

Navy Commanders explore ways to **boost** **combat prowess** in island territories



Visuals of twin carrier operations from the first edition of the Biannual Naval Commanders' Conference 2024, on Friday. (ANI)

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (PTI)

TOP Commanders of the Indian Navy carried out a comprehensive review of the security challenges facing the nation in the maritime domain and vowed to work towards boosting the combat capabilities of the force including in the strategically-located Island Territories.

India on Wednesday commissioned a new naval base, INS Jatayu, at Minicoy in Lakshadweep islands to enhance its combat prowess amid China's increasing forays

into the Indian Ocean region.

Ways to further strengthen India's maritime prowess figured prominently at the Naval Commanders' Conference that concluded on Friday. While the inaugural session of the conference was held onboard aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya on March 5, much wider deliberations on operational issues took place in the national capital on March 7 and 8.

The Navy said the proceedings in Delhi included a review of major operational, material, infrastructure, logistics and personnel related initiatives.

Tri-service exercise 'Bharat Shakti' held in Rajasthan

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (PTI)

INTEGRATED tri-service exercise 'Bharat Shakti' is slated to be held at Pokhran in Rajasthan on March 12 and it will showcase the "shock and awe" that the armed forces seek to achieve in an operational situation by employing manoeuvre and fighting capabilities effectively, a top army official said on Saturday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend the exercise.

'Bharat Shakti' will also demonstrate the prowess of indigenously manufactured defence equipment of the three services, Additional Director General, Army Design Bureau, Major General C S Mann told reporters here. The integrated tri-service firepower and manoeuvre exercise at Pokhran will be held for about 50 minutes, he said.

Indian tourists to Maldives drop by one-third amid diplomatic row

MALE, Mar 9 (ANI)

THE number of Indian tourists visiting the Maldives has dropped by 33 per cent as compared to last year, Maldivian website Adhadhu reported, citing data from the Maldives Tourism Ministry.

This comes as the diplomatic row between New Delhi and Male continues to deteriorate.

According to Tourism Ministry statistics for 2023, 41,054 Indian tourists visited the Maldives by March 4 last year. The number of Indian tourists recorded as of March 2 this year was 27,224. This was 13,830 lesser than last year, Maldives-based Adhadhu reported.

In the same period last year, India was the second largest source market for tourists to the Maldives with a 10 per cent market share. However, India is now in sixth place on the list with a six per cent market share.

The row erupted after three Maldivian Deputy Ministers made derogatory comments against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, over his pictures from the visit to



Lakshadweep. PM Modi had called for the Indian island cluster to be developed as a destination for beach tourism and promotion of domestic tourism. The matter snowballed into a major diplomatic row, with New Delhi summoning the Maldivian envoy and registering a strong protest against the viral posts. The three Deputy Ministers were suspended and they remain under suspension with pay.

Earlier this year, Maldives tourism industry stakeholders expressed concern as the boycott campaign in India grew momentum and gained the support of popular Indian film stars. The Maldives Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (MATATO) conducted a survey to determine the impact of booking cancellations by Indian guests. But the findings were not made public, as reported by Adhadhu.

Widow of Indian Air Force aviator, civil engineer become Army officers

CHENNAI, Mar 9 (PTI)

THE widow of an IAF aviator, who perished along with India's first CDS General Bipin Rawat in a chopper crash in the Nilgiris, and a civil engineer from an agrarian family were among scores of cadets who underwent gruelling training at the Officers Training Academy here and become commissioned officers in the Indian Army on Saturday.

Shauryan Thapa, the sixth generation member of his family to don the Army uniform and the youngest (21 years) candidate in the academy, too, was among the 184 officer cadets, who completed the training. He was awarded the OTA gold medal at the passing out parade on Saturday.

Shauryan would join his father Col Mohit Thapa in serving the 7/8 Gorkha Rifles.

Yashwini Dhaka, daughter of an Army man, married Squadron Leader Kuldeep Singh, a pilot of the Indian Air Force's Workhorse Mi-17V5 multi-role helicopter, in 2017 and was content with her mar-



Shauryan Thapa

ried life. But fate willed otherwise. Four years later, Kuldeep Singh took off from the Air Force Station, Sulur near Coimbatore, to fly Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat to the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Udhagamandalam. However, barely minutes before the chopper was to touchdown at the destination on December 8, 2021, the twin-engine helicopter crashed in the hilly Nilgiris killing the passengers on board. Singh, too, died along with the CDS and others.

This tragedy altered the life of Yashwini and she chose to don the olive green uniform.

Recovering from her personal loss, she became an Army officer to make her husband proud.

In the case of Saranya M,

Mumbai lad rises from Dharavi slum to become Army officer

MUMBAI, Mar 9 (PTI)

GROWING up in a tough neighborhood of Dharavi in Mumbai, it has been a journey of overcoming life's many challenges for Lieutenant Umesh Keelu.

Umesh, who was born and raised in the Sion Koliwada slum, on Saturday passed out of the Officers Training Academy in Chennai to begin his career as a commissioned officer in the Indian Army.

"While most of us have been fortunate and blessed to take many things in life for granted - a home to call our own, timely meals, recreation, avenues for entertainment, and what not - it is worth noting that Umesh Keelu's family of four used to live in a 10 feet by 5 feet

house," an official said.

Umesh Keelu's father, the family's lone breadwinner, worked as a painter and ensured that his two children got the best education possible, within their modest means.

"As Umesh got past every adversity that life threw at him and his family, new ones kept cropping up. In 2013, his father suffered an acute stroke, which left him paralysed and put a stop to the family's meagre earnings.

"While going through it all, Umesh pursued and earned a Bachelors of Science Degree in IT and Masters Degree in Computer Science. While balancing his academic work, he also served in the NCC Air Wing and earned a 'C' certificate.

from an agrarian family in Tamil Nadu's Erode district, a career in the Indian Army seemed to fascinate her.

This civil engineer and also

the first graduate in her family spurned her job in an IT firm and opted to train at the OTA and become a commissioned officer.

India, EFTA to sign trade pact today; services sector, investments to boost

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (PTI)

INDIA and four-nation European bloc EFTA will sign a free trade agreement on Sunday, which is likely to help promote investments and exports of key domestic services sectors such as IT, audio-visual, and movement of skilled professionals, an official said.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

The official said that for the first time in the history of free trade agreements (FTAs), a legal



commitment is expected to be included in the pact about promoting target-oriented invest-

ment from EFTA to India and creation of employment.

India has sought an invest-

ment commitment of USD 50 billion during the first ten years after the implementation of the agreement and another USD 50 billion over the next five years from the member countries of the bloc and to facilitate the generation of 1 million direct employment in India through such investments. This commitment would be linked to duty reduction under the agreement.

Sectors related to almost all the industrial goods exported from India to the bloc are likely to benefit from the agreement.

EC Arun Goel resigns



NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (PTI)

ELECTION Commissioner Arun Goel resigned on Saturday, days before the expected announcement of the schedule for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

His tenure was till December 2027. According to a Law Ministry notification, Goel's resignation has been accepted by President Droupadi Murmu with effect from Saturday. It was not immediately known why he stepped down. Goel, a retired bureaucrat, was a 1985-batch IAS officer of the Punjab cadre. He had joined the Election Commission in November 2022.

PM Modi opens **STRATEGIC** Sela tunnel

ITANAGAR, Mar 9 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday unveiled projects worth Rs 55,600 crore in the Northeast, including the strategic Sela tunnel which will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. The PM unveiled the projects spread across Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh at a programme in Itanagar.

The Sela tunnel, constructed at a cost of about Rs 825 crore,



The 'Sela Tunnel' which was virtually inaugurated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Itanagar on Saturday. (PTI)

is an engineering marvel. It will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang across Sela pass on the Balipara-Chariduar-Tawang Road in Arunachal Pradesh, a statement said. The project, the foundation stone of which was laid by PM Modi in February 2019, will not only provide a faster and more efficient transport route in the region but is of strategic importance to the country as it is located near the frontier with China.

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