

S-400 achieves major success in recent exercise

NEW DELHI, July 27 (ANI)

THE Sudarshan S-400 air defence missile system achieved a major success in a recent exercise where it 'shot down' 80 per cent of the 'enemy' fighter aircraft package while forcing others to retreat, aborting their missions.

The exercise was carried out by the Indian Air Force in a theatre where the force has deployed one of its squadrons of the long-range air defence missile system, defence sources told ANI.

The exercise was conducted by the Indian Air Force to showcase full integration of air defence missile system into the force, they said.

During the exercise, real fighter aircraft were flying to test the capabilities of the S-400 weapon system, now called Sudarshan by the Indian Air Force after the mighty Sudarshan Chakra of Lord Krishna. The Sudarshan, 'locking on and targeting' in simulated action, could 'shoot down' 80 per cent of the 'enemy' offensive package.

The other remaining aircraft aborted their mission which was to 'attack' their targets within Indian territory and were intercepted by the air defence system. The Indian Air Force has now fully integrated the system, whose three squadrons have already been inducted and two more are expected to be supplied in 2026.

EAM at ASEAN Summit

Need to secure sea lines of communication in South China Sea

VIENTIANE (Laos), July 27 (PTI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday stressed the need for a substantive and effective code of conduct to secure sea lines of communication in the South China Sea which he said are critical for peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region, amidst growing concerns about China's maritime coercion.

Addressing the 14th East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers Meeting in Laos's capital Vientiane, Jaishankar said the EAS process will complete two decades next year and India will contribute towards a stronger EAS process.

He said India will continue to uphold ASEAN unity and centrality through our Act East Policy. Talking about maritime security, Jaishankar said: "The Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) passing through the South China Sea are critical for peace, stability, prosperity and development of the Indo-Pacific region."

SLOC is a term describing the primary maritime routes between ports, used for trade, logistics and naval forces.

The "Code of Conduct should be substantive and effective, consistent with international law and should not prejudice legitimate rights and interest of nations not party to discussions," he said.

Jaishankar's comments hold significance as his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi is also in Vientiane to attend the sum-



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, centre, talks with Foreign Minister S Jaishankar, left, and South Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs Cho Tae-yul, right, during the East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Laos, on Saturday. (PTI)

mit. The resource-rich South China Sea in the Indo-Pacific region is widely seen as a potential flashpoint for global conflict. China claims most of the South China Sea as its own, while the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims over the maritime area.

The South China Sea provides shipping routes connecting Northeast Asia with Southeast Asia and West Asia.

Southeast Asian countries are trying to reach an agreement with China on a code of conduct to avert confrontations in the South China Sea.

At the meeting, Jaishankar also called for de-escalation and restraint in Gaza.

"India continues to extend humanitarian assistance to the

people of Palestine," he said.

He also expressed concern over attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea. "India is independently contributing to ensuring the safety and security of maritime shipping," Jaishankar said.

On the conflict in Ukraine, he said India maintained the importance of dialogue and diplomacy to resolve it. "PM @narendramodi recently engaged President (Vladimir) Putin and President (Volodymyr) Zelenskyy. India stands ready to contribute in any manner possible," he said in a post on X. India remains a steadfast supporter of the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and appreciates its convergence with the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).

EAM discusses ties with Turkey counterpart, meets scholars

VIENTIANE (Laos), July 27 (PTI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday met his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan here during which the two leaders discussed bilateral ties and exchanged views on regional and global issues.

The two leaders met on the sidelines of the meetings.

"Met with FM @HakanFidan of Turkey on the sidelines of ASEAN meetings in Vientiane. Discussed our bilateral ties and exchanged views on regional and global issues," Jaishankar posted on X.

After participating in the 31st ASEAN Regional Forum and addressing the 14th East Asia Summit (#EAS) of the Foreign Ministers Meeting, Jaishankar went ahead with his cultural interactions, including with monks.

"Pleased to interact with scholars from Lao PDR including six monks, who are travelling to India for their studies under various @iccr_hq programs. Happy to see India-Laos education partnership and capacity building in action, touching lives of common people," he said in another post on X.

He also said he was glad to launch the Common Yoga Protocol in the Lao language developed by the Art of Living Chapter in Vientiane. "Appreciate the efforts of our Lao friends and AOL for making Yoga more accessible, representing the real spirit of #InternationalDayOfYoga," he said in a post on X. Earlier in the day, the External Affairs Minister called on Laos Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone and raised the issue of trafficking of Indian nationals through cyber scam centres in the Southeast Asian country and discussed development partnership and cooperation in areas like defence and energy. Jaishankar also met his Laotian counterpart Saleumxay Kommasith during which they witnessed the exchange of MoUs on 10 Quick Impact Projects for Laos and cooperation in sharing successful digital solutions.

The projects will come under the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) initiative. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is an initiative by six countries – India and five ASEAN countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam for cooperation in tourism, culture, education, as well as transport and communications.

'Agnipath scheme will create dedicated youth for country'

PANAJI, July 27 (PTI)

GOA Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant has hailed the Centre's Agnipath scheme, stating that it was a way forward for the Indian Armed Forces and would create dedicated youth for the country.

The Centre introduced the Agnipath scheme in 2022 for short-term induction of personnel in the Army, Navy and Air Force, with an aim to bring down the age profile of the three services.

The scheme provides for recruiting Agniveers between the age group of 17-and-a-half years and 21 years for a block period of four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for another 15 years.

In a message posted on his X handle on Friday evening, Sawant said, "The Agnipath scheme is a way forward for our Armed Forces and shall create dedicated, motivated youth for a bright future of Bharat."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the Agnipath scheme was an example of necessary reforms undertaken by the Army and accused the Opposition of playing politics over the recruitment process. In his address on Kargil Vijay Diwas, Modi said some people were playing politics over a sensitive issue and rubbished claims that the Agnipath scheme was launched to save pension money.

One Gaganyaan astronaut to travel to ISS in joint mission with NASA, says Govt

NEW DELHI, July 27 (PTI)

ONE of the four astronauts undergoing training for the Gaganyaan mission will travel to the International Space Station as part of a collaborative effort with NASA, Union Minister Jitendra Singh has informed the Lok Sabha.

In a written reply, Singh said NASA has identified a private entity Axiom Space and ISRO had signed a Space Flight Agreement with the American firm for the joint mission to the International Space Station (ISS).

During Prime Minister Modi's visit to the US last year, President Joe Biden announced that India and the US were collaborating to send an Indian astronaut to the ISS in 2024.

India's Astronaut Selection Board had selected four astronauts from the group of test pilots from the Indian Air Force for the Gaganyaan mission, India's first human space flight planned to take place next year.

"All 4 astronauts have undergone training on a spaceflight basic module in Russia. Currently, they are undergoing training at ISRO's Astronauts Training Facility in Bengaluru for the Gaganyaan Mission," Singh said. The Minister said two out of three semesters of the Gaganyatri training programme have been completed while independent training simulators and static mockup simulators have been realised.

India, Ukraine looking at possibility of PM Modi's visit to Kyiv next month

NEW DELHI, July 27 (PTI)

INDIA and Ukraine are looking at the possibility of a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Kyiv next month amid renewed global efforts to bring peace to the eastern European nation, multiple diplomatic sources said on Saturday.

Modi might visit Kyiv around the Ukrainian National Day on August 24 and is expected to travel to Poland after concluding the trip to Ukraine, the sources said.

The Prime Minister held talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last month on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in Italy's Apulia.

If Modi travels to Poland, it would be the first by an Indian Prime Minister to that country in more than four decades.

India and Ukraine are looking at Modi's visit to Kyiv in the later half of August, the sources said, adding that there is no finality on the trip yet as massive preparations would be required in terms of logistics

and related issues. The Prime Minister's two-nation visit might begin around August 23-24, the sources said.

There is no official word on the visit either from India or Ukraine. At the meeting with Zelenskyy on June 14, Modi conveyed to the Ukrainian President that India would continue to do everything within its means to support a peaceful solution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and that the way to peace is through "dialogue and diplomacy."

Modi also told Zelenskyy that India believes in a "human-centric" approach to find a solution to the conflict in Ukraine. At the meeting, the Ukrainian President invited the Prime Minister to visit Kyiv.

India has been maintaining that the conflict in Ukraine must be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy.

Modi visited Russia on July 8-9 and it drew criticism from the United States. Many western countries are also unhappy over PM's trip to Moscow.

Netanyahu meets Trump, offers measured hope for ceasefire deal for Gaza

WEST PALM BEACH, July 27 (AP)

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu worked to mend ties with Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump on Friday and offered measured optimism about progress toward a ceasefire deal for Gaza as he neared the end of a contentious US visit that put on display the growing American divisions over support for the Israeli-Hamas war.

At Trump's Florida Mar-a-Lago estate, where the two men met face-to-face for the first time in nearly four years, Netanyahu told journalists he wanted to see US-mediated talks succeed for a cease-fire and release of hostages.

"I hope so," Netanyahu said, when reporters asked if his US Trip had made progress. While

Netanyahu at home is increasingly accused of resisting a deal to end the 9-month-old war to stave off the potential collapse of his far-Right Government when it ends, he said on Friday he was "certainly eager to have one. And we're working on it."

As President, Trump went well beyond his predecessors in fulfilling Netanyahu's top wishes from the United States. Yet, relations soured after Netanyahu became one of the first world leaders to congratulate Joe Biden for his 2020 presidential victory, which Trump continues to deny.

The two men now have a strong interest in restoring their relationship, both for the political support their alliance brings and for the lustre it gives each with their conservative supporters.

Israeli airstrike hits school killing 30 in Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH (Gaza Strip), July 27 (AP)

ISRAELI airstrikes hit a school being used by displaced people in central Gaza on Saturday, killing dozens, as the country's negotiators prepared to meet international mediators to discuss a proposed cease-fire.

At least 30 people sheltering at a girls' school in Deir Al-Balah were taken to Al Aqsa Hospital and pronounced dead after a strike that Israel's military said targeted a Hamas command and control centre used to store weapons and plan attacks. It said militants "used the compound as a hiding place to direct and plan numerous attacks against IDF troops" and "developed and stored large quantities of weapons inside".

Civil defence workers in Gaza said that thousands were sheltering in the school, which also contained a medical site.

Near the hospital, where the bodies were transported, Associated Press journalists saw an ambulance rushing through a dusty road as a few people ran in the opposite direction. An injured man lay on a stretcher on the ground. A body covered with a blanket and a dead toddler lay inside the ambulance.

Inside the school, classrooms were in ruins. People were seen searching for victims under the rubble and some were gathering the remains of those who were killed. Gaza's Health Ministry said at least 12 people had been killed in other strikes on Saturday.

The strikes hit a day before officials from the US, Egypt, Qatar and Israel are scheduled to meet in Italy to discuss the ongoing hostage and cease-fire negotiations. CIA Director Bill Burns is expected to meet Qatari Prime Minister

Mohammed Bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani, Mossad director David Barnea and Egyptian spy chief Abbas Kamel on Sunday, according to officials from the US and Egypt who spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to discuss the plans.

Humanitarian zone evacuated ahead of strikes

Earlier, Israel's military ordered the evacuation of a part of a designated humanitarian zone in Gaza ahead of a planned strike on Khan Younis on Saturday.

The evacuation order was in response to rocket fire that Israel said originated from the area. The military said it planned an operation against Hamas militants in the city, including parts of Muwasi, the crowded tent camp in an area where Israel has told thousands of Palestinians to seek refuge throughout the war.

Kamala Harris officially declares her candidature for US presidential elections

WASHINGTON DC, July 27 (ANI)

US VICE President Kamala Harris signed the forms, officially declaring her candidature for the US presidential elections, assuring that her people's-powered campaign will win in November.

Harris took to social media X, and emphasised that in November, her people-powered campaign will win.

She further reiterated that she would work hard to earn every vote.



"Today, I signed the forms officially declaring my candidacy for President of the United States. I will work hard to earn every vote. And in November, our people-powered campaign will win," Kamala Harris said in her post.

The upcoming US presidential election on November 5 will see Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic nominee, following Biden's endorsement.

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PM Modi calls for ZERO POVERTY at NITI meet

Aims to make India a developed nation by 2047



Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairs the 9th Governing Council Meeting of NITI Aayog at Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre in New Delhi on Saturday. (ANI)

NEW DELHI, July 27 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday called for setting zero poverty targets starting at village level and aimed to make India a developed nation by 2047 at a meeting of NITI Aayog Governing Council that witnessed high drama with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee walking out in a huff alleging her mic was switched off.

In his address to the ninth Governing Council meeting, Modi emphasised the need to tackle poverty on an individ-

WB CM Mamata Banerjee walked out in a huff alleging her mic was switched off. As many as 10 States and UTs skip meet.

ual basis rather than just at a programme level.

“We must target zero poverty as a priority for a Viksit Bharat starting at village level,” Modi said, adding it would bring about a transformational effect in our country.

As many as 10 States and UTs did not participate in the Governing Council meeting of the NITI Aayog. The absentees were Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, Bihar, Delhi, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and Puducherry, said CEO B.V.R. Subrahmanyam while briefing the media about the meeting. “It is their loss if they did not participate,” he added.

The NITI Aayog meeting held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre witnessed a walkout by the West Bengal Chief Minister, who claimed that she was unfairly stopped midway in her speech, despite being the sole representative of the Opposition. The Government, however, rejected her claim and said Banerjee’s speaking time was over.

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