

Peace accord to be inked between ULFA, Centre, Assam Govt today

NEW DELHI, Dec 28 (PTI)

A TRIPARTITE peace accord between the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), and the Central and Assam Governments will be signed here on Friday, aiming to end decades old insurgency in the northeastern State, officials said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and more than a dozen top leaders of the pro-talks faction of the ULFA, headed by Arabinda Rajkhowa, will be present during the signing of the peace agreement here.

The accord will take care of

a host of long-standing political, economic and social issues concerning Assam, besides providing cultural safeguards and land rights to the indigenous people, the officials said.

The hardline faction of the ULFA, led by Paresh Baruah, will not be part of the agreement as he has been consistently rejecting the olive branch offered by the Government.

Two top leaders of the Rajkhowa group -- Anup Chetia and Sashdhar Choudhary -- have been in the national capital since last week and gave the final touches to the peace agreement along with Government interlocutors, the sources said.

US okays new aid worth USD 250 mn for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, Dec 28 (AP)

THE US on Wednesday announced what officials say could be the final package of military aid to Ukraine unless Congress approves supplemental funding legislation that is stalled on Capitol Hill.

The weapons, worth up to USD 250 million, include an array of air munitions and other missiles, artillery, anti-armour systems, ammunition, demolition and medical equipment and parts. The aid, provided through the Presidential Drawdown Authority, will be pulled from Pentagon stockpiles.

In a statement, Lt. Colonel Garron Garn, a Pentagon spokesman said there is no more funding to replace the weapons taken from department stocks. And the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which provides long-term funding for future weapons contracts, is also out of money.

As a result, Garn said on Wednesday, "Without the supplemental funding, there will be a shortfall in replenishing US military stocks, affecting American military

readiness."

President Joe Biden is urging Congress to pass a USD 110 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and other national security needs. It includes USD 61.4 billion for Ukraine, with about half to replenish Pentagon stocks. It also includes about USD 14 billion for Israel as it fights Hamas and USD 14 billion for US border security. Other funds would go for security needs in the Asia-Pacific.

This is the 54th tranche of military aid taken from department shelves and sent to Ukraine, and it is similar in size and contents to many of the other recent packages.

Due to an accounting error that over-valued some of the weapons sent to Ukraine over the past year or more, there is still about USD 4.2 billion in restored drawdown authority. But since the Pentagon has no money to replenish inventory sent to Kyiv, the department will have to "rigorously assess" any future aid and its implications on the US military's ability to protect America, Garn said.

Russia-India ties steady despite current turbulences: Putin to EAM

MOSCOW, Dec 28 (PTI)

RUSSIA'S relations with India and its people are making "steady headway" despite the "current turbulences" in the world, President Vladimir Putin has said and expressed confidence that the two countries will maintain their traditionally friendly ties in "any alignment of political forces" after elections in India.

Putin's remarks came on Wednesday when visiting External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar called on him at the Kremlin. "We are very pleased to note that despite the current turbulences in the world, relations with our traditional friends in Asia, with India and the Indian people are making steady headway," Putin said.

The ties between India and Russia remained strong notwithstanding Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. India has not yet condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and it has been maintaining that the crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue.

"We know Prime Minister



EAM S Jaishankar during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow. (PTI)

Modi's position and we have repeatedly spoken about this — the position concerning his attitude to complex processes, including hotspots, to the situation in Ukraine," Putin said.

Putin said he would be happy to see "our friend", Prime Minister Modi in Russia.

Jaishankar, on his part, conveyed the personal greetings of Prime Minister Modi and also handed over a letter to Putin in which he expressed his thoughts about the state of

India-Russia cooperation and the progress that the two sides have made in recent days, according to a press release issued by the Kremlin.

Jaishankar also told Putin that Prime Minister Modi looks forward to visiting Russia next year. "We will have an opportunity to discuss the current issues and talk about the prospects for developing Russian-Indian relations. We have to cover a lot of ground," Putin said.

"So I would like to ask you to convey to him my best wishes and please, give him our invitation — we are looking forward to seeing him in Russia," Putin said.

He acknowledged that India's domestic political calendar is not simple.

"It is complicated considering that India will hold general elections to parliament. We wish success to our friends in India. We believe we will maintain our traditional friendly ties in any alignment of political forces," Putin, who is seeking a fifth term in office in March next year, said.

"I am sure that we will find a date which is mutually convenient for the political calendar of both countries. So it is certainly something that he looks forward to," the Kremlin press release quoted Jaishankar as saying.

Putin also talked about bilateral trade relations. "Our trade is growing for the second year running and at a confident pace. This year, the growth rates were even higher than last year," he said.

NEW CRPF, ITBP, CISF HEADS

NEW DELHI, Dec 28 (PTI)

INDO-TIBETAN Border Police (ITBP) chief Anish Dayal Singh was appointed as the Director General of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on Thursday, a Personnel Ministry order said.

Singh, a 1988-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of Manipur cadre, was holding the additional charge of the CRPF following the retirement of incumbent S L Thaisen on November 30. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved Singh's appointment as DG, CRPF up to December 31, 2024, i.e.

(Contd on page 5)



Anish Dayal Singh



Rahul Rasgotra



Nina Singh



India to launch 50 geo-intelligence gathering satellites in 5 yrs

MUMBAI, Dec 28 (PTI)

INDIA is aiming to launch 50 satellites in the next five years for geo-intelligence gathering which will include the creation of a layer of satellites in different orbits with a capacity to track the movement of troops and image thousands of kilometers of area, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman S Somanath said here on Thursday.

Speaking at 'Techfest', an annual science and technology event organised by the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, he said it is important to improve the ability of satellites to detect changes, to bring in more of AI-related and data-driven approach to analyse data, reduce data downloads and get only the necessary information.

Spacecrafts are capable of observing a country's borders and neighbouring regions, he noted. "All of it can be seen

from satellites. This capability gives us enormous potential. We have been launching satellites to handle this, but there is a different way of thinking now and we need to look at it in a much more critical manner because the power of (any) nation is the ability to understand what is happening around it," Somanath said.

"We have already configured 50 satellites to be realised in the next five years and this is going to be launched for India for supporting this particular geo-intelligence over the next five years plus (period)," the ISRO chief added. "We have found out a way by which a layer of satellites can be launched starting from geostationary equatorial orbit to lower earth orbit and also very low earth orbit where we need very critical assessment of some situation," he said. This is a new domain which is coming up not only in optical, but also in synthetic aperture radar, thermal and other technologies, he pointed out.

DIPLOMATIC WIN Qatar commutes death of 8 Indian ex-Navy personnel

NEW DELHI, Dec 27 (PTI)

IN a huge relief to eight Indian Navy veterans on death row, an appellate court in Qatar has commuted their sentence.

"We have noted the verdict today of the Court of Appeal of Qatar in the Dahra Global case, in which the sentences have been reduced," the External Affairs Ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

The Ministry didn't specify what was the "reduced" punishment and said a detailed judgment was awaited.

"Due to the confidential and sensitive nature of proceedings of this case, it would not be appropriate to make any further comment at this juncture," the Ministry said and added that it was in close touch with the legal team as well as the family members to decide on the next steps.

The appellate court verdict is also seen as a big diplomatic win for India as it comes

weeks after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the sidelines of the COP28 Summit in Dubai.

After the meeting on December 1, Modi said they discussed the well-being of the Indian community in Qatar.

The Indian nationals, who were working with Doha-based Al Dahra Global Technologies, were taken into custody in August 2022 in an alleged espionage case. While the charges against them were not made public by Qatari authorities, they were sentenced to death by Qatar's Court of First Instance in October this year.

The private firm provided training and other services to

Qatar's armed forces and security agencies. India had moved the Court of Appeal in Qatar against the death sentence last month. "Our Ambassador to Qatar and other officials were present in the Court of

Appeal today, along with the family members. We have stood by them since the beginning of the matter and we will continue to extend all consular and legal assistance. We will also continue to take up the matter with the Qatari authorities," the Ministry statement said.

Among the eight veterans, Captain Navtej Gill was awarded the President's Gold Medal for excellence when he graduated from the Naval Academy and later served as an instructor at the Defence Services Staff

College at Wellington in Tamil Nadu. The others are Captain Saurabh Vasisht, Commanders Purnendu Tiwari, Amit Nagpal, SK Gupta, BK Verma, Sugunakar Pakala, and Sailor Ragesh. The court verdict was welcomed by political parties, former diplomats and security experts, among others.

"The Indian National Congress shares its immediate relief along with the entire nation that the Court of Appeals in Qatar has decided not to go ahead with the death penalty... While fuller details are awaited we express the hope that even the jail sentence that has replaced the death penalty will be set aside and the officers will be set free," Congress' Jairam Ramesh said on X.

BJP General Secretary Tarun Chugh said the relief for the former Navy personnel was a "victory of the diplomatic efforts" under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. "This news has

(Contd on page 5)

The Ministry of External Affairs didn't specify what was the "reduced" punishment and said a detailed judgment was awaited