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India, Russia to ink deal on choppers

A deal for production of Russian Ka-226T helicopters in India will be inked during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's forthcoming visit to Moscow. Modi will meet Russian President Vladimir Putin at the annual India-Russia summit in Moscow on December 24. With both leaders keen to boost bilateral defence cooperation, they are likely to discuss proposals for Russia providing advanced missile defence system and leasing out another nuclear-powered submarine to India, apart from production of Ka-226T helicopters by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in Goa. Dmitry Rogozin, Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, said negotiations between New Delhi and Moscow for the "major helicopter project" have neared their conclusion. "We hope the relevant intergovernmental agreement that will support production of Russian helicopters in India can be reached on December 24," Rogozin, who was in New Delhi for preparation of the prime minister's visit to Moscow, said.

The Hindu

10 December 2015

Scorpene P75 programme progressing well

Amrita Nair-Ghaswala

Mazagon Dock Limited, the shipyard that manufactures warships and submarines for the Indian Navy, is producing six Scorpene submarines under transfer of technology from DCNS, a French industrial group that specialises in naval defence and energy. The first submarine (INS Kalvari) was undocked this April after much delay. All six SSK Scorpene submarines (the P75 programme) are slated to be ready to serve the nation by 2020. DCNS is a private limited company in which the French state holds a 64 per cent stake, and Thales Group holds 35 per cent of the capital. The Group generated annual revenues of around •2.93 billion in 2013. To enable local production of the Scorpene equipment, DCNS India, DCNS Group's subsidiary in India, has selected and is to qualify certain Indian companies as partners. Bernard Buisson, Managing Director, DCNS India, tells BusinessLine that on-the-job training in France for the first Scorpene submarine would have saved precious time, but asserts that all the teething problems have been overcome, and that the P75 programme is progressing at cruising speed. Edited excerpts:

Give us an idea about the company and its operations in India. How long has it been present in the country? DCNS has been involved with the Indian Navy since the mid 80's when we first participated in the preliminary design phase (a small study on feasibility study) of the first Indigenous Aircraft Carrier, (INS Vikrant), now being built at the Cochin shipyard. We are now assisting Mazagon Dock Limited in Mumbai to build, through comprehensive and genuine transfer of technologies, six P75 submarines. DCNS is committed to long-term partnerships and close collaboration with the Indian Navy and the local shipbuilding industry. It is for this reason that the Group set up DCNS India Private Limited, a subsidiary specialising in naval services, in March 2009.

The company is known as a leader in naval defence...

The company is a unique player in naval systems. We are the only company developing such a range of solutions with OPVs (offshore patrol vessels) to CVN (the Group has provided refuelling and complex overhaul of the aircraft carrier CVN Charles-de-Gaulle), and from SSKs (Scorpene class) to SSBNs (ballistic missile submarines) and associated services.

Give us an idea about the DCNS Scorpene submarine programme to the Indian Navy and what is its current status?

We are assisting Mazagon Dock to build six P75 submarines through transfer of know-how at unprecedented levels and are providing our Indian partners with technical assistance and transfer of technologies to manufacture equipment through indigenisation programmes. The P75 programme is progressing well at cruising speed now. After the undocking of the first submarine on April 6, 2015, INS Kalvari was set afloat on October 29, to start harbour and sea acceptance tests.

Could you give us a take on the P75 timelines, given that the project has been running behind schedule?

One of the big constraints in this programme is there was no On-the-Job Training (OJT) in France for the first submarine, since all six submarines are to be constructed entirely in India. OJT would have allowed a faster learning curve and saved time. However, all initial teething problems, inevitable when any shipyard resumes manufacturing submarines after a break of many years, have been overcome, and Mazagon Dock Limited is now proceeding at a nominal pace for the construction of all the six submarines. We are confident that the timelines announced by Mazagon Dock for the commissioning of the first P75 submarine should be met, with the others being delivered at nine months intervals.

PM visit to Russia: Nuke expansion on agenda, LS told

The upcoming visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Russia is expected to see the two countries deciding on expansion of nuclear programme, Government told the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. Minister of State for PMO Jitendra Singh said the earlier visits of the Prime Minister to various countries were also marked by signing of agreements to procure uranium and give boost the nuclear programme. "I would like to point out that one of the major achievements of the Prime Minister's foreign trips in the last few months is the reinforcement of our uranium and our nuclear programme," he said. Singh said the pacts signed during Modi's foreign visits included an agreement with Canada in April for procuring 5,000 metric tonne (MT) of uranium. "During his (PM) visit to Kazakhstan, we could finalise a deal for 7,000 MT uranium. During his visit to Australia, a Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, which had waited for several years, was finalised," the Minister said while replying to questions. He said during Modi's visit the US, a deal was finalised for the construction of nuclear reactors in Gujarat and during the visit to France, a deal was finalised with AREVA, world's leading nuclear power company. "For the visit of the Prime Minister to Russia, a programme has been finalised for expansion of nuclear programme," he said about the trip expected later this month. Singh said India currently has a storage of 2,25,000 tonnes of uranium and is the richest source of thorium.

Gujarat looks to make a mark in defence manufacturing

NDA government has granted about 22 industrial licences to Gujarat to set up defence manufacturing units in the state.

by Avinash Nair

Gujarat which is looking to make a mark in indigenous production of defence equipment is in the process of preparing a policy on defence manufacturing, official sources said Wednesday. "Gujarat is also in the process of preparing it's policy for defence manufacturing. But we are waiting for the Government of India's policy, because both the policies have to be complimentary and supplementary to each other," said Manoj Aggarwal, vice-chairman and MD of Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC), while speaking at the inaugural session of Defence Conclave 2015. "At present the defence production policy of 2011 is in existence, which encourages the manufacture of defence equipment in the state," he said adding that the state with more than six lakh registered MSMEs providing employment to over 39 lakh people "can contribute immensely" to this sector. "As far as manufacture of defence equipment is concerned, GIDC is ready to play it's part," Aggarwal added. Speaking at the same event, Devanshu Gandhi, Chairman of CII Gujarat State Council and MD of Vadilal Industries told the gathering at the conclave that NDA government has granted about 22 industrial licences to Gujarat to set up defence manufacturing units in the state. These licenses have been given during since May 2014 and attempts to set up defence manufacturing bases in Kutch, Bhavnagar, Amreli, Surat, Bharuch and other districts of the state. Among those who have been granted these licences by the Modi government recently include AMW Motors who will be manufacturing light armoured vehicles, infantry mobility vehicles, armoured recovery vehicles, shelters and containers for military applications, bullet proof jeeps and troop carriers, special attack and surveillance vehicles and others in Kutch district. In October 2014, Vadodara-based Swallow systems Pvt Ltd has been granted licences to manufacture mini and micro UAV with ground support systems, composite aerospace components and UAV training simulators and avionics. In this year, Pipavav Defence & Offshore engineering Company Ltd has been given a host of permission including those to manufacture helicopters, aircraft and their parts, electro optical systems like thermal imaging cameras, underwater systems like hull-mounted sonars, medium tanks, medium artillery guns, launchers or ground control and support equipment in Amreli district of the state. Modest Infrastructure Ltd has been given approval to manufacture anti-submarine/torpedo nets, and hull penetrators and connectors specially designed for military use in Bhavnagar district. Other like Fedders Lloyd Corporation Ltd has been granted licences to build all types of heavy weapons, artillery guns, Howitzers etc in Bharuch district, while Asteria Aerospace has been given licences to build unmanned aerial vehicles specially designed for military application in Kheda district. Among the companies who are presently into defence manufacturing in Gujarat include ABG Shipyard Limited which has been granted clearance to manufacture naval warships, naval support ships, submarines and underwater vessels, fast attack crafts and various weapons and equipment at Magdala Bundar in Surat and Bharuch. Larsen & Tubro also has one of the biggest defence manufacturing unit at Hazira near Surat.

Government approves financial assistances for ships built in India

Cabinet on Wednesday approved a proposal for financial assistance of 20 per cent for ships built in the country in a bid to promote the shipbuilding industry under the 'Make in India' initiative. The implementation of the policy, which would be in force for 10 years, requires a budgetary support of Rs 4,000 crore. The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the proposal for introducing measures to encourage shipbuilding and ship repair industry in India under the ambitious 'Make in India' programme, an official statement said. "It includes a policy for grant of financial assistance to shipyards, after delivery of ship, to counter cost disadvantages at 20 per cent of the contract price or the fair price, whichever is lower; such assistance is to be reduced at 3 per cent every three years and will be given for all types of ships," the statement said. This policy will be in force for ten years, it said, adding the implementation of this policy would require a budgetary support of Rs 4,000 crore during this period. The proposal also includes grant of a Right of First Refusal for Indian shipyards for Government purchases; tax incentives and grant of infrastructure status for shipbuilding and ship repair industry. The statement said the promotion of the shipbuilding and ship repair industry in India is important as it has "the same impact as the infrastructure sector due to higher multiplier effect on investment and turnover (11.6 and 4.2) and high employment potential due to multiplier effect of 6.4." Besides, the shipbuilding industry is strategically important industry due to role in energy security and maritime defence and for developing heavy engineering industry, it said. The policy will give a big boost to the shipbuilding and ship repair industry and will facilitate the 'Make in India' initiative of the Government of India," it added. The shipbuilding industry was demanding financial assistance for long.

The Economic Times

10 December 2015

Russia's Second N-site in India to be Announced During Modi Visit

Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

India is expected to allot a second site to Russia for a nuclear power plant in Andhra Pradesh and the announcement could be made when Narendra Modi visits Moscow for the bilateral annual summit on December 24-25. Expansion of the civil nuclear partnership was discussed during Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin's visit to India on Tuesday. Rogozin, who met Modi and the NSA, also focused on expanding counter-terror cooperation. This includes sharing information and perspectives on rise of IS and Russian military action in Syria, officials informed. "The two sides discussed further development of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant as well as the construction of new Russia-designed NPPs at other sites in India. We are moving in the right direction," Rogozin told Russian news agency Tass after his meetings in Delhi. A person familiar with Indo-Russian nuclear cooperation informed, "Discussions between Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Government of Andhra Pradesh for location of the second Russian technology based Light Water Reactor (LWR) Nuclear Power Plant are at an advanced stage." Meanwhile, construction work on the third and fourth units of Russian assisted Kudankulam nuclear power plant is expected to start in 2016. These are planned to be commissioned in the years 2020-2021. Russia has also proposed a plan to involve India in building Russiadesigned nuclear power plants in third countries, the cooperation is to be extended also to the area of joint extraction of natural uranium and the production of nuclear fuel and atomic waste elimination. Negotiations of this nature have taken place and this could lead to joint construction of power stations and other aspects of cooperation, including the training of personnel in other Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka, officials indicated. The only nuclear power plant in Bangladesh so far is being built by Russia. And India has nuclear cooperation with all these three countries. Explaining Indo-Russian discussions on expanding counterterrorism cooperation, Rogozin told TASS, "...The PM visit will have a deep meaning. It is extremely important for discussing joint actions and the creation of a broad counter-terrorism coalition and also for exerting joint efforts in conditions when the two countries have not only found themselves on the one side of the barricades but are in the vanguard of this struggle (against terrorism). According to Rogozin, the appearance of the Islamic State (IS) metastases in the territory of Afghanistan has aggravated the situation even further. "The Taliban used to be perceived as an exclusively domestic phenomenon for Afghanistan. ISIS (or IS) is something absolutely the opposite. They are as radical or even more radical (than the Taliban), and they also have global ambitions...India fully supports Russia's efforts to fight terrorism...It is not surprising that everything we discussed in New Delhi today largely concerned struggle against terrorism and radical forms of Islam," Rogozin said, adding the Indian side fully supported Russia's (antiterror) efforts, including those directed at fighting the most radical manifestations of religious terrorism the Islamic State (IS).

Russian Defense Ministry deploys S-300, S-400 missile systems in Arctic

The Kola anti-aircraft defense formation has put on combat duty to protect the Russian state border a new air defense missile regiment of the Northern Fleet, spokesman for the Northern Fleet Captain 1st Rank Vadim Serga said on Wednesday. "The regiment has been formed and is permanently deployed on the Novaya Zemlya archipelago. It is equipped with the S-300 modernised air defense missile systems, capable of repulsing enemy's airborne threat, hitting its targets within the range of several hundred kilometres," he said. The anti-aircraft missile regiment, stationed in Novaya Zemlya has become the first full-fledged military unit of the Northern Fleet formed on the islands of the Arctic Ocean. Until now, only a few units and groups have been formed on the archipelagos of the Arctic islands. On Tuesday, a source in the General Staff of the Russian army told TASS that Russia has formed and deployed to the Arctic this year two S-400 Triumph (NATO reporting name: SA-21 Growler) separate air defense (AD) missile regiments. "Two S-400 regiments have been activated and deployed to the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago and the settlement of Tiksi in Yakutia this year," the officer told TASS at an international forum that focused on discussing the Arctic's present and future. According to the source, Pantsir-S AD (SA-22 Greyhound) missile/gun system batteries have been deployed along with the S-400 regiments to provide close-in defense for the S-400s. In addition, a Bastion (SSC-5 Stooze) coastal defense missile battalion has been deployed to Novaya Zemlya. "The units are on alert round the clock," the source stressed. In addition, the source said, coastal defense missile, AD missile and AD missile/gun units have been deployed and placed on alert duty on all other Arctic islands and in some areas on Russia's Arctic mainland, too. "Aircraft control posts and radio-technical, radar and space surveillance unit positions have been established in all of their stations along the Northern Sea Route from the Kola Peninsula and Novaya Zemlya to Anadyr and Cape Schmidt in the east. All of them are on alert duty," the source summed up. The General Staff source told TASS previously that six Russian military bases had been set up in the Arctic, specifically on Kotelny Island (New Siberian Islands), Sredny Island (Severnaya Zemlya), Alexandra Land (Franz Josef Land Archipelago), the Rogachyovo settlement on Novaya Zemlya, Wrangel Island and Cape Schmidt in the Chukotka Peninsula. The Russian Federation is reported to plan the construction of a total of 13 airfields and 10 technical radar posts in the Arctic. In recent years, Russia has been building military infrastructure in the Arctic proactively. The Unified Strategic Command comprising, inter alia, a number of units from the Western, Central and Eastern military districts was formed on the basis of the Russian Navy's Northern Fleet in late 2014. In addition, new large units are being activated for the new command, two motor-rifle brigades in particular. The S-400 Triumph is a Russian-made long/medium-range surface-to-air missile system designed for dealing with all current and in-development aircraft and aerospace-launched weapons. The Triumph destroys aerodynamic targets (e.g. cruise missiles and tactical and strategic warplanes) at a range of 400 km and ballistic threats (battlefield ballistic missile warheads travelling at a speed of 4.8 km/s) at 60 km. The S-400's radars have a 600-km target acquisition range and its 48N6E3 missiles engage aerodynamic targets at an altitude of 10-27,000 m and ballistic ones within the 2-25,000-m altitude bracket.

The Pioneer

10 December 2015

Turkey says not dependent on Russia for N-plant

Turkey on Wednesday insisted it was not dependent on Russia to build its first nuclear power plant amid uncertainty over the \$20 billion project because of the crisis in relations between Ankara and Moscow. Russia's state atomic agency Rosatom began constructing the plant in Akkuyu in the southern Mersin province on the shores of the Mediterranean in April. But the Kremlin has refused to emphatically commit to the project's future after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane on the Syrian border on November 24, prompting Moscow to impose selected economic sanctions on Ankara. "We need to clearly say that just as we are not dependent on one door for trade, Turkey is not a prisoner of one country's technology regarding its nuclear plants," Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus told the state-run Anatolia news agency. "We know that there are many countries, many companies that are ready to respond to Turkey's demands." Akkuyu is the first of three nuclear power plants Turkey currently plans to build to reduce its dependence on importing energy from oil and gas exporters like Russia and Iran. A second plant is due to be built by a French-Japanese consortium in the Black Sea city of Sinop while a third plant is also envisaged in Igneada also on the Black Sea. "I don't believe that the Russians would easily relinquish Akkuyu," said Kurtulmus. Turkey, which imports over half its natural gas needs from Russia, has sought to emphasise it can cope with any retaliatory action from Moscow in the crisis. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Saturday that Ankara could find alternatives to Russian oil and gas although he emphasised there was "no sign" so far that Moscow could cut off supplies.

Pentagon confirms patrols of Chinese nuclear missile submarines

By Bill Gertz

China has begun patrols with nuclear missile submarines for the first time, giving Beijing a new strategic nuclear strike capability, according to the U.S. Strategic Command and Defense Intelligence Agency. U.S. intelligence and strategic nuclear officials, however, remain uncertain whether China's four Jin-class missile submarine patrols are being carried out with nuclear-tipped JL-2 missiles on board. DIA and Strategic Command representatives said this week that there were no changes to DIA's assessment earlier this year that China would begin the nuclear missile submarine patrols this year. The problem for officials in declaring the Jin-class submarines a new Chinese strategic nuclear threat is a lack of certainty that Chinese Communist Party leaders have agreed to the unprecedented step of trusting operational submarine commanders with control over the launching of nuclear missiles. Navy Capt. Pamela S. Kunze, Strategic Command spokeswoman, elaborated on comments by Adm. Cecil Haney, the Strategic Command commander, and confirmed that the nuclear submarine patrols were taking place. She told Inside the Ring: "Given China's known capabilities and their efforts to develop a sea-based deterrent, in absence of indicators to the contrary, it is prudent to assume that patrols are occurring." Adm. Haney said in October that he was not waiting for China to announce its first nuclear missile patrols because, as with most other issues related to Chinese nuclear forces, the capabilities of the submarines remain hidden by military secrecy. "The Chinese have had these submarines at sea this year, so I have to look at it as operational capability today," the four-star admiral said. "And [I] can't think that when those submarines are at sea that they aren't on patrol." The real question, the Stratcom leader said, is: "Have they put the missile we've seen them test, the JL-2, in for a package that is doing strategic deterrent patrols? I have to consider them today that they are on strategic patrol," he said, meaning the submarines were equipped with nuclear missiles. For the U.S., that means "there's another capability that's out there having nuclear capability of ranges that can strike the United States of America," the admiral said. The patrols mark a significant turning point for the Chinese. In the past, Beijing stored all nuclear warheads separately from its missiles, in part to demonstrate what China calls its policy of "no first use" - that it would not be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict and would use them only in retaliation for hostile nuclear attacks. Another reason warheads are kept separate is the Communist Party's near-paranoid obsession with political control. Separating warheads from missiles allows for a greater centralized control over the nuclear arsenal, which is estimated to be 300 warheads but is likely far larger. Chinese authorities fear giving a submarine commander control over the launch of nuclear missiles and worry that one of the military's hawks could ignore the party's nuclear chain of command and order a nuclear strike on his own. Patrols by Jin-class submarines with nuclear-armed JL-2s, if confirmed, mark a new stage in Communist Party trust with the People's Liberation Army. Sending the Jin submarines on patrol without nuclear missiles or warheads would be viewed as a hollow gesture and undermine the intended message behind the capability to launch stealthy underwater missile attacks. China is extremely secret about its nuclear forces. However, PLA missile submarines appear to be different. In 2013, state-run Chinese media published details on contingency plans to attack the western United States with submarine-launched missiles, an attack that would kill what the Global Times newspaper estimated would be up to 12 million Americans. The congressional U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, in its annual report made public last month, said the missile submarine patrols will mark China's "first credible at-sea second-strike nuclear capability." The Hong Kong newspaper Ming Pao reported in September that the first nuclear submarine patrols had taken place. The commission report quoted PLA Navy Commander Adm. Wu Shengliang saying: "This is a trump card that makes our motherland proud and our adversaries terrified. It is a strategic force symbolizing our great-power status and supporting national security." Recent Chinese military enthusiast websites have posted photographs of suspected Chinese submarine tunnels. One was shown Oct. 7 at a naval base on Shangchuan Island, along the southern Chinese coast near Hong Kong. In May, photos posted online showed the opening of a nuclear missile submarine cave at an undisclosed location.

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Pentagon confirms patrols of Chinese nuclear missile submarines

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ISLAMIC STATE EXPANDS IN LIBYA - The Islamic State terrorist group is expanding operations inside Libya, in addition to moving into other regions such as Afghanistan and Southeast Asia from Syria and Iraq, according to U.S. intelligence officials. One alarming indicator of increased Islamic State activities is a slew of reports from Libya indicating that Islamic State terrorists are training to fly commercial airliners, raising fears that the group is planning high-profile suicide attacks using hijacked airliners. U.S. intelligence estimates put the number of Islamic State jihadis in Libya at 4,000 to 5,000. Information on the use of a flight simulator in the Libyan city of Sirte was provided to U.S. intelligence agencies recently and triggered concerns that the group was preparing for attacks in Europe and elsewhere. A CIA spokeswoman declined to comment. Officials confirmed U.S. concerns about the flight training after details were disclosed in Arabic press reports. Libyan military sources told the Arabic-language British newspaper Alsharq al-Awsat last week that airstrikes were carried out by Libyan government forces to try to destroy the flight training facility near the Sirte airport. Sirte, located on the Gulf of Sidra halfway between Tripoli and Benghazi, is under control of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS and ISIL, which is expanding its activities in the North African state. The flight simulator was seized by Libyan terrorists who have conducted numerous attacks on airports in the war-torn country, which is battling several terrorist groups including the Islamic State and al Qaeda. Last year, intelligence officials said there were reports that Islamist militias had seized nearly a dozen commercial jetliners in August following militia attacks on Tripoli's international airport. Libya's government, however, claimed that all commercial aircraft of the Libyan state airline were accounted for. A Libyan military official told Alsharq al-Awsat that investigators initially suspected the simulator in Islamic State hands was stolen, but newer information indicated that the car-sized training simulator was new and had come from outside the country. Reports also stated that the Islamic State had also obtained a military flight simulator recently. Libyan government forces attempted to destroy the simulators in Sirte but were unable to succeed. As a result, the equipment was moved to another location. The Islamic State training center was said to be near the Sirte international airport, about 20 miles south of the city in an area captured by Islamic State terrorists in May. Three damaged civilian aircraft and three helicopters are at the airport. Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook said in a statement Monday that a U.S. airstrike in Libya killed senior Islamic State leader Abu Nabil in Darnah, a town east of Benghazi, on Nov. 13. "Nabil's death will degrade ISIL's ability to meet the group's objectives in Libya, including recruiting new ISIL members, establishing bases in Libya, and planning external attacks on the United States," Mr. Cook said in an earlier statement.

DUNFORD VS. CARTER - The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joseph Dunford, voted with his presence - or rather, his absence - in opposing the Obama administration's decision to open military combat slots to women. Defense officials said Gen. Dunford, who as Marine Corps commandant was opposed to women in front-line infantry combat units, was initially scheduled to appear at a news briefing with Defense Secretary Ashton Carter Dec. 3 to announce the policy. However, when it came time for the briefing, Gen. Dunford declined to take part. Asked why the chairman was not present, Mr. Carter provided his best spin for reporters: "I'm announcing my decision. I was the one who took this decision. I'm announcing my decision." Mr. Carter said he had "talked to [Gen. Dunford] extensively" about the issue and "he will be with me as we proceed with implementation." The secretary did not deny there was opposition from Gen. Dunford. He acknowledged that he drew "different conclusions" from studies about whether women in front-line combat units would harm war-fighting capabilities. Capt. Greg Hicks, a spokesman for Gen. Dunford, said: "The decision and the announcement were ones the secretary made. The latter was an opportunity for him to express it." Capt. Hicks said Mr. Carter answered questions about the absence of Gen. Dunford. "The chairman's responsibility now is to implement the decision," he said.

Iran Missile Tests Violating Nuclear Deal

By Adam Kredo

Leading lawmakers are lashing out at Iran for violating the recently approved nuclear deal by conducting a series of ballistic missile tests that some say could be used to perfect nuclear weapons technology. Iran this week reportedly conducted its second test of a ballistic missile since the deal was announced. Such testing is prohibited under United Nations Security Council resolutions, which Iran maintains it has not violated. U.S. State Department officials could not confirm that the test had taken place, but insisted that it is under "serious review" and could constitute a violation of U.N. resolutions. This review could prompt "appropriate actions," according to the State Department. Critics in Congress have continued to apply pressure to the Obama administration, which they accuse of sweeping Iranian transgressions under the rug in a bid to keep the deal intact. The missile test comes as Iran continues to increase its military presence in Syria and other countries. Additionally, the Islamic Republic has sunk financial resources into boosting its missile program, as well as its fighting forces. Sen. Ted Cruz (R., Texas), a vocal opponent of the nuclear agreement, said that Iran would continue to violate the agreement because it does not believe there will be any repercussions. "Nobody should be surprised that Iran is already breaking the agreement," Cruz said. "They never intended to follow the agreement. Iran knew that. The Obama administration knew that. Israel knew that. Everyone knew it. This is about a domestic objective for the Obama administration." Cruz warned that Iran will use the millions of dollars it is receiving as part of the deal to fund its global terrorist operations. Iran "will continue breaking the deal, using the millions of dollars the Obama administration is trying to send them, to fund radical Islamic terrorists across the globe who will murder innocent Americans, innocent Europeans, and innocent Israelis, and to accelerate their nuclear weapons development program." Citing a recent report from the International Atomic Energy Organization that found Iran had been working on nuclear weapons technology until at least 2009, Cruz criticized the Obama administration for turning a blind eye to Iranian transgressions. "Those are questions that the Obama administration is unwilling to ask," he said. "Because this deal was never about preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. On the face of it, the only consequence of this deal will be that Iran will acquire nuclear weapons." Sens. Mark Kirk (R., Ill.) and Kelly Ayotte (R., N.H.) on Tuesday wrote to President Obama, demanding that his administration take concrete action to address Iran's violations of the agreement. The administration is "inviting" Iran to continue breaking international agreements, the senators write. "We reiterate our belief that a failure to hold Iran accountable to its international obligations will invite more violations from Tehran and further endanger the security of Americans and our allies," the letter states. "In short, we would like to know what specific steps your administration plans to take to respond Iran's two ballistic missile tests in as many months." The senators also raise questions about the White House's claims that Iran's ballistic missile program is separate from its nuclear weapons program. "While your administration has attempted to treat Iran's ballistic missile program as separate from Iran's nuclear program, this approach does not withstand scrutiny—as [Director of National Intelligence James] Clapper's testimony makes clear," they write. "Iran is developing [intercontinental ballistic missile] capabilities and the sole purpose of an Iranian ICBM is to enable delivery of a nuclear weapon to the United States." When asked what Congress can do to address potential failures of the nuclear agreement, Cruz criticized Republican leadership for stymieing efforts among some to block sanctions relief. "There's no doubt Congress could act to prevent the implementation of this catastrophic nuclear deal," he said in the interview. "I've been pressing leaders in both houses to do that." "Unfortunately," Cruz said, "Republican leadership has not been willing to use the full constitutional authority and all the tools we have to prevent the deal from going into effect. In fact, the focus seems to be more on securing a show vote than stopping millions of dollars from flowing to the [Iranian leader] Ayatollah Khamenei." Sen. Bob Corker (R., Tenn.), chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also expressed concern this week about the international silence following Iran's missile test. "Iran violates U.N. Security Council resolutions because it knows neither this administration nor the U.N. Security Council is likely to take any action," Corker said in a statement. "Instead, the administration remains paralyzed and responds to Iran's violations with empty words of condemnation and concern." "If we cannot respond to a clear violation of a U.N. Security Council resolution, I have no faith that the U.N. and the Obama administration will implement any form of snapback in response to Iranian violations of the nuclear agreement," Corker said. The Obama administration "has the authority to penalize" Iran and its allies, but is refusing to exercise it, Corker said.

US: 'Seriously reviewing' Iran missile launch

Louis Charbonneau And Michelle Nichols

The United States is reviewing and seeking to confirm reports that Iran launched a ballistic missile in November in violation of UN Security Council resolutions, US ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, said on Tuesday. "The US is conducting a serious review of the reported incident," Ms Power told reporters after a meeting of the Security Council on unrelated issues. She added that if Washington confirmed the reports that Iran tested a medium-range ballistic missile on November 21 in violation of UN resolutions, the United States would bring the issue to the 15-nation council and seek appropriate action. A Western diplomatic source said last week on condition of anonymity that the test of a Ghadr-110, a spinoff of the Shahab-3 missile, was held near Chabahar, a port city near Iran's border with Pakistan. He said it was a liquid-fuelled missile with a 1,900 km range and was capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. All ballistic missile tests by Iran are banned under a 2010 Security Council resolution that remains valid until a nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers is implemented. Under that deal, reached on July 14, most sanctions on Iran will be lifted in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme. According to a July 20 resolution endorsing that deal, Iran is still "called upon" to refrain from work on ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons for up to eight years. In October, the United States, Britain and France called for the Security Council's Iran sanctions committee to take action over a test by Tehran of a nuclear-capable missile that month that they said violated UN sanctions. So far, no action has been taken by the committee, though Ms Power said council members would be discussing the issue next week. She added that the United States could take unilateral steps against Iran, though Tehran has warned it would treat any new sanctions as a breach of the nuclear deal.

The Asian Age

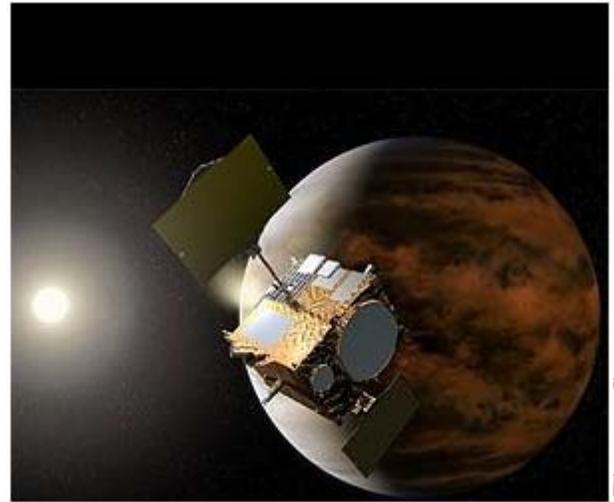
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China military paying 'close attention' to U.S. plane deployment

China's military is paying "close attention" to an agreement between the United States and Singapore to deploy the U.S. P8 Poseidon spy plane to the city state and hopes the move does not harm regional stability, the Defence Ministry said. "We are paying close attention to how the relevant situation develops, and hope bilateral defense cooperation between the relevant countries is beneficial to regional peace and stability and not the opposite," the ministry said in a brief statement late on Tuesday. The foreign ministry of China, which is at odds with Washington over the South China Sea, said on Tuesday the move was aimed at militarizing the region. In a joint statement after a meeting in Washington on Monday, U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter and Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen welcomed the deployment of the aircraft in Singapore from Dec. 7 to 14. A U.S. defense official said further deployments in Singapore could be expected. Ng told a seminar in Washington on Wednesday that Singapore had agreed the P8 deployment would be "rotational" and said it added further "substance" to Washington's assurances that it would continue to act as a stabilizing force in Asia. China claims almost all of the energy-rich waters of the South China Sea, through which more than \$5 trillion of maritime trade passes each year. The Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Malaysia and Taiwan have overlapping claims. The United States already operates P8s from Japan and the Philippines, and has conducted surveillance flights from Singapore's neighbor, Malaysia. Washington has criticized China's building of artificial islands in the South China Sea's disputed Spratly archipelago, and has conducted sea and air patrols near them. Last month, U.S. B-52 bombers flew near some of China's artificial islands and at the end of October a U.S. guided-missile destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of one of them. In May, the Chinese navy issued eight warnings to the crew of a U.S. P8 that flew near the islands, according to CNN, which had reporters on the aircraft.

Japanese space probe goes into orbit around Venus

Japan's space agency said Wednesday its "Akatsuki" probe had successfully entered into orbit around Venus after an initial attempt at reaching the second planet from the sun failed five years ago. The success marks the first time a Japanese space probe has entered into the orbit of another planet, according to Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). "The probe is functioning properly," Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) project manager Masato Nakamura said during a press conference. "We'll conduct an initial observation for three months... We'll then shift to full observation in April," he said. Akatsuki, meaning dawn, blasted off in 2010 on a 25.2 billion yen (\$205 million at current exchange rates) mission to observe the toxic atmosphere and super-hot volcanic surface of Venus. But the box-shaped probe failed to enter the planet's gravitational pull and shot past it, forcing JAXA technicians to make the second attempt. The successful Venus orbit came a week after another Japanese space probe, "Hayabusa 2", passed by Earth to harness the planet's gravitational pull to propel it toward a far away asteroid in its quest to study the origin of the solar system. The explorer conducted an "Earth swing-by" and came as close as 3,090 kilometres (1,900 miles) above the planet's surface, before switching its orbit to continue towards the tiny Ryugu asteroid. Hayabusa 2 was launched a year ago on a six-year mission to bring back mineral samples from the asteroid. It is expected to reach Ryugu, named after a mythical castle in a Japanese folk tale, in mid-2018. If all goes well, soil samples will be returned to Earth in late 2020. Analysing the extra-terrestrial materials could help shed light on the birth of the solar system 4.6 billion years ago and offer clues about what gave rise to life on Earth, scientists have said.



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First dengue vaccine in, set to debut in Mexico

This vaccine could potentially become "a blockbuster" and generate more than a billion dollars in revenue for the French pharmaceutical company. The first-ever vaccine against dengue fever, which affects up to 400 million people per year, has been cleared for use in Mexico, French manufacturer Sanofi said today. "It's a very important moment in the history of public health," Olivier Charmeil, head of the company's vaccines division, told AFP, describing Dengvaxia as the "innovation of the decade". This vaccine could potentially become "a blockbuster" and generate more than a billion dollars in revenue for the French pharmaceutical company, Charmeil added. It took 20 years and more than 1.5 billion euros (USD 1.6 billion) in research and development to create Dengvaxia. Until now, scientists have been stumped by dengue which is caused by four separate viruses acting in concert. The World Health Organization says dengue has become the fastest-growing mosquito-borne disease, with as many as 400 million people infected every year. It can trigger a crippling fever, along with muscle and joint pain, and there is no known cure. The deadliest form of the disease kills 22,000 people per year, the WHO says. Over the past half-century, dengue has become endemic in more than 100 tropical and sub-tropical countries, thanks largely to rapid urbanisation. Sanofi Pasteur has requested authorisation to push the vaccine in 20 countries. "We are waiting for more registrations in Asia and Latin America in the coming weeks," said Charmeil. Several million doses of the vaccine are ready to ship, and Sanofi expects annual production to reach 100 million doses by 2017. A stockpile for the European Union will be shipped in early 2016 and in the United States a year later. Clinical tests - carried out on 40,000 people from 15 countries - have found Dengvaxia can immunise two-thirds of people aged nine years and older, rising to 93 per cent for dengue hemorrhagic fever, reducing the risk of hospitalisation by 80 per cent.