

Army conducts anti-tank guided missile field firing exercise

GANGTOK/JALPAIGURI Feb 29
(PTI)

THE Annual Eastern Command Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) field firing exercise was conducted at Teesta field firing range in West Bengal, a statement by the Indian Army said on Thursday.

The exercise was conducted under the aegis of Trishakti Corps, and more than 260 missiles were fired to achieve the target of "one missile one tank", it said. More than 1,500 personnel from various units of the infantry and mechanised infantry battalion participated in the command-level train-

ing exercise from February 20-28 near Siliguri.

The exercise was carried out keeping in view the tactical scenarios on the battlefield in which tanks play major roles.

"The ATGM detachments were fired from various modes that they might have to adopt based on tactical situations," the statement said.

These included firing from various vehicles, including the recently inducted indigenous Light Strike Vehicle and firing by ground based detachments.

"Engagement of targets by detachments inserted by helicopters was also practised," it said.

India successfully flight tests VSHORADS missile

NEW DELHI, Feb 29 (PTI)

INDIA has conducted two successful flight tests of a very short-range air defence missile off the coast of Odisha.

The tests were carried out on Wednesday and Thursday.

“The DRDO conducted two successful flight tests of Very Short-Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) missiles on February 28 and 29 from a ground-based portable launcher off the coast of Odisha from integrated test range, Chandipur,” the defence ministry said. It said the tests were carried out against high-speed unmanned aerial targets under different interception scenarios. “During all the test flights, the targets were intercepted and destroyed by the missiles, meeting the mission objectives,” the ministry said. VSHORADS is a man-portable air-defence system designed and developed indigenously by Research Centre Imarat (RCI) in collaboration with other Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) laboratories and Indian industry partners.

The missile incorporates many novel technologies, including a miniaturised reaction control system (RCS) and integrated avionics, which have been successfully proven during the tests, the ministry said in a statement.

“The missile is propelled by a dual-thrust solid motor and meant for neutralising low-altitude aerial threats at short ranges. The design of the missile including launcher has been highly optimised to ensure easy portability,” it added. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO and the Indian Army for the successful development trials and said the new missile, equipped with modern technologies, will give further technological boost to the Armed Forces.

Mid-East, North African nations show interest in BrahMos missiles

NEW DELHI, Feb 29 (ANI)

WITH India looking to increase its defence exports, India's friendly countries in the Middle East and North African region are showing keen interest in the ground and air-launched version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile.

India has the capability of launching supersonic cruise missiles that can now hit targets beyond 450 km and has deployed these planes on different parts of the country.

"Some friendly countries in the MENA region operate Sukhoi-30 fighter jets, which can be equipped with the BrahMos. They have shown interest in having this strong capability and discussions have been held with them," defence officials told ANI.

The delegations from these



countries have also met the BrahMos teams to know the capabilities of the missile and its potential, they said.

BrahMos Aerospace has achieved major success in the Philippines, where it has received orders for batteries of BrahMos missiles, which are to be supplied to them in

the future.

The land-attack versions of the missile are also being considered by some of the countries there and a push from India is being given at the senior level.

BrahMos Aerospace chairman Atul D Rane has been focusing more on increasing

exports of the missile systems in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's target of exporting military hardware worth USD 5 billion in 2025.

BrahMos Aerospace achieved major success in internal markets as the Indian Navy placed orders for Rs 19,000 crore to buy more than 200 of these missiles, which came to be deployed in anti-ship and land attack roles by the force.

The recent order to BrahMos Aerospace was given by the Navy after the Cabinet committee on security cleared the order in its meeting last week.

BrahMos Aerospace Management, headed by Atul Rane, is now focused on getting larger consolidated orders to be more cost-effective and also allow its suppliers to get larger orders.

India flays Pak for harping on Kashmir issue at UNHRC

UNITED NATIONS/GENEVA, Feb 29 (PTI)

IN A strong retort to debt-trapped Pakistan after it raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir at the UN Human Rights Council, India has said it cannot pay any attention to a country which is soaked in red due to the bloodshed from terrorism that it sponsors around the world.

First Secretary in the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in Geneva Anupama Singh exercised India's Right of Reply at the ongoing high-level segment of the 55th regular

session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Wednesday.

India exercised its Right of Reply to respond to Turkey and Pakistan after the two countries made references to Kashmir in their statements at the high-level segment.

"Firstly, we regret the comment made by Turkiye on a matter that is an internal affair of India and hope that it would refrain from making unsolicited comments on our internal matters in the future," Singh said. Coming down heavily on Pakistan, India said that "we cannot pay any further atten-

tion to a country that speaks while being soaked in red - the red of the bloodshed from the terrorism it sponsors around the world; the red of its debt-riddled national balance sheets; and the red of the shame its own people feel for their Government having failed to serve their actual interests."

A country that hosts and even celebrates UN Security Council-sanctioned terrorists, "commenting on India whose pluralistic ethos and democratic credentials are exemplars for the world, is a contrast for everyone to see," she said, in an apparent reference

to terror outfit leaders like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Saeed and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar enjoying the backing of the Government in Pakistan. Hitting out at Pakistan for the "extensive references" to India, Singh said it is deeply unfortunate for the Council's platform to have once again been misused to make patently false allegations against India. "We are constrained to respond," Singh said.

Singh asserted that the entire Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral part of India and the

constitutional measures taken by the Indian Government to ensure socio-economic development and good governance in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir are matters internal to India. She said Pakistan has no locus standi to pronounce on matters that are internal to India. Singh said that Pakistan is a country that has institutionalised the systemic persecution of its own minorities. "Commenting on India, which is demonstratively making great strides in achieving economic progress and social justice, is not merely ironical, but perverse."

WTO: What's behind Thailand-India spat

Sidhartha@timesgroup.com

Unless you are an avid reader of all things concerning world trade, Tuesday's spat between India and Thailand at the ongoing World Trade Organisation (WTO) conference may have come as a surprise. The Thai ambassador to WTO accused India of exporting rice at unfairly low prices funded by govt subsidies. The subsidies, the allegation goes, that are meant to supply low-price rice to India's poor, are actually subsidising the country's rice exports.

Indian delegation protested the claim, lodged a complaint, taking strong exception to the statement.

The incident is only the latest spark to fly off the contentious issue of agriculture trade that has divided countries for over two decades. India and Indonesia, along with other developing nations, are pushing for reforms in rules governing agriculture trade. The current rules don't allow them enough freedom to support their farmers and the poor, who need free or subsidised food.

The background

Back in 1994, the WTO set up an agreement to lower import taxes and subsidies that affect agriculture. Here's how subsidies are categorised:

Green Box: These are subsidies that don't really affect trade much. They include direct payments, general services and environmental programmes. There's no limit on these.

Blue Box: These subsidies are supposed to be cut down over time. They're mainly used by rich countries — and China — and are tied to how much land is farmed or crop yield.

Development Box: It allows

developing countries to provide input subsidies to low income or resource-poor farmers and investment subsidies for agriculture.

Amber Box: Most other subsidies fall here. They can make farming and trade unfair because they might en-

mic or global conflicts.

Calculations by Centre for WTO Studies show that per farmer support in India is around \$300, whereas in US it is around \$80,000. So, an American farmer, with average land holding of 180 hectare, gets 267 times what

At \$80K, Farmer Support In US 267X India's

- Rules allow developing countries to subsidise up to **10%** of their agriculture's value of production
- For developed countries, cap is pegged at **5%**
- Rich nations have found ways to go much higher than their cap



Centre for WTO Studies shows that **per farmer support** in India is around \$300, and in US it is nearly 267 times at \$80,000

courage overproduction or lower prices too much. The rules allow developing countries to subsidise up to 10% of their agriculture's value of production. For developed countries, the cap is 5%. But rich countries have found ways to go much higher than their cap. For instance, a paper by the Centre for WTO Studies estimated that EU was providing 150% of its sugar's value of production as subsidy, and the US 189% to coffee.

TOI Explains

Why Are Developing Countries Upset?

The rules favour wealthier nations, giving them more ways to support their farmers and dominate the global market. This makes it harder for poorer countries to compete. For example, India has exceeded the 10% subsidy limit for rice, and others might too. The prices, set in the 1980s as a reference for what counts as a subsidy, are outdated, not accounting for inflation or current market prices.

Farms are small in India, which makes government support vital. There is also the need to keep food in stock for the poor during crises like the Covid pande-

a tiller gets in India, where average land holding is just above one hectare.

What's Being Done?

This issue was first raised in 2002 but became a hot topic in 2013. To move forward with trade discussions, developed countries agreed to a 'peace clause' that prevents disputes over subsidy limits. Since then, India and others have been pushing to find a permanent solution.

Current Status

For the past decade, groups representing developing and poorer countries have been asking for a permanent fix but claim rich nations aren't keeping their promises.

What Do Developed Countries Say?

Rich countries think public stockholding programmes distort trade. They've accused developing countries like India of exporting subsidised grains. This is where Thai ambassador's Wednesday allegation comes in. They're calling for a major reform to lower tariffs and subsidies. However, there's disagreement among them, with the EU resisting tariff cuts, unlike the US and other countries seeking broader changes.

Pak House to elect new PM on Sunday

Omer Farooq Khan | TNN

Islamabad: Hours after the first session of Pakistan's 16th National Assembly Thursday, a notification issued by the secretariat stated that the new parliament would elect the next prime minister Sunday. Former PM Shehbaz Sharif is PML-N and PPP's joint candidate for the post against Imran Khan's PTI-backed Omar Ayub.

During the inaugural session, newly elected members were sworn in amid protests by lawmakers backed by Imran's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Prominent politicians who took oath as National Assembly members included



Ex-PM Nawaz Sharif on Thursday took oath as an ordinary lawmaker

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief and three-time PM Nawaz Sharif, ex-PM Shehbaz Sharif, former president Asif Ali Zardari, Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, ex-PM Yusuf Raza Gillani and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazal chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

The session started with a ruckus as soon as the national

anthem ended with PTI lawmakers surrounding the speaker's podium shouting slogans in support of the party's founder. "Who will save Pakistan? Imran Khan! Imran Khan!" they chanted. PTI-backed lawmakers also shouted "Imran Khan Zindabad" and "Aayi, aayi PTI (PTI has arrived)".

Later, when the Sharif brothers entered, PML-N members chanted: "Sher aya, sher aya". The session saw Nawaz return to Parliament after seven years. He had stepped down as PM following his disqualification by Supreme Court in the "Panama Papers" scam in 2017. PML-N members also shouted "Ghari-chor" (wrist-

watch thief), an apparent reference to Toshakhana corruption case against Imran.

The elections for speaker and deputy speaker, meanwhile, are scheduled Friday and the two will be administered oath of office the same day. The election for Leader of the House will take place on March 3.

The Feb polls had resulted in a split mandate, with PTI-affiliated Independents winning 93 seats, followed by PML-N's 79, and PPP's 54. PPP and PML-N reached a power-sharing deal last week after the former agreed to support Shehbaz for PM in return for presidentship, governorships and Senate chairman's slot.

(With inputs from PTI)

GDP growth at 8.4% in 3rd quarter, fastest in 1.5 years

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The economy grew at its fastest pace in six quarters in the three months to Dec, led by robust manufacturing and construction sector growth. The strong growth has boosted govt's track record of handling the economy against the backdrop of global challenges

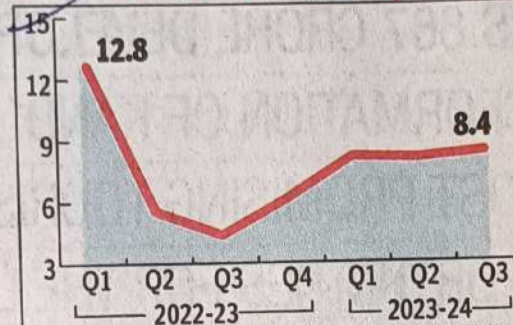
▶ **EDIT PAGE:** Three things follow from GDP figures

ahead of general elections.

Data released by National Statistical Office (NSO) showed the economy grew by a faster-than-expected 8.4% in Oct-Dec, higher than upwardly revised 8.1% in the previous quarter and above 4.3% in the third quarter of 2022-23. Now, NSO estimates 2023-24 GDP growth at 7.6%, above earlier estimate of 7.3%, making India world's fastest-growing major economy.

NSO has revised upwards

BOOSTED BY MFG, CONST SECTORS



▶ Annual GDP estimate for 2023-24 at 7.6% from earlier projection of 7.3%

▶ 11.6% mfg growth in Oct-Dec

▶ Construction grows at 9.5%

▶ Public admin, defence and other services grow at 7.5%

“ Robust 8.4% GDP growth in Q3 2023-24 shows the strength of Indian economy and its potential. Our efforts will continue to bring fast economic growth which shall help 140cr Indians lead a better life and create a Viksit Bharat

— Narendra Modi | PM



Jan core sector growth at 3.6%, 15-mth low

Growth in the infrastructure sector slowed to a 15-month low in Jan, dragged down by contractions in refinery products and fertilisers, while steel and cement remained strong. Data released Thursday showed eight core sectors grew 3.6%, slower than 4.9% in Dec and below 9.7% in Jan last year. The core sector accounts for nearly 41% of the index of industrial output. **P 23**

the second and first quarters while revision to 2022-23 quarters also led to a favourable effect. GDP growth for FY23 was revised to 7% from 7.2%. The Q3 growth was also high

her than RBI's projection of 6.5%. The central bank had revised its projection to 7% for 2023-24 from 6.5%.

▶ **Continued on P 23**

WTO talks go to extra time, India hopes for deal on farm support

Sidhartha@timesgroup.com

Abu Dhabi: Trade talks went into extra time as ministers sought to salvage a last-minute deal, with the focus largely on getting an outcome on India's longstanding demand for a solution on public stockholding, and no further extension of the moratorium on e-commerce for electronically sharing movies and books.

Of 30-odd paragraphs in the outcome document, eight to 10 had been agreed upon till late evening. Ministers and officials are expected to spend the night finalising the text with the meeting now slated to close around Friday noon instead of 8pm local time Wednesday. "The issue has boiled down to agriculture and e-commerce," a negotiator told TOI.

► **Related report, P 23**

Sending Nato Troops To Ukraine Risks Global Nuclear War: Putin

'West Should Keep In Mind We Also Have Weapons To Strike Their Territory'

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed Thursday to fulfill Moscow's goals in Ukraine and sternly warned West against deeper involvement in the fighting, saying such a move is fraught with the risk of a global nuclear conflict. Putin's blunt warning came in a state-of-the-nation address ahead of next month's election he's all but certain to win, underlining his readiness to raise the stakes in the tug-of-war with West to protect Russian gains in Ukraine.

In an apparent reference to French President Emmanuel Macron's statement that the future deployment of Western ground troops to Ukraine should not be "ruled out", Putin warned that it would lead to "tragic" consequences for countries who decide to do that.

Putin noted that while accusing Russia of plans to attack Nato allies in Europe, Western allies were "selecting targets for striking our territory" and "talking about the possibility of sending a Nato contingent to Ukraine."

"We remember the fate of those who sent their troop contingents to the territory of our country," the Russian leader said in an apparent allusion to the failed invasions by Napoleon and Hitler. "Now the conse-



Alexei Navalny's allies said on Thursday that hearse drivers are refusing to take his body from the morgue to his funeral on Friday after getting threats

Putin bears blame for Navalny's death: EU

European parliament said Thursday Russian President Putin bore the "criminal and political responsibility" for the death of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and should be held to account. In a resolution passed with 506 votes in the 705-seat assembly, lawmakers also called for an "independent and transparent international investigation" into the circumstances of Navalny's death. Nine lawmakers voted against the resolution. AFP

quences for the potential invaders will be far more tragic."

In a two-hour speech to lawmakers and top officials, Putin cast Western leaders as reckless and irresponsible and de-

Russia detains editor for discrediting army

Russian authorities on Thursday detained journalist Sergei Sokolov, the editor of Novaya Gazeta, on charges of discrediting the army, the newspaper and Russian state media reported. Novaya Gazeta said in an online report that Sokolov's detention was over coverage of the Russian army in an article, but did not provide more details. Novaya Gazeta's former editor-in-chief Dmitry Muratov is a Nobel prize winning journalist. REUTERS

clared that West should keep in mind "we also have the weapons that can strike targets on their territory, and what they are now suggesting and scaring the world with, all that ra-

ises the real threat of a nuclear conflict that will mean destruction of our civilization."

The strong statement followed earlier warnings from Putin, who has issued frequent reminders of Russia's nuclear might since he sent troops into Ukraine in Feb 2022 as he sought to discourage West from expanding its military support for Kyiv. Putin emphasized that Russia's nuclear forces are in "full readiness," saying the military has deployed potent new weapons, some of them tested on the battlefield in Ukraine. He said they include the new Sarmat heavy intercontinental ballistic missile that has entered service with Russian nuclear forces, along with the Burevestnik atomic-powered cruise missile and the Poseidon atomic-powered, nuclear-armed drone, which are completing their tests.

Putin again dismissed the US' claim that Moscow was pondering the deployment of space-based nuclear weapons.

In his speech focused heavily on economic and social issues ahead of the March 15-17 vote, Putin argued that Russia was "defending its sovereignty and protecting our compatriots" in Ukraine, charging that Russian forces have the upper hand in the fighting. AP