

North Korea's Kim calls for expanding missile, shell production capacity

SEOUL, Dec 26 (IANS)

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong-un has unveiled a plan to build new munitions factories to expand the production capacity of missiles and shells, stressing that raising their production is critical in bolstering the war deterrent, state media reported on Friday.



The report came a day after the North's state media said Kim

had inspected an 8,700-tonne "nuclear-powered strategic guided missile submarine" under construction.

The North's leader ordered expanding the production capacity of missiles and shells during his visit to major munitions industry enterprises as he inspected the missile and shell production in the fourth quarter, according to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). It did not elaborate on the date of his inspection or the factories' locations.

Kim noted plans to construct new munitions factories will be decided at the upcoming party congress, stressing the importance of modernising the munitions industry, according to the KCNA.

"In order to satisfy the prospective demands of the missile and artillery forces of the Korean People's Army, it is necessary to continuously raise the level of modernisation of the munitions industry by establishing new munitions industry enterprises as planned," Kim said, according to the KCNA.

"In particular, the missile and shell production sector is of paramount importance in bolstering up the war deterrent," he added.

Kim's entourage included Jo Chun-ryong, a party secretary, and Kim Jong-sik, the first vice director in charge of the munitions industry at the Workers' Party of Korea, Yonhap newsagency reported.

His inspection appears to be aimed at reviewing the accomplishments in the defence sector ahead of the ninth party congress set for early next year.

The North's leader has consistently called for expanding the production of missiles and shells during his visits to key munitions factories, raising speculation that the move was related to the North's weapons exports to Russia.

Since North Korea has sent around 15,000 troops to support Russia's war with Ukraine, Kim has highlighted the need to modernise conventional weapons and strengthen combat capabilities.

India's 1st 'Organised Crime Network Database'

This will help track organised criminals, terror links

■ By **Rajnish Singh**
NEW DELHI, Dec 26 (ANI)

IN A decisive boost to India's fight against organised crime and terror-linked networks, India on Friday launched its first-ever national-level 'Organised Crime Network Database' (OCND), a landmark initiative aimed at dismantling criminal syndicates that have repeatedly compromised internal security.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the database in the 'Anti-Terror Conference-2025' - a two-day annual event being organised by the country's anti-terror unit NIA. The database is AI-powered and designed to func-



Amit Shah

tion as an intelligent analytical tool, enabling investigating officers to retrieve comprehensive information on organised criminals instantly. This database integrates First Information Reports (FIRs), chargesheets, dossiers, and other critical inputs related to organised criminals from across all states. The NIA developed the OCND in close collaboration with state police forces and the National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), an integrated data-sharing platform that serves as a master database for counter-terrorism and internal security under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), supporting law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

First-ever weapon database launched

NEW DELHI, Dec 26 (ANI)

IN A significant move to bolster India's fight against organised crime, terrorism, and extremism, the first-ever weapons database, the 'Lost, Looted and Recovered Firearm' database, was launched in India on Friday.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah launched the database prepared by NIA.

The newly-developed database is designed to include detailed records of Government-owned weapons that have been looted, stolen, lost, or recovered from state

police forces and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). It aims to create a centralised repository that can be easily accessed and utilised by all state police forces, paramilitary units, and law enforcement agencies nationwide.

Officials said the "database incorporates inputs from all States, Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir, the North-East, and Naxal-affected regions." "These entries are uploaded onto a specially designed digital interface hosted by the NIA, ensuring seamless access and real-time updates for authorised users."

China sanctions 20 US defence firms over Trump's Taiwan arms sales

■ By K J M Varma

BEIJING, Dec 26 (PTI)

CHINA on Friday imposed sanctions on 20 US defence firms in response to the Trump administration's approval of a record USD 11.1 billion arms sales package to Taiwan.

The Foreign Ministry in a statement warned that any attempt to provoke China on the Taiwan issue would be met with a firm response.

In response to the US announcement of large-scale arms sales to what it described as "China's Taiwan region", the Ministry said Beijing has decid-

ed to take countermeasures against 20 American military-related firms and 10 senior executives who have been involved in arming Taiwan in recent years.

"The Taiwan question is at the very core of China's core interests and the first red line that must not be crossed in China-US relations. Anyone who attempts to cross the line and make provocations on the Taiwan question will be met with China's firm response," it said.

It urged the US to abide by the one-China principle and to "stop the dangerous moves of arming Taiwan, stop undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait,

and stop sending wrong signals to 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces".

China will continue to take resolute measures to firmly defend national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, the statement said. The sanctions were largely seen as symbolic, as most of the targeted US defence firms do not have business operations in China.

The proposed arms sales, which require approval by the US Congress, come amid concerns in Taipei over a potential invasion by China, which claims the self-governing island as part of its territory.

China opens world's 'longest' expressway tunnel in Xinjiang

■ By **K J M Varma**
BEIJING, Dec 26 (PTI)

CHINA on Friday opened to traffic a 22.13-km-long tunnel, which it claimed to be the "world's longest", in Xinjiang province.

The Tianshan Shengli tunnel, which traverses through the central Tianshan Mountains in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, has reduced a treacherous mountain journey of several hours to about 20 minutes, official media reported.

According to Song Hailiang, chairman of China Communications Construction Company, the tunnel has "set two world records".

"It is the longest expressway tunnel in the world and has the deepest vertical shaft for a highway tunnel," Song said. The tunnel is a key part of the G0711 Urumqi-Yuli Expressway, which also became operational on Friday, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The expressway serves as a major transport artery linking city clusters in northern and southern Xinjiang.

Stretching 2,500 km, the Tianshan Mountains span central Xinjiang, separating the provincial capital Urumqi, the largest city in the north, from Korla, the largest city in the south.

With the opening of the expressway, travel time between Urumqi and Korla has been reduced from around seven hours to about three hours, the report said.

The expressway, constructed over five years, is 324.7-km-long with a total investment of 46.7 billion yuan (about USD 6.63 billion).

Cambodia says Thai fighter jets bombed its border village

PHNOM PENH, Dec 26 (IANS)

CAMBODIAN Defence Ministry's Undersecretary of State and spokesperson Lt. Gen. Maly Socheata said on Friday that Thai F-16 fighter jets dropped as many as 40 bombs in a border village in Banteay Meanchey province.



She said in a press briefing that the bombardment destroyed civilian houses as well as public infrastructures in Chok Chey village, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Thai military also fired artillery shells into a civilian residential area in Poipet Municipality of Banteay Meanchey province, she added.

Earlier on December 25, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had urged the full implementation of the Peace Accords amid ongoing violence between Cambodia and Thailand.

During a phone conversation with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, "Secretary Rubio reaffirmed that the United States stands ready to facilitate discussions aimed at ensuring peace and stability between Cambodia and Thailand," said State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott.

Rubio had stressed the importance of both countries fully implementing the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accords.

The recent clashes along the Thailand-Cambodia border, stemming from long-standing territorial disputes dating back to the colonial era, reignited in late May following military confrontations in border regions.

On Thursday, Thailand's military announced that border negotiations with Cambodia entered the second day, with overall clashes along the frontier showing a downward trend.

According to Thai media reports, the Secretariat meeting of the Thai-Cambodian General Border Committee (GBC) kicked off at around 9 am local time on the Thai side of the border in Chanthaburi province.

Around 30 Cambodian delegates attended the meeting, while Malaysian members of the ASEAN observer team in Thailand also presented.

In a press briefing held on Thursday, a Thai military spokesperson stated that the intensity of border skirmishes between the two countries has generally decreased, with exchanges of fire remaining confined to localised areas.

Myanmar will hold its first general election in 5 years on 28th

Criticism of military rule mounts

BANGKOK, Dec 26 (AP)

MYANMAR will hold the first phase of a general election on Sunday, its first vote in five years and an exercise that critics say will neither restore the country's fragile democracy undone by a 2021 army takeover, nor end a devastating civil war triggered by the nation's harsh military rule.

The military has framed the polls as a return to multi-party democracy, likely seeking to add a facade of legitimacy to its rule, which began after the army four years ago ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The takeover triggered widespread popular opposition that has grown into a civil war. The fighting has complicated hold-

ing the polls in many contested areas. Voting will be held in different parts of the country in three phases, with the second on Jan. 11 and the third on Jan. 25.

Human rights and opposition groups say the vote will be neither free nor fair and that power is likely to remain in the hands of military leader Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing.

Critics doubt a real transition to civilian rule: Richard Horsey, a Myanmar analyst for the International Crisis Group, noted that the vote is being run by the same military that was behind the 2021 coup.

"These elections are not credible at all," he told The Associated Press. "They do not include any of the political parties that did well in the last election or the election before."