

ICBM Agni-V Test Put on 'Hold' For Modi's US Visit

Bhubaneswar: The much awaited experimental test of the canisterised version of India's most potent and long range nuclear capable missile Agni-V has reportedly been put on hold for the scheduled visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US on June 6.

According to reliable sources in the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the purported last developmental trial of the indigenously built surface-to-surface Inter-Continental range Ballistic Missile (ICBM) would be conducted after the PM returns from the foreign visit.

Besides the joint session of the US Congress, the PM is slated to address the 41st Annual Leadership Summit in Washington DC to be attended by business tycoons and government leaders who are likely to debate over the deepening US-India commercial and strategic ties on June 7.

Although the missile is ready to display its fire power, defence sources said, the test has been delayed for over past six months for strategic reasons. Earlier planned in December last year and then early January, the test was reportedly postponed due to the visit of US President Barack Obama and busy schedule of Modi who was slated to witness the launch along with Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar.

A source on the condition of anonymity said while the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) have already given the green signal for the test, the DRDO is yet to get any communication from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

“While the DRDO is waiting for the PM’s confirmation to witness the launch, the PMO is yet to give confirmation on the visit of the PM to the test facility. The test now completely depends on the schedule of the PMO,” the source claimed.

Although India secretly conducted two tests of submarine launched ballistic missile K-4 in March from under water platform in depressed range of less than 1,000 km, as the Agni-V, is in a ready state of induction, it would be fired from a hermetically sealed canister to its full range of around 5,000, km which is a threat for the powerful nations.

The delay has however irked the defence and strategic experts. They believed the decision at the highest levels of government was owing to Washington’s supposed allergy to rising powers displaying their distant strike capabilities.

An eminent national security expert and professor at New Delhi based Centre for Policy Research (CPR) Bharat Karnad said the last year's test was postponed not to upset Washington as Obama was to tour Delhi.

"Now it has been put on hold because Prime Minister does not want his upcoming visit to the US, the fourth in last two years since he took office, to be marred by the launch of a missile that President Obama may deem provocative. He seems more eager to please Washington than to strengthen India's strategic muscle vis a vis China," he observed.

With a strike range of over 5,000, Agni-V is the country's first ICBM which is capable of hitting targets in all Asian countries and parts of Africa and Europe. The 17-meter long, 2-meter wide, three-stage, solid-fuelled missile can carry a payload of 1.5 tonne and weighs around 50 tonnes.

As a canister-launch system gives the forces the requisite operational flexibility to promptly transport the ballistic missile and launch it from a place of their choice, the DRDO is also working on the canister version of other Agni series of missiles including Agni-I, Agni-III and Agni-IV.

A successful launch of the missile from the Abdul Kalam Island test facility off the Odisha coast would push a step forward towards its induction in the armed forces signaling the defence organization to go for its production. Local DRDO authorities refused to comment.

Game Changer

- Strike Range – 5000 km, can target all of Asia and parts of Africa and Europe
- Length – 17 meter
- Diameter – 2 meter
- Launch weight – 50 tonne
- Payload – 1.5 tonne
- Engine – Three stage solid fuel
- Speed - Mach 24 (terminal phase)

Agni-V makes India a member of the elite club of six nations including the US, UK, China, France and Russia which have intercontinental ballistic missile capabilities.