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Sitharaman stresses on IAF roadmap for Aviation tech

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday emphasised on the Indian Air Force becoming a tech-intensive service and pioneer in laying the roadmap for absorption and production of high-end aviation technology products. Inaugurating the first twoday biannual IAF Commanders Conference here, the minister while laying down her vision for contribution of the IAF towards indigenisation, said IAF should be a pioneer in laying out the roadmap for absorption and production of high-end aviation technology products in India and propel the country's growth in these sectors as envisaged in the 'Make in India' policy in the next 15 years.



She commended the IAF for the key role played by it in nation building by way of promoting regional connectivity by rendering support towards the UDAN scheme. The IAF has opened up several of its airfields for civil aircraft operations in furtherance of the scheme. Sitharaman complimented the IAF for setting precedence

for several aspects of jointness as suggested by the Prime Minister. She specifically highlighted the efforts of IAF for having issued a pathbreaking order empowering the CINCAN to exercise full control over the IAF officers deputed to work with him. She was welcomed by Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal B S Dhanoa, along with minister of state for defence Subhash Bhamre and defence secretary Sanjay Mitra. Dhanoa introduced IAF Commanders to the Minister. The Air Chief briefed the minister on the current status of the IAF and on exercise 'Gagan Shakti', which was conducted in April this year. He said the exercise was fruitful in testing IAF's surge operations capability; logistics supply chain, rapid augmentation of personnel, intertheatre movement of forces, communication network and reliability of equipment and systems.

The minister praised the exemplary conduct of IAF's biggest exercise in recent times. She complimented all personnel for sustaining round-the-clock operations in the most professional manner. She said the focus of Exercise 'Gagan Shakti' was to draw lessons for evolving the doctrinal loop which is an ongoing process. The conference will discuss the operational, maintenance and administrative takeaways identified during the exercise and the way ahead.

The Tribune

Indigenous data recorders for IAF's attack helicopters

By VijayMohan

The IAF's fleet of Mi-25/35 attack helicopters is to be upgraded with indigenously developed digital flight data recorders and video recorders that would replace the earlier analogue systems to provide better reliability, accuracy and ease of retrieving data. The project implies that the Soviet-origin Mi-35s are expected to carry on for at least another 15 years, sources said. About a decade ago, these machines had been upgraded with advanced avionics and weapons suite to enhance combat potential. The move to upgrade the Mi-35s comes in the wake of new attack helicopters being procured, which include the US-made AH-64 Apache as well as the locally produced Rudra, the armed variant of the Dhruv advanced light helicopter and the light combat helicopter. In addition, utility helicopters like the Mi-17, Chetak and Lancer are also capable of being retrofitted with rockets and missiles.

Last year, the IAF launched a similar project for indigenous flight data recorders for the Mi-17 transport helicopters. The IAF employed two squadrons of the heavily armed Mi-25/35 gunships, the No 104 and No 125 Helicopter Units, to provide close air support to Army formations. Over the years, the number of this fleet has dwindled. Four such machines were gifted to Afghanistan recently. Sources said the IAF had projected a requirement of 25 sets of solid state flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder that would also have integrated underwater locator beacons. These would replace the present systems where data is recorded on a photographic film. The present French analog video recorders, part of the Mi-35's electro optical night package system to display mission data in real time in the cockpit as well as records the data, will also be replaced with indigenous solid state digital systems.



The Tribune

Fri, 01 June, 2018

Review of the officer cadre in the army

The MoD seems to have overlooked the negative ramification of the proposed reversal of the ratio between permanent and short service commissioned officers from 4:1 to 1:1.1 and increase in their service from 5-10 years to 10-14 years.

By Col Mahesh Chadha

AS if the Ajay Vikram Singh Committee (AVSC) is not without its snags, it has now become the rule of thumb for the Indian Army to resolve its problems — the first being the promotion system widely known as the cadre review and the latest is the change in the ratio of permanent and short service commissioned officers. While the cadre review, on the one hand benefited a large number of officers who by virtue of their competence would have retired as Majors or Lt Colonels risen to higher ranks, some even becoming Generals, the upgradation of the appointments crushed the charm and elan of a Brigade Major (BM) at the Brigade, of the Colonel General Staff (Col GS) at the Division and of Brigadiers at the Corps and Command levels. The creation of more vacancies caused managerial embarrassment when a desk which was the responsibility of one was now to be shared by more, requiring a higher ranking moderator or a coordinator to be dealt by the Commander — the bane of advice — one point vis-a-vis multi-point. It bloated the middle rung without much benefit to the Army.

The proposal and its drawbacks The MoD seems to have overlooked the negative ramification of the proposed reversal of the ratio between permanent and short service commissioned officers from the present 4:1 to 1:1.1 and increase in service from 5-10 years to 10-14 years. Having been a short service commissioned officer myself, I can vouch for my fraternity that commissioned only for five years with a promise of a permanent commission made us not only compete with the regular officers but to outdo them at all levels — the courses of instruction, in performing regimental duties, manning picquets on the borders, leading long range patrols in inhospitable terrains, carrying out anti-insurgency operations at their height in the North-East against the Nagas and Mizos and leading our subunits during the 1971 and later war and operations.

We had also to face the SSB a second time to be thought worthy of being a permanent commissioned officer, qualify the Defence Services Staff College and Senior Command course before being found fit to

command our unit. The whole life we were kept on our toes so as to be saved of an ignominy to be lower in any way than a permanent officer. Most of us participated in the 1971 war, Sri Lanka operations, 1999 Kargil war, won gallantry medals and achieved higher ranks before hanging our boots with pride. On the contrary, it is feared that by making short service commission as lucrative as it appears to be, a golden handshake would make them crorepati overnight and all other benefits would put them in a privileged class of ex-serviceman better than a veteran who would have spent 30 or more years as a permanent officer, damaging his knees climbing up and down the hills under raining enemy bullets.

This would also create heartburn amongst permanent commissioned officers who do not get empanelled for higher ranks and are made to rust at unimportant appointments in the later years of their career. It also negates the very proposal of the women to be granted permanent commission in the near future. Some important issues Human nature what it is, such officers with assured conditions of service are likely to fall in one of the two categories; some are likely to pass their time in the Army — be non-performer, even to the extent of being arrogant and indisciplined, be mediocre, do not do well on courses of instruction, even not passing the promotion exams, become low medical category to seek soft postings on one pretext or the other, yet rising to the 'assured career progression' time scale rank of a Major or a Lt Colonel and finally take one or two years of study leave and think of better avenues outside; it is this lot that would be a pain for the Commanding Officer, and instead of being at the cutting edge, would be preferred out of the unit or in the rear areas during operations and war.

The second lot would be well meaning, hard working, doing well on courses- some even qualifying the Defence Services Staff College and Senior Command course deemed fit to command units and even higher formations would incur a great loss to the Army when they leave and every CO and commander would miss them. The management of such bright officers would pose a problem for the Military Secretary (MS) for either or not giving them deserving postings on staff, instructional and command — at the cost of permanent officers, thus losing on their expertise for the betterment of the Army. Another important issue is the future of the National Defence and the Indian Military Academies, whose intake shall have to be reduced, thereby rendering redundant most of the infrastructure and training facilities created over long years of research and analysis, unless they are converted into Short Service Commissioned Academies. History and traditions would not only be at stake but also become victim.

The Army shall have to shelve its proposal for the entry of women into the NDA and IMA as well. The very charm of the uniform amongst the youth of the country will be subdued, for despite greener pastures outside, some still prefer to don the olive greens either as a family tradition or for the love of the country. Thus, the MoD should have taken these aspects into account as well before making the above recommendation to the Finance Ministry showing only the financial benefits on account of pension etc —which also seems somewhat misconstrued due to the golden handshake itself running into crores every six months or one year and later benefits given like an ex-serviceman.

The solution once the MoD has made up its mind, it is difficult to make it change, especially when in its reckoning it means savings to the exchequer — may be a few crores every year. But the question remains: is it the services only that are a burden for the country or other employees paid out of defence budget or a number of chief secretaries, financial commissioners and DGPs? And what about the institutions that would lose their prestige not only in the eyes of the nation but also the world, where conscription is compulsory, but ranges between two and four years only? In contrast, our proposal is for 10 and 14 years, with golden terminal benefits!

India to go ahead with S-400 defence deal with Russia

By Shishir Gupta

India will push ahead with its deal to buy the S-400 air defence systems from Russia despite opposition from the US, defence ministry officials said on condition of anonymity. According to them, the defence ministry will approach the apex Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) for approval to purchase five units of Russian S-400 air defence systems. They added that the ministry has received no instructions as of now to stall the contract in the wake of the US red-flagging the \$5.5 billion deal.

The Trump administration has warned India of the consequences of this purchase from Russia and said it could curtail military cooperation with the United States. The officials said the CCS headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi will take the final decision now that both the countries have completed negotiations to close the deal. The defence ministry's view is that Russia, which has already sold the system to China, could also sell it to Pakistan, perhaps through China, if India reneges on the deal at this stage. In the past decade, Russian RD-93 engines were supplied to Pakistan through the China route for JF-17 fighters despite objections in writing from India.

While India has taken note of objections raised by William Thornberry, the powerful Chairman of the US House Armed Services Committee and the ambit of the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CATSA), it is open to sharing each other's security concerns. The purchase of S-400 system will be up for discussion at the two-plus-two dialogue between Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman with their US counterpart's secretary of state Mike Pompeo and secretary of defense Jim Mattis on July 6 at Washington. It is learnt that at the two-plus-two dialogue the two sides will flag security concerns over the contract and how to best come out of a sticky situation without any ramification on the close bilateral ties.

The officials said that New Delhi has already used back channels to explain India's concerns and the need for a strong air defence system given the neighbourhood. The Indian Air Force (IAF), given the advance aerial capabilities of China and Pakistan, needs the S-400 to protect its air bases. Prime Minister Modi's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval is believed to have made quiet calls to both the White House and the Kremlin to convince both the countries that India is too big a nation to belong to any camp and that it takes all decisions in its own national interest.

The Statesman

Fri, 01 June, 2018

US military renames Pacific Command

Symbolic move to signal India's importance amid tensions with China

The United States on Thursday renamed its oldest and largest military command - the Pacific Command - to IndoPacific Command, in a largely symbolic move to signal India's importance to the US military amid heightened tensions with China over the militarisation of the South China Sea. Henceforth, the storied US Pacific Command, or PACOM, which was formed after World War II, will be known as the US Indo-Pacific Command. "In recognition of the increasing connectivity, the Indian and Pacific Oceans, today we rename the US Pacific Command to US Indo-Pacific Command," Secretary of Defence James Mattis (in photo) said while speaking at a change of command ceremony in Hawaii, where the command's headquarters is located. The Pentagon's move is also reflective of the growing importance of India in US strategic thinking.

India was granted the 'Major Defence Partner' status by the previous Barack Obama Administration, providing for transfer of technology and deeper cooperation in the defence sector. In 2016, India and the US

had signed a crucial logistics defence pact enabling their militaries to use each other's assets and bases for repair and replenishment of supplies, making joint operations more efficient.

Soon after coming to power, the Trump administration had renamed Asia Pacific as Indo-Pacific and



identified India as one bookend of the region. “Over many decades, this command has repeatedly adapted to changing circumstance, and today carries that legacy forward as America focuses west,” Mattis said in his remarks. “It is our primary combatant command, it's standing watch and intimately engaged with over half of the earth's surface and its diverse populations, from Hollywood, to Bollywood, from polar bears to penguins,” Mattis said of the command whose areas of responsibility includes 36 nations, including India, as well as both the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Admiral Phil Davidson replaced Admiral Harry Harris as Commander,

US IndoPacific Command or IndoPacom. Harris has been appointed as the US ambassador to South Korea. Referring to the 2018 National Defence Strategy which acknowledges Pacific challenges and signals America's resolve and lasting commitment to the Indo-Pacific, Mattis said America's vision is shared by most nations in the region.

“For every state, sovereignty is respected, no matter its size and it's a region open to investment and free, fair and reciprocal trade not bound by any nation's predatory economics or threat of coercion, for the Indo-Pacific has many belts and many roads,” Mattis said in an apparent dig at China which is investing billions of dollars for its so called One Belt One Road initiative. America continues to invest vigorously in Indo-Pacific stability, bolstering the free and open rules-based international order that has enabled this region to grow and thrive for over 70 years. “While we are prepared to face any who would seek to challenge America's resolve, our National Defence Strategy is not a strategy of confrontation,” he said.

Mattis said the US will always be seeking peace from a position of strength. “We will also continue further strengthening existing alliances and fostering new partnerships in the region, for these form a fundamental cornerstone of our strategic vision, a shared vision respectful of all nations sovereignty, and allowing us to reinforce a resilient security architecture capable of confronting shared threats, be they terrorism or an inhibition of free trade or humanitarian disasters that can befall any nation,” he said.

Observing that relationships with Pacific and Indian Ocean allies and partners have proven critical to maintaining regional stability, Mattis said the US stands by its partners and support their sovereign decisions, because all nations, large and small, are essential to the region if they are to sustain stability in ocean areas critical to global peace. The US move comes in the wake of a series of measures by China that have raised tensions in the South China Sea. China claims almost all of the South China Sea. Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counter claims over the area. The US also rejects China's claims of ownership of the area.

The Statesman

Fri, 01 June, 2018

China invites UN members to use upcoming space station

China has invited all the member states of the United Nations to jointly utilise its future space station expected to be ready by 2022, a move that will allow the entire world to use the orbital station for scientific purposes. The China Space Station (CSS), which is expected to be launched by 2019 and become operational by 2022, will be the world's first space station open for cooperation with all UN member states, official media reported on Thursday. China is currently in the process of building it. It is regarded as a rival to the Russia's

international space station Mir, currently in orbit. According to Chinese analysts, by 2024, Chinese space station will be the only one in operation as Mir is set to complete its life span by that time.

The invitation for all the countries to jointly use the space station further shows China's unwavering belief that outer space is a common home for all humanity rather than a new battlefield, staterun Global Times reported. All countries, regardless of their size and level of development, were invited to explore cooperation with China aboard the CSS, ranging from growing a plant in space to accommodating an astronaut, Shi Zhongjun, China's ambassador to the UN and other international organisations in Vienna told staterun Xinhua news agency. The CSS will be the world's first space station open for cooperation with all UN member states, the report said. The announcement was more than a friendly gesture.

It is the strongest message so far against the worrying rhetoric that the outer space is a new front line for competition and confrontation, it said. Opening up China's future space station to the world will reinforce international cooperation for the peaceful use of outer space, said United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) director Simonetta Di Pippo. In cooperation with the UNOOSA, the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) will utilise the CSS to promote international cooperation in manned space flight and exploration, providing flight experiments and space application opportunities on board the space station for the UN member states. This is an agreement which will allow the entire world to use, for scientific purposes, the China Space Station when it will be ready," Pippo said. "It's the first time it is open to all member states," she said.



Fri, 01 June, 2018

Pakistan signs \$1.5 billion defence deal with Turkey

Following sharp cuts in military aid from the United States, Pakistan has turned to other countries for purchasing military hardware.

Pakistan has signed a deal with Turkey for the purchase of 30 attack helicopters estimated to be worth about \$1.5 billion, against the backdrop of a massive cut in military aid for Islamabad from Washington. The confirmation of the deal that had been in the pipeline for more than three years was made in the manifesto released by Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) ahead of the general election scheduled for June, Jane's Defence Weekly reported. The manifesto said that "a very short while ago a contract for the sale of 30 attack helicopters was signed with Pakistan". It did not give further details. The Turkish government did not disclose the cost of the deal for the T129 ATAK helicopters, but aerospace industry sources estimated the contract to be worth about \$1.5 billion, almost equivalent to Turkey's annual defence exports.

This will also be the largest defence deal between Turkey and Pakistan, which has turned to countries such as Russia for military hardware following sharp cuts in military aid from the US. US civilian and military assistance for Pakistan plummeted from an average of more than \$2.2 billion a year during the period immediately after the 9/11 terror attacks to \$526 million in 2017, reflecting the strain in ties between the two sides. In January, the US suspended nearly \$2 billion in security-related aid, saying Pakistan hasn't acted decisively against terrorists on its soil. In 2013, Pakistan's Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works inked a deal to build a replenishment tanker designed by a Turkish company. Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) has also upgraded 41 F-16 fighter jets for the Pakistan Air Force. Last November, Pakistan's then defence production minister Rana Tanveer Hussain had said his country planned to procure 30 attack helicopters and four warships from Turkey.

The T129 ATAK helicopter was developed by TAI and Italy-based AgustaWestland. It was inducted into the Turkish armed forces in 2014. In March, T129 ATAK helicopters from Turkey participated in a fly-past in Islamabad to mark Pakistan's National Day. The Pakistan Army has already ordered 12 US-made Bell AH-1Z Viper helicopters, and it had been conducting trials with China's Z-10 and Turkey's T129.

Mother of all lizards lived in Italian Alps

Megachirella roamed the earth about 240 million years ago

Scientists said on Wednesday they had tracked down the oldest known lizard, a tiny creature that lived about 240 million years ago when Earth had a single continent and dinosaurs were brand new. Scans of the fossilised skeleton of *Megachirella* revealed the chameleon-sized reptile was an ancestor of today's lizards and snakes, which belong to a group called squamates, an international team wrote in the science journal *Nature*. This finding dragged the group back in time by 75 million years, and means that "lizards inhabited the planet since at least 240 million years ago," study co-author Tiago Simoes of the University of Alberta in Canada said. That, in turn, suggested that squamates had already split from other ancient reptiles before the Permian/Triassic mass extinction some 252 million years ago, and survived it. Up to 95% of marine- and 75% of terrestrial life on earth was lost.



Megachirella, discovered some 20 years ago buried in compacted sand and clay layers in the Dolomites mountain range in northeast Italy, was initially misclassified as a close lizard relative. But Simoes had questions. "When I first saw the fossil I realised it had important features that could link it to the early evolution of lizards," he said. So

he hooked up with colleagues to perform a more detailed analysis of the tiny skeleton, which included CT scanning. The scans revealed previously unseen physical features, including the underside of the fossil, embedded in rock. The team found a tiny bone in *Megachirella*'s lower jaw that is unique to the squamate family.