy requires private firms chosen as SPs to enter technology partnerships with nominated global “original equipment manufacturers” (OEMs), and jointly bid for contracts to build aircraft, helicopters, submarines and armoured vehicles for the military. But Kumar, speaking at a seminar organised by the Centre for Air Power

Studies, the air force's think tank, pointed out that successful examples of ToT-based manufacture involved "co-opting of public enterprise and private enterprise in a way that leveraged the investment made in the public enterprise for multiple decades". The Boeing chief said he "tried hard, and could not find a single example [of successfully building an aircraft under ToT] where it was just the brand new private enterprise with limited aerospace experience. Look at Turkey, look at Japan, look at Brazil — look at multiple countries. In all cases, there is a fine balancing act of co-opting the capabilities of both public and private enterprise."

Other foreign companies are less forthright than Boeing. With two multi-billion dollar aircraft acquisitions already launched via the SP route — for single-engine fighter aircraft and helicopters — foreign OEMs have begun partnering Indian private firms. Lockheed Martin has partnered Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL) and Saab has partnered the Adani Group, anticipating a tender for the single-engine fighter.

This although TASL has never assembled an aircraft, while the Adanis have never built a single aerospace component. Foreign OEMs resent having to partner novices, but comply quietly so as not to rock the boat, said a foreign executive based in India. Boeing is more forthright, bolstered by the confidence of being the most successful arms vendor in India over the last decade. Since 2009, Boeing has sold India aircraft worth \$12 billion. These include eight P-8I maritime aircraft in 2009, and then four in a follow-up order; ten C-17 Globemaster III heavy lift aircraft in 2011; and 15 Chinook CH-47F and 22 Apache AH-64E helicopters in 2015. While these were all sales of ready-built aircraft, Boeing is perhaps anticipating having to "Make in India" with an SP in another forthcoming contract — the navy's multi-billion dollar acquisition of 57 ship-borne fighters for its aircraft carriers. In that acquisition, for which a tender is awaited, Boeing's F/A-18E/F Super Hornet would possibly compete with Dassault's Rafale-Marine; Saab's Sea Gripen and an upgraded version of the Russian MiG-29K/KUB. Aspiring Indian SPs, like TASL, admit that their role in an SP contract would remain "build to print", i.e. manufacturing sub-assemblies and assemblies to blueprints provided by the OEM. Yet, it would provide a lucrative growth opportunity. "The need of the hour is for the ministry of defence to go forward with the two very large aerospace orders [for] single engine fighter and helicopters. Frankly, in my mind, there is nothing else to it," said TASL chief, Sukaran Singh, at the same seminar.

In contrast, HAL chief T Suvarna Raju talked up his engineers' design skills and experience. Pointing to the range of helicopters HAL has designed ground-up – the Dhruv advanced light helicopter, Rudra armed helicopter, and the eponymous Light Combat Helicopter and Light Utility Helicopter – he declared: "Each component of our helicopters demonstrates the skill sets of HAL designers, of their capabilities and innovation efforts. Look at the carbon composite blades and the transmission system, composite body structure, glass cockpit and many more..." The air force, however, continues to back the SP policy. "The only way to sustain the momentum in the aerospace manufacturing space is to start manufacturing here and strategic partnership model is a step in the direction," said Air Marshal Shirish Deo, the air force's vice-chief. The SP policy has been in the making since 2014-15. It remains contested and a work in progress.



Fri, 08 Sep, 2017

Army will cross LoC and strike if needed, says northern commander

'Surgical strike was to send message: LoC can be breached'

By Arun Sharma

Northern Army Commander Lt General D Anbu on Thursday said the Indian Army would cross the Line of Control if required and claimed that there had been fewer successful infiltrations this year than in 2016. He also spoke of the need to create employment opportunities for Kashmiri youth to wean them away from the agitation dynamics.

Pointing out that there has been an increase in the number of infiltration attempts and terror camps across the LoC, Lt General Anbu said that “when we want to we will be able to breach it, go across and strike when we need”. He said the surgical strike by India “was a point we wanted to drive home”. India wanted to convey “this subtle message” that the “LoC is not a line that cannot be breached”, he said.

Lt Gen. Anbu was addressing a press conference after presenting gallantry and distinguished services medals to 103 officers and jawans and certificates of appreciation to 31 units apart from 31 civilians at an investiture ceremony at the Northern Command headquarters here.

“There is no dearth of people who are trying to infiltrate. The launch pads and terrorist camps across the Line of Control have increased as compared to the previous year,” Lt Gen. Anbu said. “While they attempt to cross the LoC, the success they have been able to attain this year, despite large number of people trying to infiltrate, has been much less as compared to the previous year because of the very robust counter-infiltration grid we have on the LoC,” he said.

According to official figures, 75 people have infiltrated from across the LoC this year, “but our assessment is that their number is not more than 45-50”, Lt Gen. Anbu said.

Referring to the number of local terrorists in the Valley, the Northern Army Commander said their number has been largely constant over the past three years, including the current year. “The youth turning into separatists are those who are in the age group of 15-25 and who are not very sure of the future. This is one aspect which needs to be looked at,” he said.

“It shows that we have to engage the youth. The state government and everybody has to play a part in ensuring employment generation and a positive security environment will be created by the security forces,” he said. “This is what has happened now. While the effect of elimination of so many terrorists will manifest in a couple of months from now, we have already seen a decrease in local youth getting recruited in terrorist ranks,” he claimed.

To a question about the stone throwing youths on the streets in the Valley, Lt Gen. Anbu said: “A lot of youths are involved in it, but it is not that all the youths are involved in it and their entire population comes out into the streets.... Their heart and soul is not in it.”

Asked about the situation along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh, he said it was under control.



Fri, 08 Sep, 2017

Hope General Rawat boosts ties with us'

By Saibal Dasgupta

The Chinese foreign ministry reacted sharply to Army chief Bipin Rawat's comment on Wednesday that China was “salami slicing” its way into Indian territory and India should be ready for war, with the ministry's spokesperson in Beijing wondering whether the general had spoken out of turn.

Referring to PM Modi's talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, the official asked if Rawat had been authorised by the Centre to make the observation. China's foreign ministry asked on Thursday whether Indian Army chief General Bipin Rawat's remarks that India should be prepared for a two-front war involving both Pakistan and China and that Beijing had started “flexing its muscles” represented the view of the Indian government.

“We... don't know whether he (Rawat) was authorised to speak those words or it was just his spontaneous words, or whether his words represented the position of the Indian government, “ foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters here.

“Just two days ago, President Xi (Jinping) pointed to PM Modi that the two countries are each other's development opportunities, not threats. Hope this military official (Rawat) would see this trend and contribute to the development of ChinaIndia relations, “ Geng said.

Gen Rawat had said “ As far as the northern adversary (China) is concerned, the flexing of muscle has started. The salami slicing... testing our limits of threshold, is something we have to be wary about and remain prepared for situations... which could...emerge into conflict.“

Geng said, “We hope India could view China's development in a correct and rational way . We need to show the world that peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation is the only right choice for the two countries. We should respect each other, seek common ground and shelve differences, and preserve peace and tranquillity in border areas.“



Fri, 08 Sep, 2017

North Korea's H-bomb test ignites fresh worries in India

By Rajat Pandit

Pyongyang's Expertise Could Translate Into Gains for Pak

Concerns over the continuing clandestine quid pro quo between Pakistan and North Korea in terms of nuclear and missile proliferation, all under the benign guidance of China, have further accentuated in India after Pyongyang detonated a possible thermonuclear or hydrogen bomb last Sunday .

The Indian security establishment is also of the firm belief that China may condemn North Korea's nuclear test all it wants but simply cannot wish away its pivotal role in the complex proliferation web that has enabled both Pyongyang and Islamabad to progressively strengthen their nuclear and ballistic missile arsenals over the years.

India, in fact, is worried the expertise gained by North Korea through its nuclear and missile tests, which included the Hwasong-14 intercontinental ballistic missile earlier this year, will translate into concrete gains for Pakistan like it has in the past.

Pakistan is expanding its nuclear and missile arsenals at a rapid clip, having overtaken India in the number of nuclear warheads (estimated to be 130-140 compared to India's 110-120) and the variety of delivery systems. “It has also supplemented its enriched uranium-based nuclear programme with a weapons-grade plutonium one in a major way. Plutonium makes for more efficient warheads for missiles,“ said an official.

Pakistan, incidentally, tested a new 2,200-km range Ababeel ballistic missile, which carries a MIRV (multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles) payload, for the first time in January this year. An MIRV payload basically means a single missile can carry several nuclear warheads, each programmed to hit different targets. India, of course, is also developing MIRVs for its Agni series of ballistic missiles.

It's no wonder the annual defence ministerial dialogue between India and Japan on Tuesday strongly condemned North Korea's sixth and most powerful nuclear test of September 3, in which an over 100-kiloton device was apparently detonated with several times more destructive power than the Hiroshima one of 1945.

“Japan obviously is more worried about the deteriorating security situation in the Korean Peninsula. But Pakistan is a bigger problem for us. If China really wants, it can rein in both Pakistan and North Korea but it chooses to profess innocence,“ said the official.

It's no secret that China has systematically helped both Pakistan and North Korea over the decades, with some tracing it back to a secret deal between China's Mao Zedong and Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1976. Beijing first provided Islamabad with designs for low-yield uranium devices, and later even tested a Pakistani nuclear device at its Lop Nur test site in 1990.

Concomitantly, China helped North Korea in missile design technologies. Mixed up in all this, of course, was the infamous A Q Khan, a metallurgist who returned to Pakistan in the mid-1970s with centrifuge designs and a network of contacts to aid the proliferation network.

Under the covert proliferation and barter alliance, Pakistan helped North Korea with nuclear weapon enrichment technologies.

Pyongyang, in turn, supplied Islamabad with missile design technologies. Pakistan's 1,500-km range 'Ghauri-I' missile, for instance, was a derivative of the North Korean 'Nodong' missile. The nexus still continues despite all the protestations by China.



Fri, 08 Sep, 2017

North Korea pledges 'powerful counter measures' against U.S.-backed sanctions

Vladivostok, Russia (Reuters) - North Korea on Thursday pledged to take "powerful counter measures" to respond to U.S. pressure or any new sanctions against it over its missile program, accusing Washington of wanting war.

Pyongyang's pledge, made in a statement by its delegation to an economic forum in Russia's Far East, came after the United States said it wanted the U.N. Security Council to impose an oil embargo on North Korea, ban the country's exports of textiles and the hiring of North Korean laborers abroad, and subject leader Kim Jong Un to an asset freeze and travel ban, according to a draft resolution seen by Reuters on Wednesday.

"We will respond to the barbaric plotting around sanctions and pressure by the United States with powerful counter measures of our own," the statement read.

The same statement also accused South Korea and Japan of using the Russian forum to play "dirty politics," saying the event was meant to be about discussing economic cooperation in the region and not about criticizing its missile program.



Fri, 08 Sep, 2017

NASA captures images of strong solar flares

Among the most intense this sun cycle

Two high-intensity solar flares were emitted on Wednesday, the second of which was the most intense recorded since the start of this sun cycle in December 2008, NASA said.

These radiation flares, which can disrupt communications satellites, GPS and power grids by reaching the upper earth atmosphere, were detected and captured by the US Space Agency's Solar Dynamics Observatory.

Disrupts radio signals

According to the Space Weather Prediction Center (SWPC), these so-called category X eruptions disrupted high-frequency radio communications for one hour on the earth's side facing the sun and low-

frequency communications used in navigation. The two eruptions occurred in an active region of the sun where an eruption of average intensity occurred on September 4, scientists said.

The current cycle of the sun, which began in December 2008, saw the intensity of solar activity decline sharply, opening the way to the “solar minimum”.

Eleven-year period

Solar cycles last on average eleven years.

At the end of the active phase, these eruptions become increasingly rare but still can be powerful.

Solar storms result from an accumulation of magnetic energy in some places.

These jets of ionized matter are projected — at high speed into and beyond the crown of the sun — hundreds of thousands of kilometres outward.