

India closely watching Xi's 'intriguing move' on LAC

NEW DELHI: India is closely examining President Xi Jinping's "unusual and intriguing move" to replace the overall commander of the Western Theatre Command (WTC), which handles the entire border with India, barely seven months after he took charge.

So Qingfeng, commander of the ground forces in the western theatre and now, has been promoted to full general and replaced WTC chief General Zhang Xianglin, in a charge that has come amid the continuing military confrontation in eastern Ladakh since April-May last year.

Zhang (59) had taken over as the WTC chief in December last year from Gen Zhao Zongqi, who retired a decade after retiring at that rank in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) increased within seven months. It's definitely unusual, in effect, this is the third change in the WTC chief since the military standoff with India began," said a senior official.

Xi, often described as a "rising star" in the PLA and among the younger to become a full general now, the other three to be promoted on Monday are

Shenhai Thomas Command chief Wang Xinhui, PLA Army commander Lu Zhenli, and PLA Strategic Support (Missile) Force commander Lu Dongsheng.

Indian officials say it's "preposterous" to speculate on the change in the WTC, the target of the five Chinese theatre commands that handles the entire 3,488 km LAC from eastern Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. Incidentally, with no reported Chinese command in the region, India has as many as four Army and five IAF commands for the "northern border" with China.

"Zhang could have been promoted as part of the periodic anti-

corruption purge by the Chinese Communist Party, which celebrated its centenary on July 1. Or, it could be connected to the border crisis with India. We have to wait and watch," said another official.

The change in the WTC leadership comes ahead of the impending 12th round of talks between India and China, which will be held over the next few months after the last one on April 9.

Xi was earlier hand-picked by President Xi, who is also chairman of the powerful Central Military Commission (CMC), that controls the PLA, to be the commander of

the ground forces in the WTC in June last year just a few days before the violent clashes between India and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley. As the overall WTC chief now, he will be the key player in the potential escalation between India and China to defuse the border crisis.

Sources say that while the PLA is now willing to discuss the stalled troop deployment at patrolling points (PPs) 15, 17 and 17A in the Hot Springs-Cogin Kangka La in eastern Ladakh, it has refused to stop blocking Indian patrols in the strategically located Depang Plains.



Paving the way for the Uzbek president's reelection

When the spokesman for Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev told parliament recently that he was unsure if this was possible in the October election, no one was holding it. We have to wait and find out if this will be the case," Shavkat Mirziyoyev said at a press briefing in Tashkent on June 17, extending the media that candidates do not submit their nominations until the end of July.

Uzbek's attempt to generate some support in a presidential election that the incumbent is not only sure to participate in – but due to win – was positive, it seems, expects Mirziyoyev to hold it as a second term in office.

The deputy chairman of Uzbekistan's Senate, Sapar Iskhakov, said in a March interview he did not see any other candidate. There is only one candidate, that is, President Mirziyoyev. But they have to prepare a carefully managed press conference. Uzbek authorities will call an election. Even before that with-out alternative programs and candidates, "elections cannot be honest,"

"Fair and honest" is an interesting choice of words in a meeting by the authorities, the chief of the October 24 election, is being held in Tashkent to ensure Mirziyoyev's reelection.

Uzbekistan has always had alternative candidates in its presidential elections, but only the first presidential election in December 1991 had a candidate who was a genuine opponent. Muhammad So'hib the leader of the IFA Democratic Party, who ran against the Soviet-sponsored leader of the Liberal-Socialist Republic, Islam Karimov.

So'hib received – officially – 12.7 percent of the vote, making it the closest presidential election to date in Uzbekistan. But there were many claims that the election was heavily rigged, so So'hib's total could have been substantially higher if it had been honestly tabulated.

The recent presidential election, in 2003, also had only two candi-

dates, Karimov and Abdullhalil Jalilov, the head of the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (ODPP). That election was notable for Jalilov emerging from the voting booth and announcing to the press that he had cast his own ballot for Karimov.

Starting with the 2007 presidential election, the registered political parties in the government, all of which were pro-government, were able to field candidates.

The 2007 election was the last that had an "independent" candidate. Abdul Jalilov, who in 2015, as head of the pro-government Milliy Tiklanish (National Revival) party, ran against Karimov, coming in a distant second with 3.12 percent of the vote.

So'hib is currently the first deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament and, concurrently, the director of the National Human Rights Center. He announced his plan to run as an independent in a presidential election.

A genuine opposition figure, Sapar Uvoriyev, tried to run in the 2007 election but he declined the invitation in 2005, was quickly convicted, and in prison by February 2006 on charges of corruption, tax evasion, and other financial crimes.

Shortly after the 2001 election, the law was amended to remove the possibility of anyone running as an independent. Only registered political parties can participate in presidential elections and those parties are: Milliy Tiklanish (ODPP), Liberal Democrats, Ecological party, and the 2019 parliamentary elections.

In his March interview, Iskhakov said, "Our political parties do not work well enough today. More over, let's say they just don't work."

Two parties have been trying to register in order to take part in the upcoming presidential election – the IFA party formerly headed by So'hib and the New Truth and Development party led by Halimnazar Allayev – both have reportedly had their attempts re-

jected by the Justice Ministry and been banned.

Opposition leader Khudnazar Allayev was arrested outside his home in March, and then said for reporting on the IFA party it was headed by former singer Jahongir Allayev, who just returned to Uzbekistan from Turkey on May 12. IFA held a meeting in May 20 at Anjor's home in Tashkent and put him forward as their presidential candidate. But late in the evening, as party representatives discussed their plans, a group of some 20 people forced their way into Anjor's home and broke up

the meeting, scattering insults and throwing eggs. Then, on June 15, many of the IFA members who had been at Anjor's home for the meeting were summoned by police for questioning. Some believed the questions would be about the people who broke up the meeting. IFA activist Abdullah Egayev was one of those summoned. He said IFER's IFAK Service, known locally as Gidli, that the inspector he met with was not as much interested in the minutes at the May meeting as they were in how long Egayev had known So'hib and other IFA members.

Turkmenistan, EU discuss implementation of national programs in field of human rights

On July 6, 2021, the 13th session of "Turkmenistan EU Dialogue on Human Rights" was held in the format of a videoconference in the premises of the MFA of Turkmenistan. Tural Turdiyev, acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan.

The current round of the Turkmenistan EU Dialogue on Human Rights took place in the light of the recent meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, upon the outcome of which the instructions of the President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov were given to develop further collaboration with the European Union and international institutions in the area of human rights and humanitarian law.

The Turkmen Dialogue on Human Rights also participated to the session.

rights – Ombudswoman of Turkmenistan, representatives of the Parliament (Majlis), Supreme Court, as well as the Ministry of Justice (Adalat), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of Turkmenistan, State Migration Service, Institute of State, Law and Democracy, as well as the Department on Religion Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan.

The delegation of the European Union comprised of the authorized representatives of the European External Action Service, EU Ambassador to Turkmenistan, the Ambassador of France and Germany to Turkmenistan took part in the session as observers, and the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat also participated to the session.

The parties discussed a wide range of issues regarding the implementation of international legal obligations of Turkmenistan in the field of human rights and international humanitarian law. Among the key issues of the agenda, there were the rule of law and judicial reforms, economic, social and cultural rights, cooperation in multilateral format and with the international organizations. The results of the activities of the Joint Expertise Commission on the Implementation of International Obligations of Turkmenistan in the area of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law were heard. Concrete examples of presenting the applications and proposals of the civil society were presented in the session as observers, and the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat also participated to the session.

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Explained: Why there is opposition to a domestic violence bill in Pakistan

A bill aiming to protect women, children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups from domestic violence has exposed faultlines and divided opinions in Pakistan. What is the proposed legislation, and why is there opposition?

A new bill that proposes urgent punishment against the perpetrators of domestic violence has exposed faultlines and divided opinions in Pakistan.

With opposition against the proposed legislation mounting from certain quarters, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Parliamentary Affairs Babar Awan has written a letter to National Assembly Speaker Anwar Iqbal, seeking a review of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2021, by the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII).

The bill proposes stringent punitive measures against all forms of domestic violence. It states that any act of domestic violence will be punishable with imprisonment of not less than six months, and not more than six months.

The bill was moved in the National Assembly by Human Rights Minister Shireen Mian on April 19 this year, and passed in the lower house on the same day.

When it was introduced in the Senate, the Opposition instead of sending the bill to a standing committee, Pakistan People's Party member and Leader of Opposition Younus Ghani had then said that the proposed legislation was urgent, the standing committee should review it.

The committee was thereafter asked by the Senate chairperson to submit a report on the bill. The report went on to propose multiple amendments to the draft, after which the bill was referred back to the National Assembly.

Last month, the Opposition moved an amendment in the Senate over how key human rights bills were disappearing in "black holes".

"A voting practice is going on for quite some time which is either for or against the bills, or to give incentive for members of the Senate who work hard on the bills with the civil society and their colleagues," Awan quoted Pakistan People's Party parliamentarian leader of Senate Sherry Rehman as saying in the Senate.

The bill was passed by the Senate last month and now awaiting presidential assent.

Why is there opposition to the bill, and why?

In the Senate during July 5 that he wrote to Ghani, Awan said many concerns have been raised regarding various definitions and other contents of the bill.

The letter stated, "Most importantly, it is being highlighted that the bill contravenes the Islamic injunctions of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH)."

Dismissing the way of life as a source of domestic violence, the bill is not in accordance with the Islamic injunctions of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH).

Popular Pakistani actor and writer Farhan Akhtar had written a letter to the President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, asking him to veto the bill. "Why is there an extreme

domestic violence by including all forms of physical violence, verbal and psychological abuse, and any act which is essentially a breach of consent under a woman. While the proposed legislation is a necessary measure, more conservative sections and religious hardliners have criticized the bill, saying it is an overreach and has too many loopholes which can be misused.

Recently, many people in Pakistan have been tweeting with the #NoToDomesticViolenceBill to express their opposition.

Why is the demand for a law against domestic violence important in Pakistan?

Even as the bill moves the use of many religious hardliners and conservative sections, there was significant pushback, with many pointing out that an excessive use of domestic violence is not the end of the line.

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He added that it is advisable to proceed on the preventive basis. The bill aims to protect women, children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups from domestic violence. It also seeks to provide relief and rehabilitation to all individuals who are victims of domestic violence.

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Asia's highest default risk spotlights Sri Lanka debt worry

Sri Lanka's risk premium for a default peaked, reflecting concern that the government is struggling to meet its debt obligations. The nation's ability to fill its foreign-exchange hole is under threat, with the central bank said to be in a state of emergency.

The nation's five-year credit default swap rose to 1,555 basis points in January, the highest since March 1. A spike in the price of one-year default probability was at 27.9%, the highest in Asia, up from around 15% over its volatility, according to a Bloomberg report. The report said that the government is struggling to meet its debt obligations, and the central bank is in a state of emergency.

The first week of July 21, when the South Asian nation must repay a \$1 billion bond to investors. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's administration ignored capital controls last week, limiting how much foreign currency can leave the country, and speculation is growing that it may need to turn to the International Monetary Fund for additional financial support.

The bill has attempted to come up with a broad definition of domestic violence by including all forms of physical violence, verbal and psychological abuse, and any act which is essentially a breach of consent under a woman. While the proposed legislation is a necessary measure, more conservative sections and religious hardliners have criticized the bill, saying it is an overreach and has too many loopholes which can be misused.

meeting the country's foreign-currency debt-servicing needs for 2022 and beyond."

Arrangements are already in place to settle the bonds due later this month, the central bank said in a statement late Monday. Two more payments become due next year – a \$500 million bond in July, followed by \$1 billion in debt maturing July 23.

"The debt burden also weighs on the economy and the financial sector," said Ajith Nisani, Governor of Sri Lanka's central bank, in a weekly and capital markets and former central bank governor, citing steps such as foreign exchange controls and away agreements with China and Bangladesh.

Still, the uncertainty has prompted calls from some opposition party members for Sri Lanka to seek help from the IMF, which previously asked a \$1.5 billion loan facility last year amid change in leadership, leading to the government's decision to turn to the International Monetary Fund for additional financial support.

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But the resources should be able to Sri Lanka to meet its remaining debt obligations through the end of 2021," said Rajitha Chandana, private secretary minister for Sri Lanka's Foreign Affairs, "However, the government will continue to face the medium-term. Authorities have not yet specified plans for