

India, Maldives

agree to “fast-track withdrawal of Indian military personnel”: Maldives Foreign Ministry

MALE, Jan 14 (ANI)

INDIA and Maldives have “agreed to fast-track the withdrawal of Indian military personnel” from the island nation, according to Maldives’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The first meeting of the High-Level Core Group between the Maldives and India took place in Male’ on Sunday.

“During the meeting held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Maldives, both sides reviewed the existing bilateral cooperation. Discussions were held on a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including development cooperation,” the Maldives’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a press release.

“Both sides expressed willingness to intensify cooperation and agreed to fast-track the withdrawal of Indian military personnel,” it also said. “It was agreed that the second meeting of the High-Level Core Group will be held at a mutually convenient time,” it added. Earlier in the day, the Ministry of External Affairs said that India and the Maldives discussed finding a mutually

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Crucial trade meet between India and Nepal concludes

KATHMANDU, Jan 14 (PTI)

INDIA and Nepal have concluded a crucial joint meeting on combating unauthorised trade, and highlighted the need to review the strategies for enhancing investments and development of commercial infrastructure between the two nations, the Indian Embassy here said in a statement.

The India-Nepal Inter-Governmental Sub-committee (IGSC) on Trade, Transit and Cooperation on Combating Unauthorised Trade also called

for strengthening the seamless cross-border connectivity between India and Nepal, including through construction of new integrated check post and railway links.

“The agenda of the meeting of the IGSC also covered discussions on review of the Treaty of Transit and the Treaty of Trade, proposed amendments to existing agreements, strategies for enhancing investment, the harmonisation of standards and synchronised development of trade infrastructure,” said the statement.

Indian Armed Forces one of the finest in the world: IAF chief

NEW DELHI, Jan 14 (PTI)

The Indian Armed Forces have transformed with changing times to meet the challenges of the "entire spectrum of warfare," IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhary said on Sunday.

In his address at an event hosted here to mark the 8th Armed Forces Veterans Day, he also asserted that resilient spirit, leadership, and vision of its veterans have laid the foundation of today's armed forces.

The programme held at Manekshaw Centre in Delhi Cantonment was also attended by Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar, various senior officers of the three Services, a large number of veterans or their family members.

"The Indian armed forces, we will all agree, are one of the finest in the world, and have

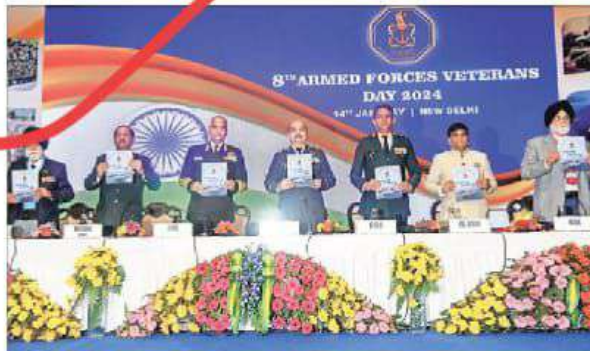
transformed with changing times to meet the challenges of the entire spectrum of warfare," he said.

The Indian Air Force, in particular, has grown from a very modest beginning just about 90 years ago, to being "one of the most formidable air forces in the world," the IAF chief said.

This has been possible only through the "sustained efforts and yeoman services" rendered by the forces' veterans over the years, Air Chief Marshal Chaudhary added.

"I acknowledge with gratitude the sterling contributions made by all our veterans, whose resilient spirit, leadership, and vision have laid the foundation of today's armed forces," he said.

Today is also a day to poignantly remember all the veterans who laid down their lives for the nation, the IAF



Indian Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar, Indian Air Force (IAF) Chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhary and other dignitaries launch the Navy 'Sagar Samvad' magazine during the 8th Armed Forces Veterans Day 2024 celebrations, in New Delhi on Sunday. (ANI)

chief said, adding, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty". The IAF, the youngest of the Services, is only 91 years old. And, as of December 31, 2023, "we have on record, 2,21,204 veterans," he said. The IAF chief shared that it has been a diligent effort to reach out to each and every veteran. "I am aware there are teething issues, we are taking up these issues constantly with the service providers and the Controller General of Defence Accounts," he said.

In his address, Air Chief Marshal Chaudhary also shared some data regarding SPARSH and other initiatives.

The System for Pension Administration (Raksha) or SPARSH is a web-based system for processing pension claims and crediting the pen-

sion directly into bank accounts of defence pensioners without any external intermediary.

"In the year gone by, 1.85 lakh legacy pensioners have been migrated onto SPARSH," the IAF chief said.

The Navy chief, in his address, underlined the contribution made by the veterans to the armed forces.

"I can say with conviction that our armed forces of today are a product of the visionary leadership, unflinching efforts and selfless service of our veterans. I would like to assure each and every one of you that we will leave no water uncharted in carrying forward this legacy," Admiral Kumar said.

So, towards that end, Navy's efforts have been focused on being a combat-ready, credible, cohesive and future-proof force, he said.

Pull out military staff by March 15, says Maldives

India Silent On Whether It Has Agreed To Recall

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New Delhi: Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has set a deadline of March 15 for withdrawal of Indian military personnel — who operate two Indian naval choppers and a Dornier aircraft in the archipelago — from his country. The deadline was announced after the first meeting in Male of the India-Maldives core group which was formed after Muizzu's meeting with PM Modi on the margins of COP28 in Dubai.

In a press statement, the Maldives foreign ministry said

DEADLINE CAME AT CORE GROUP'S 1st MEET

> Maldives and India have set up a high-level core group to negotiate the withdrawal of Indian troops from the island nation. Its first meeting was organised in Male on Sunday

> Maldives foreign ministry said discussions were held on a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including development cooperation, and that both sides expressed

willingness to intensify cooperation and agreed to 'fast-track' withdrawal of Indian military personnel

> According to officials in Male, there have been 12 rounds of meeting on the troop issue

> The March 15 deadline for Indian troops comes days after Muizzu's return from China and his ministers putting derogatory posts against PM Modi



discussions were held on a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including development cooperation, and both sides expressed willingness to intensify cooperation and agreed to "fast-track" withdrawal of Indian military personnel. One of the tasks that the core group, which is likely to expedite

work on Indian development projects, was assigned is to find a mutually workable solution to enable continued operation of Indian "aviation platforms". The Indian side was silent on whether it had agreed to recall its personnel.

▶ Related report, P 20

GOVTS OWE \$88 TRILLION IN DEBT

Equivalent almost to world's annual economic output

LONDON, Jan 14 (IANS)

WORLD leaders are flocking to Davos this week to pontificate on the planet's most pressing problems, CNN reported.

Two major wars, a shipping crisis, cyberattacks on state institutions and yet more alarming evidence of the climate emergency mean there is no shortage of talking points, CNN reported.

But turning ideas into action when governments owe an unprecedented \$ 88.1 trillion -- equivalent almost to the world's annual economic output -- will be hard.

Public debt exploded during the pandemic and new borrowing this year is likely to break records in several big economies, leaving governments less able to respond to shocks such as financial meltdowns, pandemics or wars,



CNN reported.

Even in the absence of a new crisis, soaring debt servicing costs will constrain efforts to tackle climate change and care for aging populations. Public services in many countries are already strained after successive budget cuts.

More worryingly still, as debt burdens grow, governments could find themselves unable

to borrow more to service existing obligations and fund basic services adequately, CNN reported.

A Government unable to finance its debt "would be forced to implement abrupt and painful" spending cuts or tax hikes, said Michael Saunders, a former member of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee.

Army maintaining 'robust posture' at borders: Gen Pande

NEW DELHI, Jan 14 (PTI)

THE Indian Army continues to maintain a "robust posture" at the borders and is prepared to protect the country's territorial integrity at "all costs", Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande said on Sunday, amid the over three-year festering border row with China in eastern Ladakh.

On the eve of the Army Day, Gen Pande said the force is fully committed with an "unwavering resolve" to counter any security threat, asserting that its fundamental character, core ethos and professionalism will

enable it to live up to the expectations of citizens.

He said the transition towards becoming a modern, agile, adaptive, technology-enabled and future-ready force shall continue as part of the transformation roadmap. "Each member of the 'Olive Green' fraternity is fully committed, with an unwavering resolve, to counter security

threats to the nation," he said. "We continue to maintain a robust posture at the borders and stand prepared to protect our territorial integrity, at all costs," he said in a message aired on All India Radio.



North Korea launches ballistic missile toward sea: South Korea



A TV screen shows a file image of North Korea's missile launch during a news programme at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea on Sunday. (AP/PTI)

SEOUL, Jan 14 (AP)

NORTH Korea fired a ballistic missile toward the sea on Sunday, its first missile launch in about a month, its neighbours said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the launch occurred Sunday but gave no further details like how far the weapon flew. Japan's Defence Ministry also said it detected a possible ballistic missile launch by North Korea but gave no other details. It is the North's first missile launch since it test-fired its Hwasong-18 solid-fuelled intercontinental ballistic missile, the North's most advanced weapon, on Dec. 18. The Hwasong-18 is designed to strike the mainland US.

Sunday's launch came days after North Korea fired a barrage of artillery shells near the tense sea border with South Korea, prompting South Korea to conduct similar firing exercises in the same area. In recent days, North Korea has also been escalating its warlike rhetoric against its rivals. Earlier this week, leader Kim Jong Un called South Korea "our principal enemy" and threatened to annihilate it if provoked.

Experts say Kim will likely further raise animosities by test-firing more missiles to try to raise the stakes in the stand-off with his rivals and influence the results of South Korea's parliamentary elections in April and the US Presidential election in November. In a key ruling party meeting in late December, Kim vowed to expand his nuclear arsenal and launch additional spy satellites to cope with what he called U.