

Chinese military to layoff 1.70 lakh officers: Report

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Beijing: China's new move to down size its 2.3-million strong military will result in laying off of about 1.70 lakh officers as the world's largest army plans to scrap two of its existing seven commands and three corps to stream line forces.Â

Officers will account for more than half of the 300,000 personnel to go in President Xi Jinping's plans to streamline the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Hong Kong-based the South China Morning Post said, citing unnamed military officials.

At least 170,000 officers, ranging from lieutenants to colonels, in China's land forces would be laid off after two of the existing seven military commands and three army corps were scrapped, the Post quoted Chinese officials as saying.

They will be offered early retirement packages. Each key military command has two to three army corps, with each corps having 30,000 to 50,000 troops. Shutting down two commands would mean the loss of about 120,000 personnel.

The massive downsizing plans were also aimed at encouraging pilots from the land forces to merge into the air force and navy, as part of the PLA's drive to master joint operational warfare as it set its sights beyond borders. The PLA, the world's largest military force, would announce some details of the downsizing later this month.

Soon after Xi announced 3 lakh troops cut at this week's military parade to mark the 70th anniversary of the victory against Japan, Defence Ministry spokesman Yang Yujun clarified the move was aimed at further modernising and restructuring the army, and the lay-offs would be completed by 2017.

With the exception of the Beijing Garrison, which is directly under the PLA's powerful Central Military Commission and safeguards the capital, all provincial and municipal garrisons would be shut down and 50,000 personnel dismissed, the Post report said.

As many as 100,000 troops from non-combat units, such as medical, communications, and artists brigades, would be cut, and 50,000 soldiers from border forces will merge into the People's Armed Police, the sources said.

All of those laid off would be offered good compensation packages, with 50,000 transferred to civilian posts, the sources said. Some would be offered inducements to retire early. Once the overhaul was completed, the PLA would be left with five key military commands.

The 15 army corps remaining under those five commands would strengthen joint operational command by recruiting soldiers from the air force and navy, officials said. China is ranked third in terms of military might - behind the US and Russia. The US, the world's sole superpower, has 1.4 million active military personnel, with another 1.1 million in reserve.

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