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Top Chinese General to lead military delegation to India soon

With ties between the two countries improving considerably in past few weeks, China is sending a high-level military delegation to India soon to discuss ways to enhance cooperation in border management, including the possibility of establishing a hotline.

Lt. Gen. Liu Xiaowu, Deputy Commander of the PLA Western Command, will lead the delegation. It is expected to meet military leaders on the Indian side and exchange views on a plethora of defence and strategic issues. The delegation would also be visiting Pakistan.

Informed sources here said Chinese Defence Minister and Minister for Public Security would also visit India later this year. Special Representatives (SRs) of the two countries were also scheduled to hold their next round of meeting in Beijing this year.

As part of the increasing interaction, the two foreign ministers would soon co-chair the first meeting of high-level people-to-people and cultural exchange mechanism this year.

Sources said the two countries need to strengthen exchanges between senior officials of the government, military and legislature. The two nations could also think of signing a treaty of good neighbourliness and friendly cooperation. Beijing has already provided to New Delhi the draft of the proposed treaty.

Sources said cooperation between India and China was not new. It could be traced to the introduction of Buddhism in China and the travel of the famous monk Xuanzang to India.

The boundary question between the two countries was left over by history. The two countries must build on convergences and find a mutually acceptable solution to the boundary issues while taking more confidence-building measures (CBMs) to maintain the peace and tranquillity along the border to prevent a situation like last summer's Doklam military stand-off.

Sources also drew attention to Chinese Ambassador Luo Zhaohui's recent statement that the two countries could not stand another Doklam-like incident.

In a changing world, India and China must learn how to coexist with each other. This was the primary reason for the informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at Wuhan in April-end. Sources said the two leaders were expected to meet again for their informal summit next year probably in India.

Navy officer set for solo global voyage

By Shubhadeep Choudhury

A suit of 13 sails, two sextants, lots of charts... the list may enact an image of Robinson Crusoe making a list of equipment he has to carry for a voyage across the seas.

Well, it is sea voyage all right, but the sailor here is Abhilash Tomy, an officer in the Indian Navy, who is all set to set sail on a 30,000-mile journey through some of the world's roughest seas in a bid to circumnavigate the globe in a non-motorised sailboat all alone. The trip "Golden Globe Race" (GGR) is being held to commemorate 50 years of the feat achieved by knighted English sailor Robin Knox-Johnston.

Having successfully completed the voyage in 312 days, he became the first person to finish solo, unassisted and non-stop circumnavigation of the world. Eighteen adventure enthusiasts, including a woman sailor, have confirmed participation in the GGR. Tomy is a special invitee. He reached Les Sables d'Olonne in France couple of days ago, in time for the July 1 flag-off of the race.

The biggest challenge at the GGR is to have equipment, tools and boat which are similar to the ones used by Sir Robin despite the huge advancement in technology made during the intervening five decades. Navigation will have to be done looking at stars and by using physical maps. The sailor will carry a satellite phone but it is meant for use in the case of medical emergency only.

Tomy had earlier sailed round the globe in 2012-13, becoming the first Indian to do so by travelling for 151 days in INS Mhadei. He used GPS-based maps and other satellite-based technologies during that voyage. But hi-tech stuff is barred in GGR. Only a high frequency radio can be used for communication.

Starting from the French seaside town, the participants will go south till Cape of Good Hope, continue sailing eastward in the southern hemisphere to pass the international dateline, and pass Cape of Horn to start sailing north in the Atlantic Ocean for the final leg.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Israel gets 1st women tank commanders

Jerusalem, June 29: The Israeli army on Thursday graduated the first four women from its tank commanders' school, a step toward the formation of all- female tank crews.

Another six have completed training as crew members, but actual deployment of any of the women will depend on the outcome of a review by senior officers, an armoured corps commander said. The project is a pilot programme to test whether women can be an integral part of armoured operations. Four- member tank crews operate, often for many hours, in cramped conditions where physical strength is needed to handle heavy cannon shells and engine parts which may need to be handled in the event of a breakdown. Five of the 15 original candidates did not complete training for various reasons.

But armoured corps Lieutenant- Colonel Beni Aharon told journalists on Thursday that over the year- long selection and training process the women had proven themselves fit for the task. "The purpose of the pilot programme was to determine if four women can operate a tank during routine security activity and the response is positive," he said. "The soldiers achieved all of the goals that were set for them." Opponents of the scheme, including retired army officers, have denounced the project as a dangerous experiment.