

India studying NATO offer on joining missile programme

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) invitation to India in the first week of September to be a partner in its ballistic missile defence (BMD) programme is being analysed, according to V.K. Saraswat, Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister.

"We are analysing the report. It is under consideration," he said on September 30 after the successful launch of the Agni-II ballistic missile from the Wheeler Island on the Orissa coast.

India has so far conducted six interceptor missile tests as part of its quest to establish a credible shield against ballistic missiles launched from adversarial countries. Of these, five interceptor tests, including the first three in a row, were successful.

The first interceptor missile test took place in November 2006.

These six tests featured a missile launched from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur on the Orissa coast, mimicking the path of a ballistic missile coming from an "enemy country" and an interceptor launched from the Wheeler Island destroying the incoming missile in mid-flight.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is the author of India's BMD programme and Dr. Saraswat is the programme's architect. He is DRDO Director-General.

BALLISTIC CLASH

A top DRDO official had described an interceptor destroying an incoming ballistic missile in mid-flight as "hitting a bullet with a bullet."

After three successful test-flights of Shourya, Prithvi-II and Agni-II missiles, all surface-to-surface missiles, on September 24, 26 and 30, the DRDO is getting ready to launch Agni-II Prime from the Wheeler Island. "The two stages of Agni-II Prime, their rocket motors and the re-entry vehicle are ready," the DRDO Director-General said.

Tessy Thomas, Project Director, Agni-II Prime, said: "We are flying" the Agni-II Prime in the first week of November and that "everything is ready" for the launch. The two-stage missile has a range of 3,000 km.

It will lift off from a road-mobile launcher, that is, a huge truck. Ms. Thomas was confident that a problem in the control system of Agni-II Prime in its maiden flight in December 2010 would be overcome this time.

The DRDO is also busy with the maiden launch of the Agni-V ballistic missile in December. The three-stage, surface-to-surface missile can take out targets 5,000 km away.

ON SCHEDULE

“Agni-V is on schedule. We will launch it as announced by the Raksha Mantri [Defence Minister A.K. Antony] by the end of this year,” said Avinash Chander, Chief Controller (Missiles and Strategic Systems), DRDO. “All the sub-systems have been tested.”

Both the Agni-II Prime and Agni-V can carry nuclear warheads.

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