

Vladimir Putin takes part in Russian military drills, fires missiles

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Moscow: President Vladimir Putin has taken part in major military drills of Russian nuclear forces and personally directed the test-firing of four intercontinental ballistic missiles as part of the exercises, the Kremlin said Friday.

File pic of Russian President Vladimir Putin

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the drills Thursday involved all elements of the military's nuclear triad -- nuclear submarines, strategic bombers and a land-based launcher. Peskov said that the exercises were routine and not directly linked to any international developments.

Still, the president's direct involvement in overseeing intercontinental ballistic missile launches is an event that has been rarely reported by the Kremlin in the past.

Peskov wouldn't elaborate on what specific part Putin played in the war games, saying that the president "take the necessary moves in line with the standard procedure for relevant situations as the commander in chief."

The Russian Defense Ministry said that in Thursday's drills, a Topol ICBM fired from the Plesetsk launchpad in northwestern Russia hit a designated target on the Kura firing range on the Kamchatka Peninsula in the far east.

A nuclear submarine in the Barents Sea also launched an ICBM at the same Kura range, while another nuclear submarine in the Sea of Okhotsk fired two ICBM in the opposite direction, hitting targets at the Chizha firing range in the Arkhangelsk region in Russia's northwest.

As part of the manoeuvres, the Tu-160, the Tu-95 and the Tu-22 bomber launched cruise missiles at mock targets at firing ranges on Kamchatka, the Komi region in the far North and in Russia's ex-Soviet neighbour Kazakhstan.

The manoeuvres are the latest in a steady series of war games intended to strengthen the troops' readiness amid tensions with the West.

- AP