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In a Big Boost to Defence, India Successfully Tests Glide Bomb

Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon is described as a 120 kg smart weapon, which is capable of engaging targets with high precision up to a range of 100 km

<p>Indigenous Effort Guided bomb released from the aircraft, reached the targets at greater than 70 km range, with high accuracies</p> 	<p>Three tests of the SAAW with different release conditions and ranges were conducted and all were successful, says defence ministry</p>	<p>Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman congratulates DRDO scientists and IAF</p>
<p>Chairman of DRDO S Christopher says SAAW will soon be inducted into the armed forces</p>		

India on Friday successfully test-fired an indigenously-developed, lightweight 'glide bomb' at Chandipur in Odisha. The 'smart anti-airfield weapon' (SAAW), developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation's Research Centre Imarat (RCI), other labs and the Indian Air Force, was fired from an air force aircraft.

“The guided bomb released from the aircraft and guided through precision navigation system, reached the targets at greater than 70 km range, with high accuracies,” the defence ministry said in a statement. Three tests of the SAAW with different release conditions and ranges were conducted and all were successful, it said.

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman congratulated the DRDO scientists and the IAF for the successful tests.

S Christopher, chairman of DRDO, said SAAW will soon be inducted into the armed forces.

The SAAW project was sanctioned in September 2013. In May last year, the DRDO conducted the weapon's first test from an IAF Jaguar aircraft in Bengaluru.

The second test was conducted from a Su-30MKI fighter in December last year. SAAW has been described as a 120 kg smart weapon, which is capable of engaging targets with high precision up to a range of 100 km. The long-range will allow the IAF to easily hit targets across the border without putting the pilot and aircraft at risk. It can be integrated into the varied types of fighter jets with the IAF. The weapon can be used to destroy bunkers, runways, aircraft hangers and other reinforced structures.

DRDO successfully tests guided bomb

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully tested an indigenously developed light weight glide bomb, Smart Anti Airfield Weapon (SAAW), which can target large enemy infrastructure, like airfields.

“The guided bomb released from an Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft and guided through precision navigation system, reached the targets at greater than 70 km range with high accuracies,” the Defence Ministry said in a statement on Friday. The tests were conducted at Chandipur in Odisha.

Air force beefs up Ladakh front

By Ajit K Dubey

In The aftermath of the Doklam crisis, India is now planning to develop more airfields in the eastern Ladakh area along the China border so that it can rapidly deploy troops in large numbers in case of any misadventure by the neighbouring state. "In Ladakh, we have realised that deploying troops for a long time or throughout the year is not feasible. Harsh winters and rough terrain make the job all the more difficult.

This is why we plan to develop airfields where we can deploy troops in large numbers using air assets," a top defence source said. The Air Force is scouting airfields in the area from where the transport aircraft of the force can land and take off whenever required, the source said.

Sources said during the height of the Doklam crisis, the Indian and Chinese armies had deployed close to 9,000 troops (equal to one infantry division) opposite each other for carrying out exercises in their respective areas.

The Indian Army had issued an operational alert during the crisis as part of which the troops had been deployed by it from the newly-raised mountain strike corps. "Two brigades (6,000 troops) have already been withdrawn from there and sent back to their actual locations after we called off the alert about 10 days ago," the source said. Sources said the troops could not have been retained in the area due to the onset of harsh winters and beginning of snowfall, which would have completely blocked land routes and forced them to rely on air evacuation.

The deployment of an additional division meant the army had close to 20,000 troops in eastern Ladakh at the height of the crisis. In normal conditions, it has only one division (Karubased 3 Infantry Division). As per inputs received by intel agencies, Chinese units are also withdrawing from their areas gradually.

The search for a new airfield is expected to revive the Indian Air Force's Nyoma airfield project that has been stuck for many years now, as it would be turned into a full-fledged base where all types of transport aircraft can land. The IAF had once landed its Antonov-32 aircraft at this airfield and has been trying to develop it as its base closest to the Chinese border in eastern Ladakh. Sources said the IAF.

The search for a new airfield is expected to revive IAF's Nyoma airfield project. The IAF had once landed its Antonov-32 aircraft at this airfield and has been trying to develop it as its base closest to the Chinese border in eastern Ladakh. had also tried to look at Chushul for developing an airfield but it did not seem to be a viable project and is more interested in the development of Nyoma where the air strip was last used in the 1960s.

Nyoma is located at a height of 13,000 feet and India stopped using it after the war with China in 1962, but reactivated it in 2009. India is also upgrading all its seven Advance Landing Grounds (ALGs) in Arunachal Pradesh, some of which have already been activated. IAF's C-130J Super Hercules planes have already landed there. These are not fullfledged air bases but landing strips which can be used to drop off troops and supplies. Some can be used for refueling fighter jets.

The Arunachal ALGs were also deactivated after the 1962 war. Since August, India and China were engaged in a bitter stand-off on Bhutanese soil in Doklam as the Chinese were building a road to Jhamphiri which would have brought it very close to our chicken's neck area which separates the northeastern states from rest of the country.

India-US Defence Ties - Howdy, Major Defence Partner

By Keith Webster

In the past few years, India has transformed rapidly across all sectors. The most notable change has been the engagement of the US and Indian defence and aerospace industries and government organisations. This relationship has expanded over the past four-and-a-half years and it will only continue to flourish.

A primary focus has been given in cementing the successes and gains on the US side, which culminated in a joint statement between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former President Barack Obama in June 2016 and the historic announcement of the designation of India as a 'Major Defence Partner'. The significance of this statement is notable.

On observing the historic effects of joint statements and presidential papers, one will see their importance in ensuring continuity of momentum across subsequent administrations. Furthermore, for the bureaucracies responsible for acting upon the resulting policy changes, these statements and presidential papers serve well for maintaining momentum even when legislative adjustments are absent.

A case in point is the opening of relations with China by President Richard Nixon and US secretary of state Henry Kissinger in the early 1970s. Their historic work was sustained in part by the body of presidential papers published that further enabled subsequent administrations and their staff to sustain the momentum with respect to China. Joint statements serve as enablers and reference points that can carry weight through numerous administrations, regardless of the political back ground.

Even more significant was the US Congress's ability to cement the designation as a 'Major Defence Partner' into law as part of the FY 2018 National Defense Authorisation Act (NDAA). Defence cooperation emerged as the cornerstone of US-India relationship, a conclusion not only reinforced by the current Donald Trump administration, but was the view of the previous administration as well.

So far, Trump and his team have viewed the India relationship as critically important and have embraced the Major Defence Partner status. As such, the Trump administration seeks to provide the most advanced technology and capability while jointly exploring opportunities to further expand military-to-military cooperation.

Washington views the US-India Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) and associated cooperation on both capability and technology as necessary and are seeking ways to 'raise the bar'.

Approval of the historic sale of 22 Sea Guardian drones to India marking the first-time approval for a Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) Category 1 capability outside of an allied partnership -is proof that this administration greatly values the India relationship and has used this approval as evidence of embracing the Major Defence Partner status.

With the recent visit of US secretary of defence James Mattis last month to India, the Trump administration has committed to further defining the Major Defence Partner status. And by doing so, it has expressed its cooperation with the Government of India.

The recent visit to India by US secretary of state Rex Tillerson also reinforces the importance of India to the US. It provided yet another opportunity to message the importance of this relationship with regard to business opportunities.

Tillerson confirmed his advocacy for the F16 and F18s aircraft for India, recognised the need to further define the Major Defence Partner status, and was pleased with his ability to deliver the historic Sea Guardian decision earlier this summer. Overall, he is very bullish on the opportunities for US industries in India and is doing his part to support these efforts.

This is now a great time in history to capitalise on the institutional gains of the past few years by further developing and building out the defence relations of the two democratic countries.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

Indo-US JWG on aircraft carrier technology cooperation concludes

The 4th meeting of the IndoUS Joint Working Group on Aircraft Carrier Technology Co-operation (JWGACTC), set up by the Indo-US Defence Trade and Technology Initiative noted that significant achievement had been made on cooperation in various aspects of aircraft carrier technology.

The six-day meeting, which was attended by a 13- member US delegation headed by Rear Admiral Brian Antonio, Program Executive Officer Aircraft Carriers, visited the shore-based test facility at Goa, Naval Base at Karwar, INS Vikramaditya at sea, Mazagaon Dock Limited and Headquarters of the Western Naval Command. During the meeting, both sides acknowledged the significant achievements of the JWG so far and discussed plans for future cooperation under various aspects of aircraft carrier technology.

The meeting marked a significant landmark in cooperation between the two countries in the field of aircraft carrier technology.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

Remembering Major Sharma First Param Vir Chakra recipient

Wreath-laying ceremonies in honour of one of the most gallant martyr of the Indian Army, Major Somnath Sharma, was organised on Friday at his Memorial at the New Airport and at the Badgam War Memorial in Kashmir.

On 22 October 1947, when Pakistan launched the tribal invasion of Jammu & Kashmir with intention to grab Kashmir Valley by force, the D Company of 4 Kumaon, led by Major Somnath Sharma, was airlifted to Srinagar on 31 October as part of the Army's response after the Instrument of Accession was signed. Major Somnath Sharma with his arm in plaster, on 3 November established a base at Badgam against raiders approaching Srinagar from the Northern direction.

In the contact that followed, despite facing a numerically superior enemy force of about 700 raiders supported with small arms, mortars and heavy automatics, Major Sharma and his troops held on to their positions and did not let the enemy succeed in their designs. The gallant effort of the soldiers stemmed the tide of the enemy advance on Srinagar and the airfield for some very crucial hours. In this decisive battle of Badgam, Major Somnath Sharma along with one JCO and 20 other ranks made the supreme sacrifice defending their country against all odds. For his unparalleled courage, leadership and dedication, beyond the call of duty, Major Somnath Sharma was conferred upon the country's First & Highest War time Gallantry Honour, The Param Vir Chakra. Major Sharma belonged to Himachal Pradesh.

Major General BS Raju, Victor Force Commander, laid wreath at the Budgam War Memorial and Brigadier Suresh Chavan, Commandant, JAK LI Regimental Centre laid the wreath on behalf of Chinar Corps

at his Memorial as a mark of their respect for the martyr. Besides Officers and men of the Army, representatives from the BSF, JKP and Airport Authority also laid the wreaths and attended the event to pay their homage to the martyr.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

The Indian Army should not be used to build bridges in Mumbai

By Barkha Dutta

The soldier isn't a 'stepney' to bring in every time the vehicle of civil administration develops a snag

Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look on them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death", says the ancient Chinese military treatise; the 'Art of War' - attributed to Sun Tzu.

In our country, the heroism of the military – made even more poignant by the staggering humility of the Indian soldier – has been repeatedly brought home. It has stood by the citizenry not only 'unto death'; but in every national crisis – riots, floods, earthquakes, evacuations – even crowd control. Soldiers have courageously gone to battle; but more than that they have helped to keep the peace. Even today a flag march by the Army – through neighbourhoods that have been divided by violence and hate or in the most volatile and scarred areas of insurgency zones – carries a moral authority and calming influence that no other institution does.

But there is a certain sanctity to the uniform that we need to respect at all times; its virtue cannot be confused with easy availability for jobs meant for others.

The soldier is not a 'stepney' to be brought in every time the vehicle of civil administration develops a snag; he is not a spare part meant to fix faulty administrative performances. Which is why, the decision by the government to use the Army to build footbridges in Mumbai – after a stampede at Elphinstone killed 23 people in September has created a gigantic furore.

We must ask: What is the accountability of the country's richest civic body – the BMC's budget this year was over 25,000 crore rupees – that it needs to deploy the military for a job that should squarely fall with its ambit? Where is the Public Works Department? And these are elected bodies that are able to take positions and express themselves freely in a way that a silent soldier never can. If it is bridges today, will it be the cities killer – potholes – tomorrow?

I don't disagree with the Railway Minister's impulse to bring urgency to the matter – bureaucratic delays in a new tender for the Elphinstone bridge cost lives – and he is right in assessing that the Army will deliver ahead of deadline. But it's one thing to count on the troops to build pontoons and baileys in emergencies or their aftermath; it's quite another to use them in more controlled situations. The BJP is not the first party to have fallen back on the military because of civilian failure; the Congress did it too. During the commonwealth games when the UPA was in power, a suspension bridge crashed on the street. The Army was called in to reconstruct it in a record five days, saving India from international embarrassment.

The precedent set by either of these decisions is institutionally unhealthy. There is already seething, if unexpressed, resentment among soldiers at the overweening influence of 'babudom' in their lives and the lack of parity with the bureaucracy. While the military's core characteristic is discipline and thus you will almost never hear a soldier complaining, a number of retired chiefs have spoken of the need for a greater say in decisions that are directly related to the military. The disquiet over the 7th Pay Commission and its perceived inequality in pay, pensions and stature between the civilian cadres and the military, was serious enough for the serving chiefs to write to the prime minister.

Though the government tried to address many anomalies under the Ashok Lavasaled panel, the military is still angry at what it sees as a downgrading of its rank and authority. A high-level committee under the Defence Ministry to unpack these sensitive issues of equivalence has not reached any consensus yet. Promotions can be quicksilver in the bureaucracy and even in the police and paramilitary, compared to the military, creating an intractable set of inequities and problems in the chain of command, especially in areas where both are on duty together. And while the government has doubled the hardship allowance of soldiers at Siachen and in the Naxalite areas, there is still residual resentment over similar perks for bureaucrats in postings like Guwahati. Also don't forget, while a civil servant retires at 60, 85% of the Army is compulsorily retired between 35 and 37.

If the military is going to be used to do the job of municipal bodies or the local police, the simmering tension in the civil-military equation over emoluments and status, will only worsen. Of course the Centre's decision is guided by an entirely sincere intention; but it comes with risks and warnings. The soldier must never be used as a stop-gap.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

IAF MiG-27 gets stuck on Jodhpur runway

Three passenger flights were stuck at Jodhpur Civil Airport after a fighter jet developed a technical snag leading to damage on the runway . About 300 passengers, who were to fly out, remained stuck at the airport and incoming ones could not land.

“While landing, the IAF MiG-27's tyre burst and there was some problem with its ending gear. As a result, the plane's nozzle hit the ground,“ said a source.

With the plane stuck and reports of damage to the airstrip, flight movements had to be stopped. Airport authorities and IAF were trying to remove the plane from the run way . Jodhpur Airport director G K Khare said a schedule flight of SpiceJet and Air India each bound for New Delhi and a non-schedule Jaipurbound flight of Supreme Airways could not take off.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

Why China can't be India's friend

By Harsh V Pandit

Surprise, surprise! China for the fourth time blocked India, the US and other nations' bid to list Pathankot terror attack mastermind Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, arguing that “there is no consensus” within the members of the sanctions committee. New Delhi's reaction was pointed. “Deeply disappointed that once again a single country blocked international consensus on designation of an acknowledged terrorist Masood Azhar. India strongly believes that double standards will only undermine international community's resolve to combat terrorism,” the ministry of external affairs said, adding that “India hopes there will be realisation that accommodating with terrorism for narrow objectives is shortsighted and counterproductive.”

Sanctions

China was the only member in the 15- nation UN Security Council last year to put a hold on India's application despite all the other members supporting New Delhi's bid to place Azhar on the 1267 sanctions list that would subject him to an assets freeze and travel ban. Despite the latest block, Beijing's chutzpah is to be

admired. It has gone ahead to suggest that it is “ready to work with India to promote constant progress of bilateral relations guided by this diplomacy with Chinese characteristics for the new era,” by highlighting China’s efforts at making consistent efforts to promote bilateral relations and develop mutual political trust with its neighbours over the past few years. The BRICS declaration of 2017 issued at Xiamen, China, had generated significant euphoria in India.

The 43-page declaration, adopted by the five-member states of the BRICS grouping, took a strong stance against terrorism for the first time since its inception, expressing “concern” over the security situation in the region and the violence caused by the Taliban, ISIS, Al Qaeda and its affiliates including Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT), Jaishe-Mohammad (JeM), Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Hizbut-Tahrir. This was a remarkable turnaround for a grouping that was unwilling to talk of groups like LeT and JeM based in Pakistan till last year. At the 2016 Goa summit of BRICS, China had led the way in scuttling any mention of these groups in the declaration despite India making it a priority issue. This had caused considerable dismay in India with many observers questioning the very utility of BRICS platform for India of even on issues like terrorism there was little or no convergence among the five member states.

This year’s BRICS summit happened under the shadow of Sino-Indian standoff at Doklam and so China’s acceptance of India’s case has come as a surprise to many. New Delhi successfully managed to convey its strong feelings on the issue of terrorism to Beijing and Xi Jinping, who wanted to make the BRICS summit a success, had no compunction in taking on the issue as part of the declaration.

Stand

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang justified his country’s stand by suggesting that with this declaration, BRICS countries have “shown their concerns to the violent activities raised by these organisations... These organisations are all sanctioned by the UN Security Council and have a significant impact for Afghanistan issue,” Geng underlined. That Pakistan saw this as a real challenge was evident in foreign minister Khawaja Asif’s remarks: “We (Pakistan) need to break our false image. We have no stake but there is baggage. We need to accept the history and correct ourselves.”

Islamabad was worried about China’s stance and Asif made it clear that Pakistan needed “to tell our friends that we have improved our house. We need to bring our house in order to prevent facing embarrassment on an international level.” While there is much to commend in the way Indian diplomacy managed to get Chinese support on this issue and the likely pressure it put on Pakistan to clean up its act, it should have also been evident that it won’t change much on the ground in so far as Sino-Pak ties were concerned. Days after the declaration, Beijing assured Pakistan that there is “no change” in its policy with Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Sun Weidong underscoring that “the BRICS declaration mentioned organisations which are already banned.”

Terrorism

Pakistan’s foreign minister too paid a visit to China when he was reassured by the Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, that “there has been no change in Chinese policy regarding Pakistan... Pakistan and China are in constant contact regarding regional challenges”. He further stressed that China supports Pakistan’s stand on terror. The two nations also joined hands to rebuff the Trump Administration’s new Afghanistan policy. Taking a contrary stand to that of Trump’s, Wang suggested that Pakistan has not been given “full credit” for its efforts to battle terrorism by “some countries.” Weng said, “When it comes to the issue of counterterrorism, we believe Pakistan has done its best with a clear conscience. In comparison, some countries need to give Pakistan the full credit it deserves.” Given China and Pakistan’s close ties, this should hardly be a surprise. China’s support for the BRICS declaration was merely a tactical ploy to make the summit a success given New Delhi’s categorical stand on the issue but its long-term strategic interest has always been to build Pakistan as an equal to India to block New Delhi’s ascent in global hierarchy. And that long-term strategy is not going to change any time soon. With its recent action on Masood Azhar’s case, China has once again made it clear that it doesn’t see good Sino-Indian relations as a priority. It is guided by its shortterm tactic of scuttling India’s

regional and global rise. India should prepare itself economically, militarily, and diplomatically for a long-term rivalry with China. The writer is Professor of International Relations, King's College London



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

U.S. may term N. Korea as sponsor of terror

Option being considered: White House

The U.S. is mulling to designate North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism, the White House has said, as President Donald Trump embarked on his five-nation Asia trip on Friday during which the issue of the reclusive nation would be taken up prominently.

“That is an option that’s under consideration,” the National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster told reporters at a White House news conference when asked if designating North Korea a state sponsor of terrorism was an option for the U.S..

“The President’s Cabinet is looking at this as part of the overall strategy on North Korea,” he said.

Mr. McMaster lashed out at the North Korean regime for the “murder” of Kim Jong-nam, the estranged brother of its dictator Kim Jong-Un.

“A regime that murders someone in a public airport using nerve agent, and a despotic leader who murders his brother in that manner, that’s clearly an act of terrorism that fits with a range of other actions,” Mr. McMaster said.

Concerted effort

There was a concerted effort to isolate North Korea economically. And that had been combined with a major diplomatic effort that asks all countries to do more, he said, adding that there was “tremendous momentum” behind that now.

Mr. McMaster rued that approaches in the past had not delivered on halting and then reversing North Korea’s “very dangerous” nuclear and missile programs.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

N Korea accuses US of rehearsing ‘nuclear strike’

North Korea has accused the US of being ‘gangster-like imperialists’ trying to ‘ignite a nuclear war’ after supersonic bombers flew over the Korean Peninsula in a show of force. The US Air Force said two B-1B Lancers based in Guam were joined by two South Korean F-16 fighters and aircraft from the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force. The drills simulated attacks on land targets, but did not involve live weapons, an Air Force official said. But North Korea’s state media denounced the exercise as a ‘surprise nuclear strike drill’.

Pyongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency said: “The US imperialists are making last-ditch efforts to check the dynamic advance of the DPRK (North Korea) by deploying their nuclear strategic assets in succession, but its army and people are never frightened at such moves.” It added: “The gangster-like US imperialists are ceaselessly resorting to their frantic nuclear threat and blackmail to stifle the DPRK with nukes at any cost.” Tensions are high over Pyongyang’s ballistic missile and atomic programmes, which in recent months have included ICBM tests and its sixth nuclear blast.

The North Korean nuclear threat will likely overshadow President Donald Trump’s trip to Asia, which starts on Sunday in Japan and will include stops in South Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines. Trump’s

visit will throw a spotlight on the issue, after Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un traded insults and threats of war. In a statement, the US Air Force explained that the exercise was part of the ‘continuous bomber presence’ mission in the Pacific and ‘was not in response to any current event’. The operation follows an October 10 ‘show of force’ in which two Lancers staged the first night-time joint aviation exercises with Japan and South Korea. North Korea in July launched two intercontinental ballistic missiles apparently capable of reaching the US mainland — described by Kim as a gift to ‘American bastards’.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

US sends supersonic bombers over South Korea

US bombers overflew the Korean peninsula as part of an exercise with Japanese and South Korean warplanes, the US Air Force said, days before President Donald Trump arrives in the region for a trip set to be dominated by the nuclear-armed North. Tensions are high over Pyongyang's ballistic missile and atomic programmes, which in recent months have seen it test ICBMs and carry out its sixth nuclear blast. Trump's visit will throw a spotlight on the issue, after the US President and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un traded insults and threats of war. Flights by supersonic B-1B Lancer bombers in the area always infuriate North Korea, which condemned the drill as “blackmail” early Friday.

Two B-1B aircraft took off from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, and were joined west of Japan by Japan Air SelfDefense Force fighters, the US Pacific Air Force said in a statement. “The Lancers then transited overland to Korea to integrate with Republic of Korea fighters in the Yellow Sea,” the statement read, adding that the aircraft later returned “to their respective home stations.” The exercise was part of the “continuous bomber presence” mission in the Pacific and “was not in response to any current event,” the statement said. The operation follows an October 10 “show of force” in which two Lancers staged the first night-time joint aviation exercises with Japan and South Korea. North Korea in July launched two intercontinental ballistic missiles apparently capable of reaching the US mainland -- described by Kim as a gift to “American bastards”.

It followed up with two missiles that passed over Japan, and its sixth nuclear test, by far its most powerful yet. Trump has warned of “fire and fury” in response to Pyongyang's threats, and derisively dubbed Kim “Rocket Man”, who responded by calling him a “dotard”. This week the North's KCNA news agency described the US president as “incurably mentally deranged”.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

Twin Iraq and Syria attacks as Islamic State loses last city

Syrian troops retake last major city Deir Ezzor, Iraqi forces seize a crossing by IS' last urban bastion

Syrian troops today retook the last major city where the Islamic State group had a presence as Iraqi forces seized a crossing by the jihadists' last urban bastion across the border. The simultaneous assaults on Deir Ezzor in eastern Syria and Al-Qaim in western Iraq dealt fresh blows to IS in its former heartland, leaving Albu Kamal, on the Syrian side of the border, the last town of note under its full control. The jihadist group that once laid claim to a self-styled “caliphate” spanning swathes of Syria and Iraq has seen its proto-state crumble in recent months under the pressure of multiple offensives.

In October, it lost its onetime de facto Syrian capital Raqa after an assault of more than four months waged by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-Arab alliance. Today, Syria's army announced

that its Russianbacked assault had recaptured all of Deir Ezzor city, in the oil-rich east of the country, while Iraqi forces captured the Husaybah border post on the edge of the town of AlQaim. “The army forces... restored security and stability to all of Deir Ezzor city,” a spokesman for the army command said in a statement broadcast live on state television. “Deir Ezzor represents the final phase in the complete elimination of Daesh,” the statement added, using the Arabic acronym for the group.

The city “was the headquarters of the organisation's leadership, and in losing it, they lose their capacity to direct terrorist operations,” the statement added. State television said engineering units from the army were combing captured neighbourhoods to clear mines and other explosives. Syrian forces entered Deir Ezzor city in September, breaking an IS siege of nearly three years on government-held parts of the provincial capital. The battle has been ferocious, with heavy Russian air strikes and Syrian artillery fire leaving much of the city in ruins. A reporter contributing to AFP inside the city yesterday saw entire floors of buildings that had crashed onto those beneath, while on others, facades were completely blown away to reveal empty, destroyed interiors. Trenches dug by IS fighters were still visible, as were army minesweepers working to locate and defuse explosives laid by the jihadists.

Before Syria's war began in March 2011 with antigovernment protests, around 300,000 people lived in the city, the capital of Deir Ezzor province along Syria's eastern border with Iraq.



Sat, 04 Nov, 2017

Another close-by planetary system?

The ALMA Observatory in Chile has detected dust around the closest star to the Solar System, Proxima Centauri. These new observations reveal the glow coming from cold dust in a region between one to four times as far from Proxima Centauri as the Earth is from the Sun.

The data also hint at the presence of an even cooler outer dust belt and may indicate the presence of an elaborate planetary system. These structures are similar to the much larger belts in the Solar System and are also expected to be made from particles of rock and ice that failed to form planets. ALMA study revealed that emission from clouds of cold cosmic dust were surrounding the Proxima Centauri.