

Kim Jong-un's tour stops in Russia highlight risk of increasing military ties

Kim Jong-un on Friday toured Russian military-related facilities producing the off-limits technology he would like to obtain for his isolated nation, as Moscow tempts the North Korean leader whose ammunition stocks the US says Russia covets for the war in Ukraine. Kim's visit to a plant that makes fighter jets in the eastern Russian city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur came two days after he met President Vladimir Putin of Russia at the Vostochny Cosmodrome, where the North Korean leader viewed powerful rockets similar to the ones he hopes to build to launch military satellites.

In the coming days, Kim also is expected to visit Russia's Pacific Fleet, according to Putin. Though it is unclear which facilities he will visit, the fleet includes a large number of modernised submarines — the likes of which North would like to develop.

Kim's tour schedule seemed designed not only to impress the North Korean leader with Russia's scientific abilities in the military sphere but also to underscore how Moscow could exacerbate the North Korean threat in response to Western support for Ukraine. UN sanctions ban financial, technological or other aid for North Korean weapons programmes. But Putin said after meeting Kim that there were still "some prospects" for military cooperation. He didn't say what those were. The Russian state news agency Tass reported that the Kremlin spokesman said no agreements were signed by the two men. NYT



COURTING CONTROVERSY: A 2018 photo of Russian President Putin dancing with then Austrian foreign minister Karin Kneissl. Kneissl announced on Telegram on Wednesday that she has moved to Russia to work for a think tank she has set up in St Petersburg. She has been repeatedly criticised in Austrian and German media for her pro-Russia views. Her dance with Putin came just months after Russia was accused of poisoning former spy Sergei Skripal with nerve agent Novichok in the UK

Musk denial of Kyiv's request for Starlink prompts Senate probe

The US Senate Armed Services Committee is looking into national security issues raised by Elon Musk's decision not to extend the private Starlink satellite network to aid a Ukrainian attack on Russian warships near the Crimean coast. Chairman Jack Reed said in a statement that the reports on the use of Starlink exposed "serious national-security liability issues and the committee is probing this issue from every angle." BLOOMBERG

Tears & a son's salute: Nation bids farewell to J&K martyrs

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

TOI LINE OF NO CONTROL

SANDEEP ADHWARYU

Mohali/Panipat: Colonel Manpreet Singh's seven-year-old son Kabir bowed before his father's coffin in Mohali, gave a crisp salute and vowed to be a soldier. In Panipat, Major Aashish Dhonchak's family felt proud of his martyrdom.

These heart-wrenching vignettes completed the last rites of the two soldiers who were killed in the encounter with terrorists in Anantnag along with J&K DSP Humayun Bhat on Wednesday.

At Bharonjian village in Mohali's Mullanpur Garibdas, it was Colonel Manpreet's son Kabir who stood out among the sea of mourners. "I will join the Indian Army and become a soldier like my father," Kabir said. He was dressed in Army-style combat fatigues even as his two-year-old sister, cradled in the arms of her mother, looked on at the tricolour-wrapped coffin.

At the village cremation ground, chants of "Colonel Manpreet *amar rahe*" and "Bharat Mata ki jai" rent the air as Kabir along with his paternal uncle lit the pyre. Just then, a section of the crowd also raised slogans against Pakistan for spreading terror.

Colonel Manpreet was commanding officer of the Army's 19 Rashtriya Rifles, and Major Dhonchak was in the same unit. "He (Manpreet) was a passionate Ar-



myman. He will live on in our hearts forever. We will ensure his native village is known by his name," school-friend Narinder Singh said.

Apart from senior army officers, Punjab governor Banwarilal Purohit, AAP ministers, BJP leaders and police officers paid homage to the martyr.

Eyes had welled up at Binjhol village in Haryana's Panipat district too, with thousands attending Major Dhonchak's final journey. The coffin had first arrived at a new house in Panipat's TDI City where the major had planned to shift next month. From there, it was

taken to his village.

Major Dhonchak is survived by his father Lal Singh (60), mother Kamla Devi, his wife Jyoti, a two-year-old daughter and three sisters. His cousin Major Vikash lit the pyre.

DC Virender Dahiya, scores of relatives, villagers, politicians were present at the cremation ground. He read out CM Manohar Lal Khattar's message of condolence. Khattar wrote that Major Dhonchak's sacrifice will forever be etched in our memories, and the nation will remain indebted to him.

(Inputs from Barinderjit Saluja in Mohali)

Nod for ₹45k cr def buys, 12 more Sukhois to fly in

Up Indigenous Content To 65%, Says Rajnath

Rajat.Pandit@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: India on Friday gave the preliminary nod for capital acquisition projects worth Rs 45,000 crore for the armed forces, including 12 more Sukhoi-30MKI fighter jets, five next-generation naval survey vessels, around 800 light armoured multi-purpose vehicles and over 200 Dhruvastra anti-tank guided missiles.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh, while chairing the high-powered Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC) meeting, also directed the top military brass and bureaucrats to work towards ensuring a minimum of 60-65% indigenous content for IDDM (indigenously designed, developed and manufactured) projects, instead of the existing threshold of 50%, in consultation with the Indian industry.

The major takeaway, of course, was the grant of "acceptance of necessity (AoN)" for the long-pending procure-



The Indian Air Force currently has 260 of the 272 twin-seat Sukhois, which constitute the backbone of its combat fleet

ment of 12 Sukhoi-30MKI fighters for the IAF.

The IAF currently has 260 of the 272 twin-seat Sukhois, which constitute the backbone of its combat fleet, with the bulk of them being licensed produced by Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) at an overall cost upwards of \$12 billion from Russia.

The 12 Sukhois and their associated equipment will cost around Rs 11,500 crore. The decision comes at a time when a major upgrade of the Sukhoi fleet, with new indigenous weapons, electronic warfare systems and sensors, is also on the anvil.

The other proposals cleared by the DAC will also be from Indian vendors, offi-

cialists said. It includes the procurement of around 800 light armoured multi-purpose vehicles and integrated surveillance and targeting systems for almost Rs 2,000 crore. The AoN was also accorded for procurement of high-mobility gun-towing vehicles for swift mobilisation and deployment of howitzers and radars.

The Navy, in turn, will get five next-generation survey vessels for around Rs 3,300 crore, an official said.

For the IAF, the AoN was also granted for the procurement of over 200 Dhruvastra short range air-to-surface missiles to equip Dhruv Mark-4 advanced light helicopters at a cost of around Rs 700 crore. Then, there was the AoN for the avionics upgrade of the Dornier-228 aircraft fleet.

The nod for the 12 new Sukhois comes at a time when the IAF is grappling with just 31 fighter squadrons, when at least 42 are needed for the "collusive threat" from China and Pakistan. As was reported by TOI last month, the IAF now plans to order around 100 more Tejas Mark-1A jets to meet the existing shortfall till a much more powerful version of the indigenous fighter is ready.

Xi's def min under graft lens? Speculation is rife

A US Diplomat Raises Questions About Possible House Arrest Of Li Shangfu, Who Has Been Missing For Weeks

Suspicion over the unexplained weeks-long absence of Chinese defence minister Li Shangfu deepened on Friday, as leading western newspapers reported he was subject to a probe and a top US diplomat questioned whether he was under house arrest.

Li, 65, has missed meetings with Vietnamese and Singaporean defence leaders in recent weeks, according to sources. He was last seen in Beijing on August 29. Citing US officials, Washington Post reported Li was under investigation for corruption and will likely be removed from his post. Wall Street Journal also reported Li was being removed from office while Financial Times said the US government believes Li is under probe.

Rahm Emanuel, Washington's outspoken ambassador to Japan, posted on X: "1st: Defence Minister Li Shangfu hasn't been seen or heard from in 3 weeks. 2nd: He was a no-show for his trip to Vietnam. Now: He's absent from his scheduled meeting with the Singaporean Chief of Navy because he was placed on house arrest???" China's defence ministry didn't comment.

Li's absence follows the unexplained replacement of China's foreign minister, Qin Gang, after a prolonged period out of view and a shake-up of the leadership of the PLA's elite Rocket Force in July. Both Li and Qin were seen by observers of Chinese politics as handpicked by President Xi Jinping, making their ab-



LI WAS ONCE XI'S WEAPON EXPERT: For much of his career, Li was deeply involved in developing & acquiring the PLA's growing array of rockets and missiles. He appeared to have Xi's trust as a weapons expert

Rocket force not combat-ready: PLA paper in rare critique

A unit of China's Rocket Force uncovered "shortcomings" during a field assessment of an exercise, the PLA Daily — the official newspaper of the Chinese military — reported on Friday in a rare critique. It suggested gaps in combat readiness at the armed force overseeing conventional and nuclear missiles. The combat readiness of the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force has come under focus recently after its two most senior leaders were suddenly replaced in July. **REUTERS**

sence after less than a year on the job particularly notable. The two serve among China's 5 state councillors, a post outranking a regular minister.

The investigation into Li, who was appointed as defence minister in March, relates to procurement of military equipment, according to sources. Eight top officials from the military's procurement unit, which Li led from 2017 to 2022,

Foreign minister to skip UNGA, veep to attend session in NY

China is sending vice-president Han Zheng to the UN General Assembly's annual summit, the ministry of foreign affairs said Friday, suggesting that the country's most senior diplomat, Wang Yi, will not attend. This year's gathering at UN headquarters in New York starts Monday. Wang attended last year and generally represented China at the UN. Han is a past member of the Politburo Standing Committee. He retired from that post but assumed the position of the VP in March. **AP**

are also under investigation that is being carried out by the military's powerful disciplinary inspection commission.

Li's absence is being particularly watched by the US, which has not dropped sanctions imposed on him in 2018 for buying weapons from Russia. Chinese officials had repeatedly said they want sanctions dropped to facilitate better military talks. **REUTERS**

India and Japan agree to step up cyber cooperation

NEW DELHI, Sept 14 (PTI)

INDIA and Japan on Thursday agreed to step up cooperation to improve skills in securing cyberspace at bilateral and multilateral levels.

Senior officials from both sides, during the fifth India-Japan Cyber Dialogue held in Tokyo, discussed important areas of bilateral cyber cooperation and reviewed the progress achieved in the areas of cybersecurity and information and communication technologies including 5G technology, an official statement said.

The Indian delegation was led by Muanpui Saiawi, Joint Secretary (Cyber Diplomacy Division) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), while the Japanese side was led by Ishizuki Hideo, Ambassador in-charge of Cyber Policy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Japan.

"Both sides exchanged views on latest developments in cyber domain and mutual cooperation at the United Nations and other multilateral and regional fora, including under the Quad framework," the MEA statement said.

It said both the delegations

underscored the importance of capacity building in ensuring secure cyberspace and agreed to cooperate in this aspect.

The Indian delegation comprised senior officials from MEA, ministries of home affairs, defence, and electronics and information technology, National Security Council Secretariat, Department of Telecommunications, Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre and Embassy of India in Tokyo.

India slashes solar imports from China as domestic manufacturing thrives

NEW DELHI, Sept 14 (PTI)

IN A departure from global trends, India has recorded a substantial 76 per cent drop in solar module imports from China during the first half of 2023 which reflects New Delhi's resolute shift towards self-sufficiency in solar manufacturing, a new report said on Thursday.

Year-on-year, India's solar module imports from China plummeted from 9.8GW in the first half of 2022 to a mere 2.3



GW during the corresponding period in 2023, the report by global energy think tank Ember said. This strategic shift, coupled with the imposition of tariffs, underscores India's determination to minimise dependency on imports and prioritise

the development of its domestic manufacturing capacity.

Neshwin Rodrigues, an India Electricity Policy Analyst at Ember, said, "India's dependence on China for solar module imports is well and truly reducing post-2022. Domestic manufacturing is gaining momentum, thanks to recent policy interventions."

"As India edges closer to self-sufficiency in solar manufacturing, reliance on Chinese modules and cells is no longer

(Contd on page 5)