

DGQA clearance to indigenous anti-tank ammunition after trials at Balasore

■ By Ashish Rajput

JABALPUR, Mar 18

THE first lot of indigenously produced 125-mm anti-tank ammunition, valued at around Rs 32 crore, has received a clearance from Director General Quality Assurance (DGQA) after rigorous firing trials at the Balasore range in Odisha.

This marks a major milestone for Ordnance Factory Khamaria (OFK), which has successfully completed indigenous production under the ambitious Mango Project.

With this approval, OFK is now ready to begin full-scale pro-

duction, a move expected to strengthen self-reliance of the Indian Army in critical defence equipment.

The project is also set to create an additional annual production opportunity of nearly Rs 500 crore for OFK.

Until now, India has been importing 20,000–30,000 rounds of this ammunition annually from Russia.

With indigenous production in place, this dependency is now expected to reduce significantly. OFK has already received an order to manufacture 24,000 rounds per year, worth approximately Rs

500 crore.

Story of Mango Project began on August 29, 2016, when OFK launched the production of 125-mm anti-tank ammunition based on Fin Stabilized Armour Piercing Discarding Sabot (FSAPDS) technology, in collaboration with Russia.

The first two phases involved Semi Knock Down (SKD) and Complete Knock Down (CKD) production, where components were assembled with the assistance of Russian experts.

In the third phase, OFK took a major leap by starting fully indigenous production without foreign technical support.

Cabinet clears Rs 33,660 cr BHAVYA scheme to accelerate industrial development

■ Delhi Bureau & Agencies
NEW DELHI, Mar 18

IN ORDER to boost manufacturing, the Government on Wednesday approved Rs 33,660 crore Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA) to develop 100 plug-and-play industrial parks across the country.

The scheme aims to develop world-class industrial infrastructure, unlocking manufacturing potential and driving India's growth story, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said while briefing reporters on Cabinet decisions.

The Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the BHAVYA scheme, which is expected to generate about 15 lakh direct jobs. Under the scheme, industrial parks ranging from 100 to 1,000 acres will be taken up for the development with financial support of up to Rs 1 crore per acre.

These parks will have core infrastructure like internal roads, underground utilities, drainage, common treatment facilities, ICT and administrative systems.

Besides, there would be value-added

CCEA approves Rs 1,718.56 cr for cotton procurement operations

NEW DELHI, Mar 18 (PTI)

The Government on Wednesday approved Rs 1,718.56 crore funding to Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) for procurement operations. The decision was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"In a significant step towards strengthening farmer welfare and advancing the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, the CCEA has approved Minimum Support Price (MSP) funding of Rs 1,718.56 crore to the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) for the cotton season 2023-24," an official statement said.

infrastructure like ready-built factory sheds, built-to-suit units, testing labs, warehousing and social infrastructure, including houses for workers and other amenities. Moreover, he said, support for external infrastructure will also be provided up to 25 per cent of the project cost,

Cabinet approves Rs 2,585 cr Small Hydro Power Devpt Scheme

NEW DELHI, Mar 18 (PTI)

THE Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a small hydro power development scheme with an outlay of Rs 2,585 crore to boost the development of 1,500 MW of renewable capacity.

"Small Hydro Power Development scheme approved by the Cabinet with an outlay of Rs 2,585 crore," Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters after the meeting of the Union Cabinet here. The Minister stated that the projects will be developed as run-of-river projects without constructing dams and displacing people.

ensuring seamless connectivity and integration with existing networks.

Project selection will be undertaken through a challenge mode, ensuring that only high-quality, reform-oriented and investment-ready proposals are taken forward.

Govt approves Rs 6,969 cr for four-lane UP road project

NEW DELHI, Mar 18 (PTI)

THE Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the construction of a 4-lane access-controlled National Highway-927 from Barabanki to Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh at a cost of Rs 6,969.04 crore.

The 101.515 km project aims to provide seamless connectivity to key economic, social, and logistics hubs across Uttar Pradesh, according to an official statement.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the construction of the 4-lane Access-Controlled National Highway-927 from Barabanki to Bahraich on Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM) for Rs 6,969.04 crore, it said.

The project involves a civil cost of around Rs 3,485.49 crore and an additional Rs 1,574.85 crore for land acquisition.

The project would generate 36.54 lakhs person-days (direct) and 43.04 lakh person-days (indirect) new employment opportunities.

About 90 ships cross Strait of Hormuz as Iran exports millions of barrels of oil despite war

HONG KONG, Mar 18 (AP)

ABOUT 90 ships including oil tankers have crossed the Strait of Hormuz since the outset of the war with Iran and it is still exporting millions of barrels of oil at a time when the waterway has been effectively closed, according to maritime and trade data platforms.

Many of the vessels that passed through the strait were so-called "dark" transits evading Western government sanctions and oversight that likely have ties to Iran, maritime data firm Lloyd's List Intelligence said.

More recently, vessels with ties to India and Pakistan have also successfully crossed the strait as

governments stepped up negotiations.

As crude prices spiked above USD 100 a barrel, US President Donald Trump pressured allies and trade partners to send warships and reopen the strait, hoping to bring oil prices lower.

Most shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway for global oil and gas transport that supplies roughly one-fifth of the world's crude oil, has been halted since early March, after the war started. About 20 vessels have been attacked in the area.

However, Iran has still managed to export well above 16 million barrels of oil since the beginning of March, trade data and analytics platform Kpler esti-

mated. Due to Western sanctions and associated risks, China has been the biggest buyer of Iranian oil. There has been "continued resilience" in Iran's oil export volumes, said Kpler trade risk analyst Ana Subasic.

Iran has managed to profit from oil sales and also "preserve its own export artery" by using control over the chokepoint, said Kun Cao, client director at consulting firm Reddal.

Iran's oil export data estimates are largely aligned with maritime traffic data.

At least 89 ships crossed the Strait of Hormuz between March 1 and 15 including 16 oil tankers, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence, down from rough-

ly 100 to 135 vessel passages per day before the war.

More than one-fifth of the 89 vessels were believed to be Iran-affiliated, while Chinese and Greece affiliated ships are among the rest, it said.

Other vessels also have been getting through.

The Pakistan-flagged crude oil tanker Karachi, controlled by the Pakistan National Shipping Corp., passed through the strait on Sunday, Lloyd's List Intelligence said.

Shariq Amin, a spokesman at the Pakistan Port Trust, refused to confirm or deny which route the MT Karachi had used but he said the ship would soon safely reach Pakistan.

Pak's long-range ballistic missiles could potentially target US: Tulsi Gabbard

■ **By Sagar Kulkarni**

WASHINGTON, Mar 18 (PTI)

UNITED STATES' intelligence chief Tulsi Gabbard on Wednesday told lawmakers that Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile development could include missiles capable of targeting the US.

In a testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Gabbard, the Director of National Intelligence, also said that the threats to the US were set to expand collectively from more than 3,000 missiles at present to more than 16,000 missiles by 2035. "The US secure nuclear deterrent continues to ensure safety in the Homeland against strategic threats. However, Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and Pakistan have been researching and developing an array of novel, advanced, or traditional missile delivery systems with nuclear and conventional payloads that put our Homeland within range," Gabbard said.

She said the US Intelligence Community assesses that threats to the Homeland will expand collectively to more than 16,000

missiles by 2035, from the current assessed figure of more than 3,000 missiles.

"The IC assesses that China and Russia are developing advanced delivery systems meant to be capable of penetrating or bypassing US missile defences," Gabbard said.

The US top intelligence official said that North Korea's ICBMs can already reach US soil, and it is committed to expanding its nuclear arsenal.

"Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile development potentially could include ICBMs with the range capable of striking the Homeland," Gabbard said.

She said that Iran has previously demonstrated space launch and other technology it could use to begin to develop a militarily viable ICBM before 2035, should Tehran attempt to pursue the capability.

"However, these assessments will be updated as the full impact of Operation Epic Fury's devastating strikes on Iran's missile production facilities, stockpiles, and launch capabilities is determined," Gabbard said.

China ignores Trump's Hormuz request as Iran war deepens

WASHINGTON, Mar 18 (AP)

CHINA won't help the United States reopen the Strait of Hormuz as requested by President Donald Trump, but it is probably welcoming the delay in Trump's highly anticipated trip to Beijing as the US risks getting bogged down in the Middle East, analysts say.

The latest developments are unfolding as Trump's Iran war, in its third week, is faced with mounting pressure as oil has stopped moving through the strait and US allies have refused to step up to secure the strait.

That has produced concerns that China, the United States'

biggest geopolitical rival, could stand to benefit from a war that some say was ill-considered.

"President Trump's request to delay his long-awaited summit with President Xi Jinping underscores how significantly he underestimated the fallout from Operation Epic Fury," said Ali Wyne, senior research and advocacy adviser for US-China relations at the International Crisis Group.

"A show of US force that was meant to intimidate Beijing has instead served to puncture the illusion of US omnipotence: Unable to reopen the Strait of Hormuz alone, Washington now needs its principal strategic com-

petitor to help it manage a crisis of its own making."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry gave a nonanswer when asked if it would help reopen the strait but repeated its call for "parties to immediately stop military operations, avoid further escalation of the tense situation and prevent regional turmoil from further impacting the global economy."

Beijing, which had never officially confirmed Trump's state visit, originally scheduled for March 31, has signalled willingness to work with the US to reschedule the visit by stating that the two sides "remain in communication."

It even helped clarify that the postponement had nothing to do with Trump's request for China to help reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

On Tuesday, Trump said the Chinese "were fine" with the delay and claimed "a very good working relationship with China."

Sun Yun, director of the China programme at the Stimson Centre, said, "I think the Iran request is now going to be less pressing for China to fulfil." At the same time, Chinese diplomats have been engaging with countries in the Middle East, pledging a constructive role in easing tensions and restoring peace.

No signs of M-E war slowing



New high-tech missiles launched from Iran streak across the sky over central Israel. (AP/PTI)

DUBAI, Mar 18 (AP)

IRAN lashed out following the killing of one of its top officials in an airstrike with attacks on its Persian Gulf neighbours and Israel on Wednesday, using some of its latest missiles to evade air defences and killing two people near Tel Aviv as the war in the Middle East showed no signs of slowing.

Responding to Israel's killing of Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security

Council and one of the country's most powerful figures, the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said on Wednesday that it had targeted central Israel with multiple-warhead missiles, which have an increased chance of evading missile defence systems and can overwhelm radar tracking systems.

Iran's Guard said the force launched the Khorramshahr-4 and Qadr multiple-warhead missiles to avenge Larijani's killing. Footage filmed by The

Associated Press showed at least one missile releasing cluster munitions over Israel.

Israel said two people were killed in Ramat Gan, east of Tel Aviv. Larijani, a former Parliamentary Speaker, was a senior policy advisor to the late Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on strategy in nuclear talks with the Trump administration.

Larijani was sanctioned by the US Treasury in January for his role "coordinating" Iran's violent (Contd on page 3)

Israel claims killing Iran's Intelligence Minister Khatib

DUBAI, Mar 18 (AP)

ISRAEL'S Defence Minister said on Wednesday that the Israeli military killed



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