

China Will Emerge As America's Strategic Threat: Pentagon

Agencies

Beijing: China will emerge as America's strategic threat in this era of great power competition, a top Pentagon official has said, underlining the need for ramping up the US presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Having the US Army in the region strengthens America's position to conduct global commerce, build confidence with investors and compete economically, US Secretary of Army Ryan D McCarthy said on Tuesday.

"In this era of great power competition, China will emerge as



America's strategic threat. Over 60 per cent of the world's GDP flows through the Straits of Malacca, and China is militarising the global commons," he said in his address to the Brookings Institute think-tank.

"In order to commoditise life for its 1.1 billion people, China is increasingly relying on its Belt and

Road Initiative (BRI), having the US Army in the region with modernised weaponry, and this alongside our counterparts, changes the calculus and creates dilemmas for potential adversaries," he said.

According to McCarthy, the Indo-Pacific region is strategically important to the US, which is an Indo-Pacific country.

"The world's foremost populous countries and three largest economies are located in the region. Six of the 10 largest armies in the world are located there. The US maintains five bilateral treaties, all critical for our national security and prosperity.

"Forces in the region reinforce the American narrative or alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative. And in order to be competitive and gain an advantage, we must have continuous presence. In order to maintain over-match and prevent conflict in the region, the US Army must be postured in the region for the intensifying competition, and if required, to win in conflict," McCarthy said.

Observing that there is an ongoing fight for influence in the region, for which axis and presence are critical, he said partners matter but their type is paramount.

"China uses coercive economics and many partner with them out of necessity and in this lies a great deal of vulnerability," McCarthy added.

First Gaza Rockets Land In Israel Since Soleimani Killing

Agencies

JERUSALEM: The Israeli military said four rockets were fired on Wednesday from Hamas-controlled Gaza, the first since Israel's ally the US killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani.

"Four rockets were just fired from Gaza at Israel. Two rockets were intercepted mid-air by the Iron Dome aerial defence system," the military tweeted.

It was not possible to immediately confirm where the other two rockets landed.

The fire from the Palestinian territory was the first since the Jan 3 assassination in a Baghdad drone strike of Soleimani, a key figure in Iran which supports Hamas.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last week warned Israel would strike a "resounding blow" if attacked by Iran.

Hamas condemned the killing of Soleimani but stopped short of calling for revenge attacks.

The prime minister did not immediately respond to the latest rocket fire, which comes just weeks ahead of March 2 elections.

But his rival Benny Gantz accused the premier of failing

"in his duty to provide security to the residents" of southern Israel bordering Gaza.

"We will put an end to ... the rocket fire ... It is time to bring about a decisive outcome," the Blue and White

party leader said.

Hamas has over the past year gradually shaped an informal truce with Israel, under which the Jewish state has slightly eased its crippling blockade of the enclave in exchange for calm. But Israel in November assassinated a senior leader of Islamic Jihad, a Hamas-allied militant group in Gaza, sparking a flare-up in which 36 Palestinians were killed. No Israelis died.



Trump Impeachment Articles Delivered To Senate For Trial

Agencies

Washington: The articles of impeachment charging US President Donald Trump with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress were delivered to the Senate on Wednesday, setting in motion a historic trial that threatens his removal from office.

Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell announced that the articles would be formally read to the chamber on Thursday at noon (17:00 GMT), after which Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts will be sworn in to preside over the trial.

Senators will then be sworn in as jurors on Thursday and preparations will get underway for an impeachment trial that will begin on Tuesday, January 21.

"This is a difficult time for our country, but this is precisely the kind of time for which the framers created the Senate," McConnell said, referring to the authors of the US Constitution.

The two articles of impeachment - one for abuse of power and the other for obstructing the House investigation - were delivered in blue folders in a solemn procession by the newly-appointed House managers, seven Democrats who will prosecute the case against the president.

Trump Impeachment

"So sad, so tragic for our country, that the actions taken by the president to undermine our national security, to violate his oath of office and to jeopardise the security of our elections, has taken us to this place," Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said as she signed the articles.

"This president will be held accountable," she said, adding: "No one is above the law."

The solemn formalities underscored the grimmess of the occasion, as Trump became only the third president in history of the United States to be placed on trial in the Senate.

"We feel we are carrying out the will of the framers of our constitution, and that's a pretty serious load," said Adam Schiff, the Democratic legislator who will lead the prosecution team.

'Two weeks'

Trump is accused of secretly withholding \$391m in aid to Ukraine between July and September to pressure Kyiv to investigate former vice president Joe Biden, the Democratic frontrunner in this year's White House race.

The president is also charged with obstruction for holding back witnesses and documents from the House impeachment investigation in defiance of Congressio-

nal subpoenas.

He was formally impeached on December 18.

"President Trump put his own personal interests above the national interests ... and if not stopped, he will do it again," Schiff said.

"The appropriate remedy, indeed the only remedy, is the conviction and removal from office of President Donald Trump."

Pelosi - US Congress

Pelosi held back on delivering the articles to the Senate as she pressured McConnell to agree to subpoena the witnesses and documents that the White House blocked from the House probe.

McConnell has refused to commit, saying the issue will only be decided after the trial's opening arguments and questioning, which could take two weeks.

A Trump administration official told reporters on Wednesday that they expected the trial to continue for no longer than two weeks, suggesting McConnell could use his 53-47 Republican majority in the Senate to stifle calls for witnesses and quickly take the charges to a vote.

With impeachment rules requiring a two-thirds super-majority in order to convict and remove a president, Trump is widely expected to be acquitted.

'Lying' Trump could spark war with Iran: Bernie Sanders

Agencies

Washington: Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has said he is concerned that US President Donald Trump is peddling lies that could spark a war with Iran which would be worse than the Iraq War.

"What we have to face as a nation is that the two great foreign policy disasters of our lifetimes were the war in Vietnam and the war in Iraq. Both of those wars were based on lies," Sanders said on Tuesday

night's Democratic presidential primary debate.

"And right now, what I fear very much is we have a president who is lying again and could drag us into a war that is even worse than the war in Iraq," he added.

Sanders, who has risen to near the top of polls of the Democratic field in early voting states, has opposed the Iraq War and is speaking against the Trump administration's warmongering against Iran.

Tensions between the US and Iran have skyrocketed

in recent weeks after the US military carried out an airstrike on the order of Trump at Baghdad's international airport January 3, assassinating General Soleimani and the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, as well as eight other companions. Iran responded by launching missiles at Iraqi military bases that house US troops.

US officials have made confusing remarks about what prompted Trump to order the assassination.

Tourist Visa Scam Traps Indian Workers In Abusive Jobs In UAE

Agencies

Abu Dhabi: Exploitative employers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are increasingly using tourist visas to hire Indian nationals in a scam that leaves migrants open to labour abuse, police and activists said.

Indian migrants on visit visas - quicker and cheaper to obtain than work permits - are wary of reporting exploitation on the job for fear of revealing their illegal status, they say.

The scale of the problem is unknown as visit visas do not appear in Indian or UAE migration or employment records.

But workers, police and lawyers said the practice is on the rise in a nation with more than three million Indian migrants, often hired at short notice to work on large construction projects.

"Employers and recruiters have colluded and invented this visit visa route," said Bheem Reddy, president of the Emigrants



Welfare Forum in the southern Indian state of Telangana.

Reddy's charity estimates at least 10,000 migrants from the state - just one of 29 in India - have found work in the UAE having entered the country on visit visas since July last year.

A demand for short-term workers in the run-up to big events such as Dubai's Expo 2020 world fair in October has further fuelled the scam, a United Nations official said on condition of anonymity.

No workers' rights

Indian migration into the Gulf has been steady for decades but using tourist visas to abuse workers is new, activists say.

Anuradha Vobbilisetty, who works on migrant labour cases in Dubai courts, said she had supported about 270 workers on tourist visas since 2018 who had not been fully paid.

Whereas work permits are issued by embassies and leave a paper trail, visit visas are sold by hotels and airlines, giving workers no rights and freeing employers from all responsibility.

US Census: Sikhs To Be Counted As Separate Ethnic Group For First Time

Agencies

Washington: For the first time, Sikhs in the US will be counted as a separate ethnic group in the 2020 census, an organisation of the minority community said on Tuesday, describing it as a milestone moment.

President of the Sikh Society of San Diego Baljeet Singh said the Sikh community's efforts have come to fruition.

"This has paved the way forward nationally not only for the Sikh community but also for other ethnicities in the United States," he said.

Describing this as a milestone, the United Sikhs said that this will be the first time the minority group will be counted and coded in the decennial US Census.

A delegation of the United Sikhs has held several meetings with the US Census in the recent past with the last one being on January 6 in San Diego.

"It's clear that a separate code is needed to ensure an accurate count of Sikhs in the United States, recognising a unique identity," said US Census Deputy Director Ron Jarmin. "Working with United Sikhs, we understand how this change affects the nation-

al Sikh community, leading us to add this code for the 2020 Census," said Shagufa Ahmed with the Census Bureau and Office of Management Budget.

According to the United Sikhs, the current estimates of Sikhs living in the US are at 10 lakhs.

Sikhs meet the criteria for representation in the US Census as a distinct ethnic group and have a distinct unified appearance, culture, language, food and history.

The United Sikhs has advocated for the separate coding for more than two decades and filed commentary with the US Federal Register advocating for Sikhs to be added as an ethnic group, in large part, so that action can be taken to address major Sikh issues such as bullying, intimidation and hate crimes against the community.

"With the 2020 census approaching, many historically under-coded communities will be at risk for being under-counted and under-served," said Ruben Singh, United Sikhs Census Manager.

"We look forward to collaborating with our census partners and other Sikh organisations and institutions to address the unanticipated challenges of the 2020 Census," he said.

NEWSMAKERS

Eyes Bulged In Surprise: Modi Left Shocked After Meeting Trump, Claims New Book

Washington: US President Donald Trump's shaky grasp of geography includes not knowing that India shares a border with China, according to a new book by a pair of reporters for The Washington Post.

The book, "A Very Stable Genius" by Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig, highlights episodes of volatile behavior by the president along with his ignorance of basic geography and history.

"It's not like you've got China on your border," the authors quoted Trump as telling Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting between the two leaders.

India and China share a border and the two countries went to war in 1962 over a disputed Himalayan section of the frontier.

Following Trump's border comment and seeming dismissal



of the threat China poses to India, "Modi's eyes bulged out in surprise," according to the book, excerpts of which were published in the Post on Wednesday.

"Modi's expression gradually shifted, from shock and concern to resignation," it said.

After the meeting, "the Indians took a step back" in their diplomatic relations with the

United States, a Trump aide told the authors.

The book also recounts a tour by Trump of a memorial for the USS Arizona, a US warship that was sunk by Japanese planes in the December 7, 1941 surprise attack on Pearl Harbour.

"Hey, John, what's this all about? What's this a tour of?" Trump is quoted as asking his

Japan's Environment Minister To Take Paternity Leave

Japan's popular environment minister said he will take paternity leave when his first child is born later this month to be a good example for working fathers in Japan, where men are largely absent from child-rearing.

Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said on Wednesday he will take two weeks of leave over three months on the condition it would not affect his parliamentary and Cabinet duties.

With Japan facing an ageing population and a dwindling birthrate, the government recently began promoting paternity leave.

Last month, it adopted a policy allowing male public servants to take more than a month of leave with the birth of a child.

While the governors in Hiroshima and Mie in western Japan have taken paternity leave, Koizumi is the first Cabinet minister to do so.

The 38-year-old politician said it was a difficult decision, but that he was going ahead with the plan to pave the way for other male employees in his ministry and working fathers elsewhere.

Koizumi is the son of maverick former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and is considered a future prime ministerial hopeful.



"Honestly, I had to think over and over how I should take time off for child-rearing, or take paternity leave while fulfilling my public duty as environment minister," Koizumi told a group of ministry officials and reporters.

"Unless we change the atmosphere, government employees presumably won't start taking paternity leave."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters that he hoped Koizumi's decision would have a positive effect on attitudes to male parenting.

There are no official records on whether cabinet ministers have previously taken parental leave, but Koizumi is the first to publicly announce he is doing so.