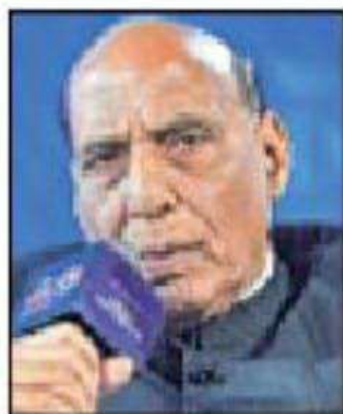


'Govt open to make changes in Agniveer scheme if needed'

NEW DELHI, Mar 28 (Agencies)

DEFENCE Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said that his Government is "open to change" in the Agniveer recruitment scheme if necessary. Speaking at a summit, the Union Minister also said that the Government has ensured that the future of the Agniveers is secure.



Asserting that youthfulness is necessary in the defence forces, Singh also defended the scheme, and said, "Sena mein youthfulness honi chahiye. The youth, I feel, are more enthusiastic. They are more tech-

savvy. We have taken proper care that their future is also secure. We will also make changes if there is a need."

The recruits named Agniveers serve for a tenure of four years that includes training for six months followed by 3.5 years of deployment. After retirement from the service, they will have the opportunity to apply to continue in the Armed Forces.

As announced, the 'Agnipath' or 'Agniveer' scheme is a process for recruiting soldiers in the Army, Navy and Air Force to be hired for a term of four years on contract.

No breakthrough in India-China dialogue

Both Sides Agree To Maintain Regular Contact

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: India and China held another round of diplomatic talks to complete the disengagement process in eastern Ladakh and, in absence of any breakthrough, agreed to maintain regular contact through diplomatic and military channels for border peace. According to China, both sides agreed to have another meeting of the corps commanders soon to resolve the remaining issues.

This was the 29th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) and the 15th such meeting since the Galwan clash in June 2020. Apart from the 15 WMCC meetings, the two countries have also held 21 rounds of India-China corps commander level meetings to resolve the military standoff that erupted in April-May 2020.

According to an Indian readout, the two sides had an in-depth exchange of views on how to achieve complete disengagement and resolve the remaining issues along LAC in the western sector of India-China border areas.

The remaining issues pertain to the friction points in Demchok and Depsang areas where aggressive forward deployment remains a major issue. India has maintained that the situation remains abnormal at the LAC and that it will not consider normalising ties with Beijing till complete disengagement is achieved. "In the interim, both sides agreed to maintain regular contact through diplomatic and military channels and on the need to uphold peace and tranquility on the ground in the border areas in accordance with existing bilateral agreements and protocols," the govt added.



India said the two sides had an in-depth exchange of views on how to achieve complete troop pullback and resolve remaining LAC issues

MEA: China claim on Arunachal baseless

Following repeated statements by China claiming sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh, India asserted Thursday "baseless" claims by Beijing won't change the fact that the northeast Indian state is and will always remain a part of India. "Our position on the matter has been made very clear on Arunachal Pradesh time and again. China may repeat its baseless claims as many times as they want. That is not going to change the position. Arunachal Pradesh was, is and will always remain an integral and inalienable part of India," said the MEA spokesperson.

After foreign minister S Jaishankar's remark that Arunachal is a natural part of India, China earlier this week said that Zangnan (Chinese name for the state) has always been China's territory. TNN

India attributes the current situation between the two countries to China's violation of the bilateral agreements and protocols for border peace and tranquility. Jaishankar said on Wednesday, the day WMCC talks were held, that India will not compromise on the border issue and that normalisation can only be achieved through

Del rejects 3rd party remarks on Pannun

Following remarks by China calling upon India and the US to observe international law in the murder-for-hire Gurpatwant Singh Pannun case, India hit back Thursday, rejecting Beijing's "gratuitous advice" and asserting India and US can address the issue between them. "India and the US, as two countries adhering to the rule of law, are capable of dealing with any issues between them. There is no role for speculative comments and gratuitous advice by unrelated third parties," said the ministry of external affairs spokesperson.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian, during a press conference, had said that relevant countries must observe international law and the basic norms governing international relations. TNN

a return to the normal or traditional troop deployment.

"We're negotiating with the Chinese. We meet from time to time. But we are clear that we had an agreement. There is a Line of Actual Control. We have a tradition of not bringing troops to that line. Both of us have bases some distance away, and we want that normalcy," he said.

AFSPA extended for 6 months in Arunachal, Nagaland districts

NEW DELHI, Mar 28 (PTI)

THE Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, under which an area is declared as "disturbed" for the convenience of security forces, has been extended in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh, eight districts of Nagaland and some other areas for six more months after a review of the law and order situation in these two northeastern States.

The AFSPA gives Armed Forces personnel, operating in disturbed areas, sweeping powers to search, arrest and to open

fire if they deem it necessary for "the maintenance of public order".

An area or district is notified as a disturbed area under the AFSPA to facilitate the operations of the Armed Forces.

In a notification, the Union Home Ministry said the Central Government in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 had declared the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh and the areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai, Mahadevpur and

Chowkham police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering Assam as "disturbed area" on September 26, 2023.

"And whereas a further review of the law and order situation in the state of Arunachal Pradesh has been undertaken. Now, therefore, Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh and the areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai, Mahadevpur and Chowkham police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering the State of Assam, are

declared as 'disturbed area' under Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 for a period of six months with effect from 01.04.2024, unless withdrawn earlier," the notification said.

In a separate notification, the Home Ministry also said that the Central Government in exercise of the powers conferred by AFSPA had declared eight districts and 21 police stations in five other districts of Nagaland as 'disturbed area' for a period of six months with effect from October 1, 2023.

MGNREGS wage rates hiked between 4-10% for states

■ Haryana has the highest wage rate for unskilled workers under the scheme at Rs 374 a day, while Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland have the lowest at Rs 234

NEW DELHI, Mar 28 (PTI)

WAGES under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) have been revised, with hikes ranging between four and 10 per cent for different states.

Haryana has the highest wage rate for unskilled workers under the scheme at Rs 374 a day, while Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland have the lowest at Rs 234, according to a notification. The wage rate in three panchayats of Sikkim -- Gnathang, Lachung and Lachen -- is Rs 374 a day.

The wage revision under the scheme was notified by the Union Rural Development Ministry on March 27 after

clearance from the Election Commission as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is in force for the Lok Sabha polls.

The increase has been made on the 2023 wage rates under scheme that is aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

The hike in the wage rate in Goa was highest in the country at Rs 34 and the per day payment now stands at Rs 356 in the state, according to the notification. In Andhra Pradesh, it was increased by Rs 28 a day and the wage rate is now Rs 300.

The increase for Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand was the lowest at Rs 7 and the wage rate in both the states is Rs 237 a day to workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The wage rate in West Bengal has been increased to Rs 250 (increase of Rs 13), in Tamil

Nadu to Rs 319 (increase of Rs 25), in Telangana to Rs 300 (increase of Rs 28) and in Bihar to Rs 228 (increase of Rs 17).

Though Haryana tops in terms of wage rate, the increase is only around four per cent.

Overall, the hikes vary between four and 10 per cent. Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka and Telangana have registered an around 10 per cent increase, an analysis of the data mentioned in the notification shows.

In a report tabled in Parliament earlier this year, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj had pointed out the high range of variation in MGNREGS wages across states.

It had also said that the wages were inadequate and not in consonance with the rising cost of living. The panel also quoted a report of the Central Government Committee on minimum wages, Anoop Satpathy Committee, had recommended that the wages under MGNREGA should be Rs 375 a day.

Skyroot Aerospace successfully test fires Stage-2 of its Vikram-1 orbital rocket

HYDERABAD, Mar 28 (PTI)

SKYROOT Aerospace, a space-tech company, has successfully test-fired the Stage-2 of Vikram-1 space launch vehicle, called Kalam-250, at the propulsion testbed of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), at its Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.

The city-based firm in a press release on Thursday said Vikram-1 launch is slated to be a landmark event for the Indian space sector as its first private orbital rocket launch, and follows the remarkable suborbital space launch of India's first private rocket - the Vikram-S by Skyroot in November 2022.

The test, done on Wednesday, which lasted 85 seconds, recorded a peak sea-level thrust of 186 kilonewtons (kN), which will translate to a fully expanded vacuum thrust of around 235 kN in flight, it said. The Kalam-250 is a high-strength carbon composite rocket motor, which uses solid fuel and a high-performance Ethylene-Propylene-Diene terpolymers (EPDM) thermal protection system (TPS).

Pawan Chandana, Co-Founder and CEO said, "This is a significant milestone for the Indian space industry, marking the successful test of the largest propulsion system ever designed and manufactured by the Indian private sector so far,

and the first carbon composite-built motor tested at ISRO.

"All test parameters are within expected bounds, and this achievement takes us another step closer to the upcoming orbital launch of the Vikram-1 rocket," he said.

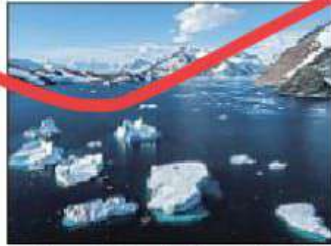
Naga Bharath Daka, Co-Founder and COO of Skyroot, said, "In this landmark test, we validated the critical system for the launch—the flex nozzle control system—during firing for the first time, making this an important milestone in our journey. We have a few more milestones to cross and are focused on achieving them in the coming months to reach our maiden orbital launch of the Vikram-1 in 2024."

Ice melting in Antarctica slowing Earth's rotation, affecting timekeeping: Study

NEW DELHI, Mar 28 (PTI)

ICE melting in Greenland and Antarctica, driven by global warming, is affecting timekeeping the world over by slowing down the Earth's rotating speed, according to a new research. As a result, a second might need to be deducted from the Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) three years later than otherwise, it found.

The study author, Duncan Agnew, explained that because the Earth doesn't always rotate at the same speed, the UTC consists of discontinuities.



Since 1972, all discontinuities have required that a 'leap second' be added, because many networked activities like computing and financial markets require the consistent, standardised and precise timescale provided by the UTC, he said.

Agnew is a geophysicist at

Scripps Institution of Oceanography at University of California San Diego, US.

Using mathematical modelling, Agnew showed that the rate at which the Earth's liquid core rotates -- angular velocity -- has been slowing down. To compensate for this, the rotating speed of the solid Earth has steadily increased. The compensatory effect comes from the fact that for a closed system such as the Earth, angular momentum -- the rate at which rotating speed changes -- is a conserved quantity and doesn't change, he explained.

His study has been published in the journal Nature.

He found that the effect of the solid Earth rotating faster has resulted in fewer leap seconds being needed to be added to the UTC in recent decades.

When extrapolated to the future, he predicted that a leap second will need to be deducted from the global primary standard of timekeeping as early as the year 2026. However, Agnew also found that the increased melting of ice caps in Greenland and Antarctica has slowed down the Earth's rotation more rapidly.