

IAF, IIT Madras to develop indigenous airborne communication system

BENGALURU, Dec 29 (PTI)

THE IAF's Software Development Institute (SDI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IIT-Madras for the joint design and development of an indigenous digital communication system for airborne applications.

This collaboration marks a significant step towards realising the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, fostering self-reliance in defence technology and enhancing India's strategic capabilities, an official release said on Monday. The MoU was signed by Air Vice Marshal R Guruhari, Commandant, SDI; Prof

V Kamakoti, Director of IIT Madras and Dr M J Shankar Raman, CEO, Pravartak Technologies Foundation. Through this partnership, IAF aims to develop advanced algorithms for networking and encryption in collaboration with IIT Madras, the release said on Monday.

These systems are critical for secure, reliable, and high-performance data exchange in dynamic airborne environments, essential for modern military operations and networked warfare.

By developing this technology indigenously, the collaboration seeks to reduce reliance on import-

ed systems, promote technological sovereignty, and bolster the operational efficiency of India's defence forces, it added. Air Vice Marshal R Guruhari said, "This partnership is a visionary step towards achieving complete self-reliance in critical defence communication technologies."

'Trade pact with Australia anchors India's economic engagement in Indo-Pacific'

NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (IANS)

COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday said that as the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) negotiations advance with other nations, India-Australia trade pact continues to anchor the country's economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific, aligned with 'Make in India' and the vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047'.

From January 1, 2026, 100 per cent Australian tariff lines will be zero-duty for Indian exports, unlocking fresh opportunities for labour-intensive sectors, Goyal informed. On the third anniversary of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA), the Minister said that we are celebrating a partnership that has translated intent into impact.

"Together, India and Australia are building a future of shared prosperity and trusted trade," Goyal posted on X social media platform.

Over the past three years, the agreement has delivered sustained export growth, deeper market access, and stronger supply-chain resilience, ben-



From January 1, 2026, 100 per cent Australian tariff lines will be zero-duty for Indian exports, unlocking fresh opportunities for labour-intensive sectors, Piyush Goyal said

efiting Indian exporters, MSMEs, farmers, and workers alike, according to Goyal. India's exports to Australia grew by 8 per cent in FY 2024-25, improving India's trade balance. Strong gains

were witnessed across manufacturing, chemicals, textiles, plastics, pharmaceuticals, petroleum products, and gems and jewellery.

"Agri-exports recorded broad-based growth, with sharp increases in fruits and vegetables, marine products, spices, and exceptional growth in coffee. Gems & Jewellery exports rose 16 per cent in April–November 2025," said the Minister.

Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) on organic products was signed, marking a major milestone, enabling seamless trade and lowering compliance costs for exporters.

Meanwhile, India and New Zealand have also concluded a comprehensive and long-awaited FTA, marking a major economic and strategic milestone. The FTA eliminates duty on 100 per cent of Indian exports, along with a \$20 billion investment commitment over 15 years to strengthen long-term economic and strategic cooperation.

India's total exports of goods and services surged to a record high of \$418.91 billion during April–September 2025 of the current financial year to register a 5.86 per cent annual increase.

Maiden flight test of Pinaka long-range guided rocket conducted successfully

NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (PTI)

THE maiden flight test of Pinaka long-range guided rocket was conducted successfully on Monday, and it impacted the target with "textbook precision", the Defence Ministry said. The test was conducted at Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur in Odisha.

The rocket was tested for its maximum range of 120 km "demonstrating all in-flight manoeuvres" as planned.

"The maiden flight test of Pinaka Long Range Guided Rocket (LRGR 120) was conducted successfully at Integrated Test Range, Chandipur today," the Ministry said.

The LRGR impacted the target with "textbook precision", the Ministry said in a statement.

All the deployed range instruments tracked the flight throughout its trajectory, it said.

The LRGR was launched from the in-service Pinaka launcher demonstrating its versatility and providing launch capability of Pinaka variants of different range from the same launcher, officials said. This rocket is designed by Armament Research and Development Establishment, a lab of the DRDO, in association with High Energy Materials Research Laboratory and with support from Defence Research and Development Laboratory and Research Centre Imarat, the

ministry said. The flight trial was coordinated by ITR and Proof & Experimental Establishment.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO on the achievement. He said the

successful design and development of long range guided rockets will boost the capabilities of armed forces, terming it as a "game changer", according to the Ministry.



N Korea tests long-range strategic cruise missiles



SEOUL, Dec 29 (AP)

NORTH Korea said on Monday it fired long-range strategic cruise missiles into the sea to test the country's nuclear deterrence, days after it showed apparent progress in the construction of its first nuclear-powered submarine.

Sunday's launches were the latest weapons display by North Korea ahead of its planned ruling Workers' Party congress early next year. Keen outside attention on the congress, the first of its kind in five years, will be on whether North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will establish new priorities in relations with the US and respond to Washington's calls to resume long-dormant talks.

The official Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim expressed "great satisfaction" over Sunday's launches, which occurred off the country's west coast. It said Kim noted that testing the reliability of North Korea's nuclear deterrence and demonstrating its might are "just a responsible exercise of the right to self-defence and war deterrence" in the face of external security threats.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it was aware of several cruise missile launches made from North Korea's capital region on Sunday morning. It said South Korea maintains a readiness to repel any potential North Korean provocations through its alliance with the United States.

UN Security Council resolutions prohibit North Korea from

launches involving its huge stockpile of ballistic missiles. Its cruise missile tests are not banned, but they still pose a threat to the US and South Korea because they are highly manoeuvrable and fly at low altitudes to avoid radar detection. Analysts say North Korea would aim to use cruise missiles to strike US warships and aircraft carriers in the event of conflict.

Last week, North Korea test-launched new anti-air missiles off its east coast and displayed photos showing a largely-completed hull of a developmental nuclear-powered submarine. North Korea implied it would arm the submarine with nuclear missiles.

A nuclear-powered submarine is among a slew of sophisticated weapons systems that Kim has vowed to introduce to cope with what he describes as US-led security threats. Some experts say North Korea's recent alignment with Russia -- including sending thousands of troops and military equipment to support President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine -- may have helped it to receive crucial technologies in return. North Korea has focussed on weapons-testing activities to expand its nuclear arsenal since Kim's high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with US President Donald Trump collapsed in 2019.

But in an apparent response to Trump's repeated outreach, Kim suggested in September that he could return to talks if the US drops "its delusional obsession with denuclearisation" of North Korea.

US offers Ukraine 15-yr security guarantee in peace plan

Zelenskyy seeks commitment of up to 50 years to deter Russia from further attempts to seize Ukraine's land

Ukraine and Russia are 'closer than ever' to peace deal: Trump after talks with Zelenskyy

KYIV/PALM BEACH, Dec 29 (AP)

THE United States is offering Ukraine security guarantees for a period of 15 years as part of a proposed peace plan, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Monday, though he said he would prefer an American commitment of up to 50 years to deter Russia from further attempts to seize its neighbour's land by force.

"Without security guarantees, realistically, this war will not end," Zelenskyy told reporters in voice messages responding to questions sent via a WhatsApp chat. US President Donald Trump on

Sunday insisted Ukraine and Russia are "closer than ever before" to a peace deal as he hosted Ukrainian President Zelenskyy at his Florida resort, but he acknowledged the negotiations are complex and could still break down, leaving the war dragging on for years.

The President's statements came after the leaders met for talks following what Trump said was an "excellent", two-and-a-half-hour phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose invasion of Ukraine launched the war nearly four years ago. Trump insisted he believed Putin still wants peace, even as Russia launched another round of attacks on Ukraine while Zelenskyy flew to the United States for the latest round of negotiations.

"Russia wants to see Ukraine



President Donald Trump and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy shake hands at the start of a joint news conference following a meeting at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club, on Sunday in Palm Beach, Florida

(AP/PTI)

succeed," Trump said during a late afternoon news conference as he stood with Zelenskyy after

their meeting. He repeatedly praised his counterpart as "brave". Trump and Zelenskyy

both acknowledged thorny issues remain, including whether Russia can keep Ukrainian territory it controls, as well as security guarantees for Ukraine to ensure it is not invaded again in the future. After their discussion, they called a wide group of European leaders, including Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and the leaders of Finland, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Poland.

Zelenskyy said Trump had agreed to host European leaders again, possibly at the White House, sometime in January. Trump said the meeting could be in Washington or "someplace".

Zelenskyy thanked Trump for his work. "Ukraine is ready for peace," he said. Trump and Putin will speak again. Negotiators are still searching for a breakthrough

on key issues, including whose forces withdraw from where and the fate of the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, one of the 10 biggest in the world. Trump noted that the months-long US-led negotiations could still collapse. Ukraine has been fighting Russia since 2014, when it illegally annexed Crimea and Moscow-backed separatists took up arms in the Donbas, a vital industrial region in eastern Ukraine.

Details of the security guarantees have not become public, but Zelenskyy said on Monday that they include how a peace deal would be monitored as well as the "presence" of partners. He didn't elaborate, but Russia has said it won't accept the deployment of troops from NATO countries. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry

Peskov said on Monday that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Trump were expected to speak in the near future, but there was no indication the Russian leader would speak to Zelenskyy.

French President Emmanuel Macron said Kyiv's allies will meet in Paris in early January to "finalise each country's concrete contributions" to the security guarantees.

Trump said he would consider extending US security guarantees for Ukraine beyond 15 years, according to Zelenskyy. The guarantees would be approved by the US Congress as well as by Parliaments in other countries involved in overseeing any settlement, he said. Zelenskyy said he wants the 20-point peace plan under discussion to be approved by Ukrainians in a national referendum.

Defence Ministry clears procurement of military hardware worth Rs 79K cr

NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (PTI)

THE Defence Ministry on Monday approved procurement of long range rockets, missiles, radar systems and military platforms worth Rs 79,000 crore to bolster the military's combat prowess.

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, green-lighted the proposals.

The DAC approved procurement of loiter munition systems for the Army's artillery regiments.

It also cleared acquisition of low level lightweight radars, long-



range guided rocket ammunition for Pinaka rocket system and integrated drone detection and interdiction system (Mk-II) for the Indian Army, the Defence Ministry said.

Loiter munition will be used
(Contd on page 5)

China starts new drills in Taiwan Strait

BEIJING, Dec 29 (PTI)

THE Chinese military on Monday started new major drills in the "middle areas" of the Taiwan Strait amid rising diplomatic tensions with Japan over Taiwan that Beijing claims as its territory.

"The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theatre Command is employing fighters, bombers and unmanned aerial vehicles in coordination with long-range rocket fires to conduct drills in the waters and airspace in the middle areas of the Taiwan Strait on Monday," state-run 'Xinhua' news agency reported.

Focusing on striking mobile ground targets, the drills intend to test the troops' capabilities of precision strikes on key targets, it said.

China claims the self-governing Taiwan as part of its mainland and vows to integrate it.

The drills comes against the backdrop of the US approval of a record \$11.1 bn arms package to Taipei and diplomatic tensions with Japan over Taiwan



The drills in which fighters, bombers, long range rockets and unmanned aerial vehicles will be used comes against the backdrop of the US approval of a record USD 11.1 billion arms package to Taipei which China sharply criticised and diplomatic tensions with Japan over Taiwan.

US President Donald Trump approved an arms package worth

USD 11.1 billion for Taiwan, which, if cleared by the US Congress, would mark Washington's largest-ever arms sale to the island.

The landmark arms sale comes amid Taipei's concerns over a potential.

China sharply criticised the US saying that Washington "blatantly announced its plan to sell massive advanced weapons to

China's Taiwan region" and send a "gravely wrong signal to 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces".

The arms sale aids Taiwan's independence forces' plans to turn the island into "powderkeg", Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Guo Jiakun told a media briefing here on December 18 reacting to Trump's approval to the arms sale.

"China will take resolute and strong measures to defend its national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity," he said.

The arms sales to Taiwan comes in the backdrop of rising China-Japan tensions over Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remarks in parliament on November 7 that a Taiwan contingency could be a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan that may lead to action from the country's defence forces in support of the US.

Her remarks angered China which demanded Takaichi to retract her statement.

China has also criticised Japan's move to develop the easternmost island of Okinawa for the deployment of a mobile surveillance radar unit to monitor Chinese aircraft carriers and airplanes. The Japanese side kept strengthening targeted military deployment near Taiwan region and even claimed it will deploy mid-range missiles, he said.

"This time, it went even further by deploying a radar unit and troops to secretly monitor its neighbour," Guo said.

"Given the erroneous and dangerous remarks made by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Taiwan, we must question: Is the Japanese side making trouble and provocations at one's doorstep to find a pretext for its military build-up and missions overseas", he said.

Reviving India's ancient maritime glory

INSV Kaundinya sets sail for maiden voyage to Oman

PORBANDAR, Dec 29 (PTI)

INSV Kaundinya, the Navy's engineless vessel built using the ancient stitched-ship technique, embarked on her maiden overseas voyage from Gujarat's Porbandar to Muscat on Monday to retrace old maritime routes that once connected the western coast of India with Oman.

This historic expedition marks a major milestone in India's efforts to revive, understand, and celebrate its ancient
(Contd on page 5)



INSV Kaundinya



A 5th century mural depicting an ancient Indian stitched sailing ship, serving as inspiration for INSV Kaundinya.

(PTI)