

Infiltration bid at LoC

5 Pak terrorists killed in landmine blast in Poonch

JAMMU, Feb 7 (IANS)

FIVE Pakistani terrorists were killed on Friday in a landmine blast near the Line of Control (LoC) while trying to infiltrate into Indian territory in Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K) Poonch district.

Official sources said that the five Pakistani militants were killed in the landmine explosion while attempting to infiltrate across the LoC in Battal sector of Poonch.

They said that the Pakistani terrorists were attempting to infiltrate into Indian territory when one of them stepped onto a landmine.

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"One of them stepped on a landmine, triggering a huge explosion that killed all five terrorists. They were also carrying an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) with them, which also exploded, adding to the damage," sources said.

The LoC area has been fitted with landmines by the Indian Army to prevent infiltration by the terrorists. In addition to night vision devices, electronic surveillance and human preparedness, the landmines are an

important part of the anti-infiltration mechanism in J&K.

Usually the area close to the LoC is called 'no man's land' thereby signalling that nobody should tread on this land.

Security forces and the Indian Army have heightened vigil along the LoC and the hinterland in J&K as very less snowfall this season so far has left all mountain routes used by the terrorists open in the UT. Union Home Minister, Amit Shah chaired a high level security meeting on J&K recently.

The Home Minister advised security forces to ensure 'zero infiltration' and 'zero tolerance' to terrorists.

The meeting was held in the backdrop of the recent murder of an ex-serviceman, Manzoor Ahmad Wagay by terrorists in Kulgam district of the Valley.

The retired soldier's wife and daughter were injured in the terrorist attack.

There was a political uproar in J&K after the ex-serviceman's killing as local politicians of the ruling National Conference, Congress and the Peoples Democratic Party criticised the Centre for claiming normalcy in the UT.

Panama prez: No deal with US to let its ships transit canal for free

Panama City: Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino on Thursday denied the US state department's claim that his country had reached a deal allowing US warships to transit the Panama Canal for free.

Mulino said he had told US secretary of defence Pete Hegseth on Wednesday that he could neither set the fees to transit

China slams US for Panama's BRI exit

China is opposed to US "smea- ring and sabotage" of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Panama through "pressure and coercion", its foreign ministry said on Friday, after the South American nation decided to exit the programme. At a presser, a ministry spokesperson, Lin Jian, said China deeply regretted Panama's decision. Panama has formally presented a document to exit the BRI, President Mulino said on Thursday, after meeting US secretary of state Marco Rubio, but denied the US had sought the move. REUTERS

the canal nor exempt anyone from them and that he was surprised by the US state department's statement suggesting otherwise late on Wednesday.

"I completely reject that statement," Mulino said. On Wednesday, the US state department said via X that "US govt vessels can now transit the Panama Canal without charge fees, saving millions of dollars..." AP

Baltic states to cut Soviet-era ties to Russian power grid

Vilnius: Nearly 3 1/2 decades after leaving Soviet Union, Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania this weekend will flip a switch to end electricity-grid connections to neighbouring Russia and Belarus — and turn to their EU allies.

The severing of electricity ties to oil- and gas-rich Russia is steeped in geopolitical and symbolic significance. Work toward it sped up after Russia's Putin ordered troops to invade Ukraine three years ago, battering Moscow's EU relations and spooking the Baltic countries into thinking they could be targeted. The countries have been preparing to integrate with the European grid for years but have faced technological and financial issues.

On Saturday, all remaining transmission lines between the countries and Russia, Belarus and Russia's Kaliningrad will be switched off one by

one. Then, for 24 hours, the Baltic Power System will operate solo in an "island operation mode," to test their frequency, or power levels. The next day, the power system is set to merge with Continental European and Nordic grids through several links with Finland, Sweden and Poland. The Baltic countries have credited 1.2 billion euros in EU for the project.

FINAL COUNTDOWN

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen and others will attend a ceremony Sunday as a 9-m tall clock in Vilnius counts down the final seconds till ties are severed. EU has hailed the disconnection as "a victory for freedom and European unity".

Russia said the disconnection plan was announced in advance and it had taken preparatory steps to ensure smooth operation on its side. AGENCIES

Trade, def, N-ties on agenda of Modi-Trump summit in US

India Eyes Revival Of Biz Benefits Revoked By Previous Trump Admin

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Trade, defence and nuclear cooperation are likely to dominate PM Narendra Modi's first bilateral meeting with President Donald Trump next week on Feb 12-13. Announcing Modi's official working visit, foreign secretary Vikram Misri said the PM would be among the first world leaders to visit the US in the first few weeks of the second Trump administration, in a sign of the bipartisan US support for the partnership with India.

Modi will fly to Washington from Paris where he will participate in an AI summit on Feb 10 and 11 and also have a bilateral meeting with President Emmanuel Macron.

Modi will have restricted and delegation-level talks with Trump and interact with business leaders, as well as the Indian communi-



File photo

Modi's talks with Trump are also expected to see some progress in the negotiations for joint development of small modular reactors

ty, on Feb 13. Officials, however, didn't comment on speculation that Elon Musk might call on Modi during the visit.

While Misri did not confirm that the negotiations with the first Trump administration for a trade deal would be resumed, he said very intense discussions are likely on trade and investment as this remained a pri-

ority issue for India. India is hoping for a restoration of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) trade benefits that had been revoked by the previous Trump administration. The talks are also expected to see some progress in the negotiations for joint development of small modular reactors.

Misri said there has been

a very close rapport between Trump and Modi, dating back to the US leader's first term. "There is a clear convergence of interests between the two countries in several areas, including trade, investment, technology, defence, counter-terrorism, Indo-Pacific and people to people contacts," he said.

"The visit will be a valuable opportunity to engage the new administration on all areas of mutual interest. This has been one of our strongest international partnerships in recent years and the prime minister's visit is in line with our steady engagement with the new administration," he added.

Misri said the 5.4 million-strong Indian community in US and more than 350,000 Indian students pursuing higher education in American universities further strengthen the bond between India & US.

India protests mistreatment, okays 96 more deportations

487 Presumed Indians Face Removal Notice

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New Delhi: India has protested the US handling of Indian deportees, who arrived handcuffed and shackled from San Antonio in a military plane on Feb 5, the govt confirmed while officially announcing PM Modi's visit to Washington.

Govt sources, who confirmed that there are 96 more verified Indian nationals who may be deported soon, did not rule out the possibility of Modi raising the mistreatment issue with President Donald Trump in what will be their first bilateral meeting since the latter's inauguration.

"Yes, we have registered our concerns with the US (on mistreatment)," foreign secretary Vikram Misri said, re-

DETAILS OF 295 SHARED

> 487 'presumed' Indian nationals facing final removal order in US, says foreign secy Vikram Misri. Of these, US has shared details of 295 and India is verifying their nationality

> US initially sent list of 203, which included the 104 who returned on Wednesday

> Of remaining 99, India has verified citizenship of 96 people who are expected to be on next deportation flight

> Amritsar flight was possibly the 1st use of military plane for deporting Indians

> Misri says India open to exploring alternatives, does not confirm if govt will send own plane for deportees



sponding to a query from TOI on whether India had, like Brazil, officially protested the treatment meted out to its citizens. Significantly, Misri also said at a media briefing that the military deportation to Amritsar, compared to earlier flights in the past, was of a "slightly different nature" as the Trump administration has characterised deportation as a national security operation. "That's perhaps one of the reasons why a military plane was used," he said.

Describing the treatment of illegal Indian migrants as avoidable and a valid issue to raise, Misri said India will continue to raise the matter with US authorities. While India has accepted more than 15,000 illegal Indian migrants from the US in the past 16 years, the flight that landed in Amritsar this week with 104 Indian nationals saw possibly the first use of a military aircraft for deporting Indians.

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PM's US trip on Feb 12-13, to hold talks with Trump

PM Modi will visit the US on Feb 12-13 for his first bilateral meeting with President Donald Trump after the latter took office on Jan 20. Trade, defence and nuclear cooperation are likely to dominate the talks.



Announcing the dates, foreign secretary Vikram Misri said PM Modi would be among the first world leaders to visit America within the first few weeks of the second Trump administration.

Modi will fly to Washington from Paris, where he will participate in a global AI summit on Feb 10 and 11, and also have a bilateral meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. **FLAP INSIDE**

Skill India with ₹8,800cr outlay, new rly zone get Cabinet nod

Panel For Safai Karamcharis Gets Extension For Three Years

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Cabinet on Friday approved the Rs 8,800 crore Skill India Programme till 2025-26 with focus on industry-aligned training of manpower across the country. It also gave ex-post facto approval for creation of South Coast Railway zone, fulfilling Centre's assurance as per Andhra Reorganisation Act.

Briefing mediapersons about the Cabinet decisions, I&B minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the revamped skill programme will now include three components — Rs 6,000 crore PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 (PMKVY 4.0), Rs 1,942 crore PM National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS), and Rs 858 crore Jan Shikshan Sanshan (JSS) scheme.

An official release said that the approval underscores govt's commitment to building a skilled, future-ready workforce by integrating demand-driven, technology-enabled, and industry-



PM Modi with NDA MPs from Bihar on Friday. The MPs thanked the PM for a host of Budget's provisions aimed at the development of the state

aligned training across the country. "These initiatives aim to provide structured skill development, on-the-job training, and community-based learning, ensuring that both urban and rural populations, including marginalised communities, have access to high-quality vocational education," it said.

Vaishnaw said PM-NAPS will cover the service sector in addition to manufacturing. Govt said the scheme encourages apprenticeship opportunities in prevailing manufacturing including emerging fields such as AI, robotics, blockchain, green energy, and Industry 4.0 technologies.

"This aligns skilling initiatives with futuristic job markets and industry trends," govt said. The scheme will incentivise estab-

lishments to engage apprentices by providing financial incentives in the age group of 14-35 years, aiming at ensuring school to work transition through hands-on experience. Govt said there are around 2.3 crore beneficiaries till date under the three flagships schemes of skill development and entrepreneurship ministry.

With regard to the two other decisions, Vaishnaw, who is also railway minister, said that a new Rayagada Railway division under the East Coast Railway Zone will be established and the existing Waltair division will be renamed as the Visakhapatnam Railway Division, ending another colonial legacy.

The minister said that the Cabinet also gave the go ahead for extension of Na-

Govt delists 1,114 hosps over fraud in AB-PMJAY scheme

Govt has de-empanelled 1,114 hospitals in the country over fraud in the implementation of Ayushman Bharat - PM Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) scheme since its inception, Union health minister JP Nadda told Lok Sabha on Friday. In a written response to a Parliament question, Nadda added that penalties worth Rs 122 crore have also been imposed on 1,504 errant hospitals over fraudulent practices. TNN

He said a National Anti-Fraud Unit (NAFU) has been established which works in close coordination with State Anti-Fraud Units to investigate and take joint action against issues related to fraud. TNN

tional Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) for three years beyond March 31, 2025 and approved approximately Rs 51 crore. "It would help in facilitating socio-economic upliftment of sanitation workers, improving the working conditions in the sanitation sector and aiming to achieve zero fatalities while performing hazardous cleaning," govt said.