

N Korea holds rocket drills that simulate Nuclear counterattack

SEOUL, Apr 23 (AP)

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised salvo launches of the country's "super-large" multiple rocket launchers that simulated a nuclear counterattack against enemy targets, State media said on Tuesday, adding to tests and threats that have raised tensions in the region.

The report by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency came a day after the South Korean and Japanese militaries detected the North firing what they suspected were multiple short-range ballistic missiles from a region near its capital, Pyongyang, toward its



eastern seas.

Analysts say North Korea's large-sized artillery rockets blur the boundary between artillery systems and ballistic missiles because they can create their own thrust and are guided during delivery. The North has described some of these systems, including the 600 mm multiple rocket launchers that were tested on Monday, as capable of delivering tactical nuclear warheads.

Russia to deliver remaining 2 S-400 Triumph air defence missiles to India by next year

NEW DELHI, Apr 23 (PTI)

INDIA is set to receive the remaining two regiments of S-400 Triumph surface-to-air missile systems from Russia by next year under a new timeline that was firmed up following some delays in the supplies in view of the war in Ukraine, authoritative sources said on Tuesday.

Russia has already supplied three units of the long-range missile systems to India under a USD 5.5 billion deal.

India is also expected to take delivery of warship Tushil, the first of the two Russian-built

frigates, in September, the sources said.

The second warship Tamal will be supplied by Russia in January, they said.

According to the original timeline, the ships were to be delivered by 2022, they said, attributing the delays in the delivery to Russia's war in Ukraine. Russia is supplying the stealth frigates under a four- frigates deal firmed up in 2018. The remaining two ships are being made in India. On S-400 missile systems, the sources said the deliveries will be completed by next year.

India's first bullet train to run in 2026, says Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI, Apr 23 (IANS)

SIGNIFICANT progress has been made in the construction of various stations for India's first bullet train and we are geared up to



run the first train in one section in 2026, Union Railways and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

In an interview with IANS, the Union Minister said the work on bullet trains is progressing very well on the Ahmedabad-Mumbai route.

"More than 290 kms of work has already been done. Bridges have been built over eight rivers. Work is going on at 12 stations. The stations have also come at the same level so that the work is nearing completion," Ashwini Vaishnaw informed.

"The work is going on at two depots. The work is going on at a very fast pace with the com-

plete target of opening its first section in 2026," the Union Minister told IANS.

The Bullet Train is a very complex project. The work on it started in 2017 and it took almost two-and-a-half years to complete the design.

"Its design is very complex because the vibrations are very strong at the speed at which the train has to run," informed the Union Minister.

"How to manage those vibrations? If we have to take current from above electricity, then how to take that current? Everything like speed, aerodynamics etc. has to be looked at very carefully and the work started immediately after that," Ashwini Vaishnaw elaborated.

In between, there was a little setback due to the COVID pandemic.

"In Maharashtra, Uddhav Thackeray's Government had refused to give permission which delayed the project. But the work is progressing very well now," the Union Minister noted. The bullet train corri-

dor has a 21-km-long tunnel, including a 7-km undersea stretch. The deepest point of the tunnel is 56 metres.

Inside the tunnel, the bullet trains will run at the speed of 300-320 kmph.

The objective is to develop a high-frequency mass transportation system by constructing the High-Speed Rail between Mumbai and Ahmedabad, using Japan's Shinkansen technology (also known as the bullet train).

Meanwhile, Vaishnaw said that in the next five years, it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantee that almost any passenger who wants to travel can easily get a confirmed ticket. He said that in the last 10 years, PM Modi has done unprecedented transformation in Railways. "In the next five years, PM Modi's guarantee is that the capacity of the Railways will be increased so much that almost any passenger who wants to travel can easily get a confirmed ticket," the Union Minister emphasised.

'India 4th largest military spender globally in 23'

NEW DELHI, Apr 23 (PTI)

INDIA was the fourth largest military spender globally in 2023 with an expenditure of USD 83.6 billion, behind the US, China and Russia, according to a report by an independent international think-tank.

The report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) shared on its website in April also said the "rise" in global military spending last year can be attributed "primarily to the ongoing war in Ukraine and escalating geopolitical tensions in Asia and Oceania and the Middle East".

The military expenditure went up in all five geographical regions, with major spending increases recorded in Europe, Asia and Oceania and the Middle East, it said.

The report comes amid ongoing conflicts in various parts of the world such as the ones involving Israel-Hamas, Iran-Israel, Russian-Ukraine besides volatility in the Red Sea region.

"World military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year in 2023, reaching a total of USD 2443 billion. The 6.8 per cent increase in 2023 was the steepest year-on-year rise since 2009 and pushed global spend-

ing to the highest level SIPRI has ever recorded," according to the report.

The world military burden -- defined as military spending as a percentage of global gross domestic product (GDP) -- increased to 2.3 per cent in 2023. Average military expenditure as a share of government expenditure rose by 0.4 percentage points to 6.9 per cent in 2023 and world military spending per person was the highest since 1990 at USD 306, it added.

With military expenditure of USD 83.6 billion in 2023, India was the "fourth largest spender globally".

Indian spending was up by 4.2 per cent from 2022 and by 44 per cent from 2014. The increase in India's military spending was "mainly a result of growing personnel and operations costs" which made up almost 80 per cent of the total military budget in 2023, the SIPRI report claimed.

"This aligns with the Government's priority to strengthen the operational readiness of the armed forces amid ongoing tensions with China and Pakistan. In comparison, capital outlays to fund military procurement remained relatively stable at around 22 per cent of the budget in 2023," it said.

Can we skip spectrum auction in some cases, Centre asks SC

Seeks Clarity On Allotment To Defence, Utilities

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Govt has moved Supreme Court seeking clarification on assigning spectrum for specific purposes — such as satellite communication, for use by defence forces and public sector undertakings (PSUs), and for Metro or railway operations — instead of auctions, mandated by the apex court in 2012 following the 2G scam.

The petition, which was filed last Dec, came up for hearing on Monday. In late Dec, Parliament had passed the new telecom law, which provides for 19 exemptions, including those for which govt had moved SC.

Despite the 2012 ruling, govt was already allocating spectrum for specific requirements of national security and public infrastructure, administratively.

The petition and the new law also included spectrum for space communication within the ambit of administrative allocation.

In light of the apex court

COURT HAD CANCELLED 122 LICENCES

Oct 2007: A Raja, then communications minister, announces continuation of no-auction regime for allocation of spectrum; Centre gets 575 applications from 46 cos



Jan '08: DoT decides to issue licences on first-come first-served basis with retrospective effect from Sept 2007

July: Delhi high court rules Sept 2007 date illegal

Nov: CAG report cites irregularities in allocation, estimates revenue loss of up to ₹1.76 lakh cr. Raja steps down as comms minister

Feb '11: CBI arrests Raja, others

Feb '12: SC cancels 122 licences, orders auction of spectrum, a national resource

Dec 2023: Before introducing Telecom Bill, govt files petition in SC 'seeking clarification' to firm up 'spectrum assignment framework' where it may not be feasible to auction airwaves

WHERE GOVT INTENDS TO ALLOCATE SPECTRUM

- Satellite comm services
- National security, defence
- In-flight and maritime connectivity, transport sector
- Needs of Centre, state govts, PSUs like BSNL

verdict in the spectrum case, the administrative assignments have come with the rider that they will "not be treated as final, but purely interim and provisional; subject to govt's final decision on pricing and policy in the matter", the petition said.

The Centre is emphatic that it will stick to the auction route when it comes to commercial use such as mobile communication to offer 2G, 4G or 5G services.

"We are already following an auction process for spectrum for mobile servi-

ces and will continue to follow it. Which is what the law is," communications minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Tuesday as he sought to dispel any impression of a reversal in govt policy. The department of telecom is working on the next round of auction for 5G and other services in June, sources said.

There are certain resources which cannot be auctioned, like airwaves for satellite communication and backhaul spectrum.

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Hezbollah launches deepest attack into Israel

200 Days Since Oct 7, Hamas Armed Wing Calls For Escalation Across All Fronts

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group said Tuesday it had launched a drone attack against Israeli military bases north of the city of Acre, in its deepest strike into Israeli territory since the Gaza war began. The Israeli military said it had no knowledge of any of its facilities being hit by Hezbollah, but had said earlier that it intercepted two "aerial targets" off Israel's northern coast.

Hezbollah said it acted in retaliation for an earlier Israeli attack killing one of its fighters. The group published what appeared to be a satellite photo, with the location of the strike symbolised by a flash with a red circle around it that sat halfway between Acre and Nahariyya to the north. Israeli strikes killed two Hezbollah fighters in south-



People rush to collect aid packages air dropped over northern Gaza

hern Lebanon, the military said earlier Tuesday. Hezbollah later confirmed the death of its fighter, Hussein Azkoul, but provided no more details.

Since Oct, Israeli strikes have killed about 270 Hezbollah fighters as well as about 50 civi-

lians. Hezbollah's fire has killed about a dozen Israeli soldiers and half as many civilians.

Meanwhile, the spokesperson for Hamas' armed al-Qasam Brigades, Abu Ubaida, called Tuesday for an escalation across all fronts in a televised

speech marking 200 days since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip on Oct 7.

In a video aired by Al Jazeera TV, Abu Ubaida praised Iran's attack on Israel on April 13, saying the direct strikes with explosive drones and missiles "set new rules, drew important equations, and confused the enemy and those behind it". He also called for an escalation in the West Bank and Jordan, which lies between Iran and Israel.

Across Gaza, Israeli strikes intensified in some of the heaviest shelling in weeks, residents said, and the army ordered fresh evacuations in the north of the strip, warning civilians they were in a "dangerous combat zone". Israeli army spokesman said the military "will work with extreme force". REUTERS

9m Asians were hit by 79 climate-related disasters in '23: WMO

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New Delhi: Asia remained world's most disaster-hit region from weather, climate and water-related hazards by reporting 79 disasters in 2023 that affected over nine million people, World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said in a report released on Tuesday. It also underlined that the continent is warming faster than the global average, and the warming trend has nearly doubled since 1961-1990 period making 2023 the second warmest year on record for the continent.

WMO referred to international disaster database, Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), that kept Americas (North and South put together) at second spot in terms of reporting disasters followed by Europe, Africa

and Oceania. The global Met body used only hydro-meteorological hazards to arrive at the figure of 79 disasters.

Though country-wise precise numbers in terms of fatalities is missing from the report, India Meteorological Department (IMD) in Jan flagged that India alone witnessed 2,376 casualties due to extreme weather events, including highest 1,276 due to lightning & thunderstorms followed by floods & heavy rains (862) and heat waves (166).

The WMO report, State of the Climate in Asia 2023, said floods and storms caused highest number of casualties and economic losses in Asia whereas impact of heatwaves became more severe in terms of health risks in 2023. It said over 50 years of data in Asia confirms need for greater disaster risk reduction intervention.

RBI: Heatwaves, geopolitical tensions may stoke inflation

Sees Recovery Signs In Private Consumption, Investment

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Extreme weather events may pose a risk to inflation along with prolonged geopolitical tensions that could keep crude oil prices volatile, RBI's state of the economy report said on Tuesday. It, however, added that conditions are shaping up for an extension of a trend upshift in real GDP growth, backed by strong investment demand and upbeat business and consumer sentiments.

The report warns of climate risks, such as an increase in above-normal heatwave days across India. The report suggests monitoring of food prices, as overlapping price shocks could occur before an above-normal monsoon this year, as projected by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The report states that to

EYES ON FOOD PRICES

- > RBI's report warns of **climate risks**, such as an increase in above-normal heat wave days across India
- > The report calls for monitoring of food prices, as **overlapping shocks** could occur before an above-normal monsoon



- > RBI's report said that the current growth trajectory is powered primarily by sustained **public investment**
- > The report aligns with MPC observation, which expects private consumption to rise as **rural activity** picks up & urban demand stays steady

achieve India's developmental goals over the next three decades, the economy must grow at 8-10% annually to take advantage of the demographic dividend that started accruing in 2018 and will persist until 2055. "Conditions are shaping up for an extension of the trend upshift that took the average real GDP growth above 8% during 2021-24," the report said.

According to govt data, the economy grew at 8.4% from Oct-Dec—its fastest pa-

ce in a year and a half. This resulted in three consecutive quarters of growth over 8%. Several agencies have raised their growth estimates for India on the back of a stellar Dec quarter performance.

The prediction of a normal monsoon augurs well for inflation in the months ahead, although prices of some food items including vegetables pose a risk. RBI governor Shaktikanta Das had said that inflation has come down sig-

nificantly but remained above the 4% target and food inflation continues to exhibit considerable volatility impeding the ongoing disinflation process. He had also said that high and persistent food inflation could unhinge anchoring of inflation expectations which is underway.

The report said that the current growth trajectory is powered primarily by capital deepening, fuelled by sustained public investment, and supported by productivity improvements. It also quotes the Asian Development Bank (ADB), highlighting a renewed increase in private investment. The report aligns with the MPC observation, which expects private consumption to increase as rural activity picks up and urban demand remains steady due to improving consumer confidence.