

India to begin permanent magnets production this year: G Kishan Reddy

NEW DELHI, Feb 19 (PTI)

INDIA will begin production of Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPMs) this year itself, Union Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy said on Thursday, marking a key step towards self-reliance in critical minerals for electric vehicles and renewable energy sectors.

Speaking at a conference organised by FICCI and Ministry of Mines here, Reddy highlighted the Government's push under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative to reduce import dependence on rare earth elements. "In this year itself, permanent magnets production will begin in India," Reddy asserted. The announcement comes amid India's focus on securing supplies of neodymium, praseodymium and other rare earths, with the mines ministry auctioning exploration blocks and approving recycling facilities.

India aspires to establish equitable maritime order: Rajnath

VISAKHAPATNAM, Feb 19 (IANS)

DEFENCE Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said that India aspires to establish an equitable maritime order based on international rules and freedom of navigation in accordance with international law

He underlined the need for the international community to join hands to tackle maritime challenges.

Inaugurating the multilateral naval exercise MILAN 2026 here, he noted that traditional threats coexist with emerging ones. "Piracy, maritime terrorism, illegal fishing, trafficking, cyber vulnerabilities and disruptions to



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, CNS Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and others during the inauguration of the 13th edition of Indian Navy's Exercise 'MILAN', in Andhra Pradesh. (PTI)

critical supply chains. Climate change is intensifying natural disasters, mak-

ing humanitarian and disaster relief operations more frequent and more demanding. No single navy, however capable, can address these challenges alone. This is why cooperation among the Navies is no longer an option, it is an imperative," he said.

The Defence Minister said that distinctive responsibilities call upon the international community to join hands to manage the challenges harmoniously and act in the spirit of mutual respect. He pointed out that the United Nations Convention on the Law of Seas provides a robust legal framework for addressing matters related to the international waters.

Macron: Ready to raise local content in Rafale

Slams Critics Who Questioned Its Performance

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New Delhi: French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday said that Rafale fighter jets will boost India's military strength and that he is committed to having more indigenous content in 'made-in-India Rafale', as sought by the Modi govt.

Speaking on the sidelines of the AI-India Summit at the end of his three-day visit, Macron told the French and Indian media, "Rafale improves the strategic relations between us, and it creates more jobs here." On criticism in some western quarters over the performance of the 4.5-gen fighter, especially during Operation Sindoor last year, the President said, "I don't see how people can criticise the aircraft because it (Rafale) makes your country stronger."

Macron said France and India are entering a new era of defence cooperation with plans to jointly produce Rafale fighter jets as well as helicopters.

"On Rafale, what we want to do is expand. India confirmed a few days ago its willingness to command a new bunch of Rafales... 114... and to co-produce in India," he said. India's expected order for another 114 Rafales is a "step forward" in defence ties. On India's demand for increasing indigenous content in the



Modi with French President Macron at AI Impact Summit 2026 on Thursday. Macron showed his willingness to sell more French submarines to India

jet's co-production, Macron said, "Very clearly, we are extremely, I would say, committed to having a maximum number of Indian components and manufacturing a maximum number of critical devices in India.... We will have increased cooperation in maintenance and diversification."

Showing his willingness to sell more French submarines to India, Macron cited the tie-up on Rafales to make his case. "I hope we will do it on submarines. We have offered additional capacities," he said. The Indian Navy currently operates six French Scorpene submarines and there are plans to have more — at least three — such submarines from France in the near future.

The President said India's push to co-produce Rafale fighter jets is a "legitimate" ambition that aligns with the

"direction of history.... Rafale is the key." He underscored the long-term necessity of this partnership, predicting that India's requirement for advanced aviation will only grow in the coming decades. "Looking ahead to 2040 and 2050, I am telling you, India will need combat aviation," Macron said.

"We don't have a strategic partnership, we have a global spatial strategic partnership, which is unique for both France and India," he said.

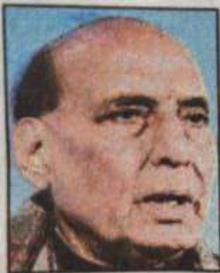
Macron's reaction came just days after the Rajnath Singh-led Defence Acquisition Council gave the initial clearance for acquiring 114 more Rafale jets and the defence minister discussed the jet deal with his French counterpart Catherine Vautrin as part of the India-France annual defence dialogue on Tuesday.

Terror, new challenges need all navies to join hands, says Rajnath

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Visakhapatnam: Defence minister **Rajnath Singh** urged global powers to confront fast-evolving, intertwined maritime risks through cooperation rooted in respect and reciprocity, as India opened its largest-ever multilateral naval exercise, Exercise MILAN-2026.



“When our ships sail together, when our sailors train together, and when our commanders deliberate together, we build a shared understanding that transcends geography and politics,” he said on Thursday.

The defence minister addressed visiting navy chiefs and delegations from nine Asean members at the inaugural ceremony, welcoming participation that has grown from four foreign navies in 1995 to 74 nations this year.

Navies now shoulder a broader burden as global commerce surges and competition sharpens around chokepoints and channels, he said. Interest in underwater resources, including rare earth minerals, is rising. Terror networks spanning borders complicate security, while climate change is intensifying disasters and pushing humanitarian missions to the fore. “No single navy, however capable, can address



The defence minister, who opened the largest-ever multilateral naval exercise on Thursday, said, ‘When our ships sail together and when our commanders deliberate together, we build a shared understanding that transcends geography and politics’

these challenges alone,” Singh said.

Inviting Asean countries to tap India’s expanding defence-industrial base, he said the govt’s Aatmanirbhar Bharat push led by PM Narendra Modi has transformed India into a “builder’s navy”. He cited aircraft carrier INS Vikrant and the Visakhapatnam-class destroyers as proof of growing indigenous shipbuilding capacity.

Singh traced India’s maritime outlook from SAGAR to its expanded vision, MAHASAGAR, signalling wider engagement. He backed United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as a durable framework and called for stronger global naval architecture. India, he said, will remain a steady “vishwa mitra” in the Indo-Pacific.

'9 Board of Peace members agree to pledge \$7 bn for Gaza relief package'

WASHINGTON, Feb 19 (AP)

PRESIDENT Donald Trump announced Thursday at the inaugural Board of Peace meeting that nine members of the body have agreed to pledge USD 7 billion toward a Gaza relief package.

Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, UAE, Morocco, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and Kuwait are the countries that are making pledges, Trump added.

"But every dollar spent is an



investment in stability and the hope of new and harmonious (region)," said Trump, thanking

the donors.

The amount, while significant, represents a fraction of the estimated USD 70 billion needed to rebuild the Palestinian territory decimated after two years of war.

Trump also announced the US was pledging USD 10 billion for the Board of Peace, but didn't specify what the money will be used for.

"The Board of Peace is showing how a better future can be built, starting right here in this room," Trump said.