

Louder cry in Male for Indian troops recall

Pro-China Yameen Ups Ante As Maldives Prez Muizzu Faces Parl Probe Over Kid's Death

Sachin.Parashar
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Former Maldivian president and the most rabid anti-India leader in the Indian Ocean archipelago, Abdulla Yameen, joined a public event, even while serving the 11-year sentence awarded to him for money laundering, and urged Maldives President to fulfil his promise of expelling Indian military personnel from the island nation.

Yameen described as disheartening the remarks made by a Maldivian minister in which he had said that removing Indian troops won't be easy. The former president recalled that removal of Indian soldiers was among the most important "presidential vows" of Muizzu. His comments came in the middle of the controversy over the death



Maldives President Muizzu with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing earlier this month. Both Muizzu and Yameen are pro-China but the latter is believed to be the architect of the 'India Out' campaign

of a 13-year-old, allegedly because of delayed medical evacuation. A parliamentary committee has initiated a probe into the issue and Muizzu himself has come under criticism from the opposition for the failure of the local authorities to use Indian helicopters for the purpose.

Considered China's most trusted ally in the country, Ya-

meen was a mentor to Muizzu but recently fell out with him and helped launch a new political outfit. Both are pro-China leaders but it's Yameen who is believed to be the architect of the 'India Out' campaign that apparently tipped the balance in Muizzu's favour in the presidential polls last year.

It was also Yameen's idea in 2018 as president to have

the Indian soldiers thrown out, along with Indian choppers and an aircraft they help operate and maintain, that Muizzu wants to implement. Yameen was in prison, but Muizzu ensured that the former president was moved to house-arrest a day after he won the presidential run off against his predecessor Ibrahim Solih in September, 2023.

"It is very disheartening to hear these words from a minister of the President's Office of a government that came with immense courage and resolve to remove the Indian troops from Maldives. Nothing will be easy," said Yameen, who was allowed to participate in a meeting of the party he recently launched.

After his return from China, Muizzu asked India to pull out its troops by March 15. The president wants to replace Indian choppers and aircraft,

which have carried out 500 medical evacuations in the country saving 523 lives, with an air ambulance service he's planning to launch on March 1. With Yameen breathing down his neck, Muizzu is unlikely to rethink his decision, which he says is backed by the democratic will of the Maldivian people.

Muizzu has linked the issue with Maldives' sovereignty, saying India not removing forces will imperil democracy in the Maldives. After he met the commander of the US Indo-Pacific command on Sunday, Muizzu's office said the commander affirmed US support in maintaining peace while "preserving its sovereignty".

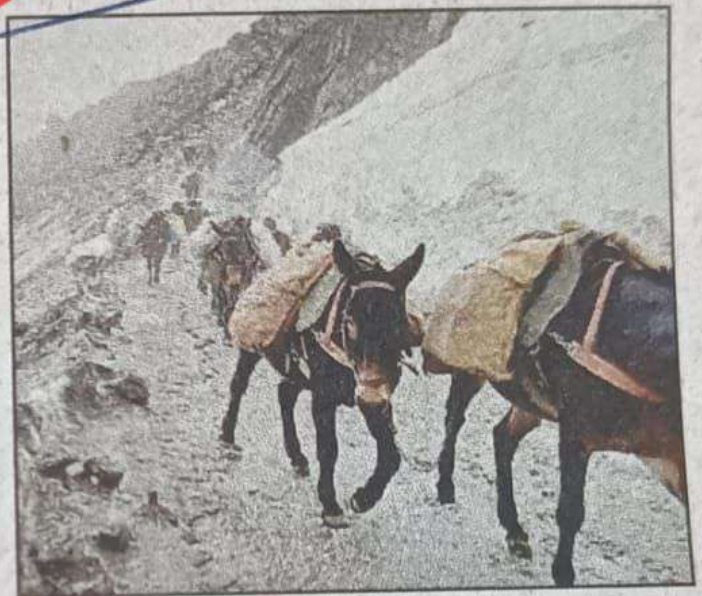
However, Muizzu wants to see the back of the Indian military personnel, as he told **TOI** in an interview, through diplomatic means.

Army gets logistics drones, mules march into history

New Delhi: The sturdy and surefooted mules of the Army, which have been transporting crucial loads to forward border posts through treacherous routes under extreme weather and terrain conditions for over a century, are now slowly but steadily marching into history.

Army is progressively inducting logistics drones, robotic mules, all-terrain vehicles and rough-terrain vehicles, in conjunction with the improvement in border infrastructure and better last-mile connectivity, to replace its existing animal transport fleet, reports Rajat Pandit.

Under the overall “force



Over 3.3k ‘general service mules’ will be retired by the decade-end

restructuring and optimisation” plan to cut manpower by around 1 lakh personnel by 2027, animal transport firms and other “legacy units” are being gradually disbanded.

► **Related report, P 22**

25 dead in shelling of a market in Russian-occupied Ukraine

Kyiv: At least 25 people were killed on Sunday by shelling at a market on the outskirts of the city of Donetsk in Russian-occupied Ukraine, local officials reported Sunday. A further 20 people were injured in the strike on the suburb of Tekstilshchik, including two children, said Denis Pushilin, head of the Russian-installed authorities in Donetsk. He said that the shells had been fired by the Ukrainian military.

Kyiv did not comment.

Also Sunday, fire broke out at a chemical transport terminal at Russia's Ust-Luga port following two explosions, regional officials said. Local media reported that the port had been attacked by Ukrainian drones, causing a gas tank to explode. The blaze was at a site run by Russia's second-largest natural gas producer, Novatek, about 170 km southwest of St. Petersburg. In a statement to Russian media outlet RBC, the company said that the fire was the result of an "external influence." It also said that it had paused operations at the port. Yuri Zapalatsky, the head of Russia's Kingisepp district, where the port is based, said in a statement that there were no casualties, but that the area had been placed on high alert.

The Russian ministry of defence did not report any drone activity in the Kingisepp area in its briefing. It said that four Ukrainian drones had been downed in Russia's Smolensk region, and that two more had been shot down in the Oryol and Tula regions. AP



FIRE AT RUSSIAN GAS TERMINAL NEAR ST PETERSBURG: A fire broke out at a Baltic Sea terminal belonging to Novatek, Russia's largest liquefied natural gas producer, after a suspected Ukrainian drone attack, forcing the company to suspend some operations there. The Ust-Luga complex, located on the Gulf of Finland about 170 km west of St. Petersburg, processes stable gas condensate into light and heavy naphtha, jet fuel, fuel oil and gasoil, according to Novatek's website. The port is used to ship processed products to international markets

N Korea says Putin willing to visit Pyongyang 'soon'

Seoul: Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his willingness to visit Pyongyang soon when he met with North Korean foreign minister Choe Son Hui in Russia last week, North Korea's state news agency KCNA reported Sunday. Putin also thanked North Korean leader Kim Jong-un for his invitation to visit, KCNA said, citing North Korea's foreign minister's assistant office. It would be the Russian leader's first trip to North Korea in more than two decades.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday that Russia hoped a Putin visit to

North Korea, at Kim's invitation, would take place "in the foreseeable future", but he said no date had yet been agreed.

KCNA's Korean-language report suggested Putin intended to visit soon, but its later English report said he was "willing" to do so at an early date. During Choe's visit, Russia thanked North Korea for its support in its Ukraine military operation, KCNA said.

Kim and Putin's growing ties have worried the US and its allies who have condemned arms trade between the two countries as a violation of multiple UNSC resolutions. REUTERS

India to send back 276 Myanmar soldiers who fled to Mizoram last week

AIZAWL, Jan 21 (PTI)

INDIA will send back 276 Myanmar soldiers who fled to Mizoram last week following gunfights with an ethnic insurgent group, an official said on Sunday. With this repatriation, which will continue for two days -- Monday and Tuesday, more than 600 Myanmar soldiers who fled to Mizoram will be sent back to their country, he said.

The 276 personnel will be airlifted by Myanmar air force planes from the Lengpui airport near Aizawl to Sittwe in the neighbouring country's Rakhine state, the Assam Rifles official told PTI. They entered

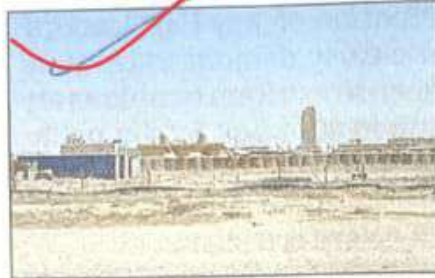
Bandukbanga village, located at the India-Myanmar-Bangladesh trijunction, in southernmost Mizoram's Lawngtlai district with arms and ammunition on 17 January and approached the Assam Rifles, she said.

They were taken to the nearby Assam Rifles camp at Parva, and later the majority of them were shifted to Lunglei, she added. They have been under the supervision of the Assam Rifles since then, the official said. These 276 soldiers were brought to Aizawl over Saturday and Sunday for their transport to Myanmar from the Lengpui airport, she said. The group is headed by a colonel, and has

36 officers and 240 lower-rank personnel, officials said. Since November, 635 Myanmar soldiers have fled their country and entered Mizoram after their camps were overrun and captured by ethnic armed organisations and pro-democratic forces, officials said. Of them, 359 soldiers have already been sent back to their country, they said. While 104 Myanmar army personnel were sent to the border town of Moreh in Manipur from different places in Mizoram by Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopters in November, 255 soldiers were moved via the Lengpui airport by Myanmar air force planes on January 2 and January 9, they said.

US troops injured in rocket strikes on base in Iraq by Iran-backed militia

AFP



The Ain al-Assad air base hosting US forces in Iraq in Anbar province

At least two US service members stationed in Iraq were injured on Saturday when their air base came under heavy rocket and missile fire from what American officials said were Iran-backed militias, as the ripple effects of Israel's war in the Gaza Strip continued to roil West Asia.

A US official cautioned that initial information was sketchy and that the number of injured could grow. A number of American military personnel were being evaluated for traumatic brain injuries. One Iraqi soldier was injured as well, said Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool, the military spokesman for Iraq's PM Mohammed Shia al Sudani.

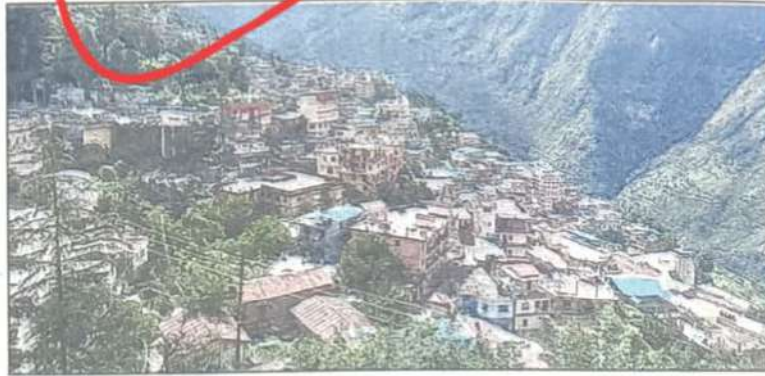
The attack against Al Asad Air Base in Iraq, which came at 6.30pm local time, was the latest and the most serious of roughly 140 such rocket and missile strikes against US troops based in Iraq and Syria since the Gaza war started. At least 10 rockets and seven short-range ballistic missiles were fired at the base, with two making it through air defence systems, in the most successful attack the militias had carried out so far. The attack was another example of the region being pulled into a broader conflict. Iran-linked militias in Iraq claimed in a statement that the latest attack was a response to Israel's war in Gaza. NYT

35% of Joshimath in high-risk zone

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Dehradun: Approximately 35% of Joshimath, which faced severe land subsidence last year, is situated in a high-risk zone, according to Ranjit Sinha, secretary of the disaster management department. Sinha, and senior officials from Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority (USDMA), participated in a public consultation on rehabilitation and reconstruction on Saturday.

He said technical teams, based on an on-field survey since January 18, have iden-



Uttarakhand government has earmarked 25 hectares of land for relocation of affected residents, senior officials said

tified 14 areas spread across Joshimath under high-risk zones. At the public hearing, Sinha said that government

has earmarked 25 hectares of land near Gauchar in Bomoth village for the relocation. However, affected per-

sons said they were unwilling to relocate elsewhere. The secretary also said no new construction would be permitted in the town until experts verify that the land beneath Joshimath has stabilised. "The district administration will take action if any new construction is reported," Sinha said.

Meanwhile, Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (JBSS), a residents' group also submitted a nine-point memorandum and raised concerns over the non-fulfilment of the promises made in April 2023.