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Tessy Thomas Missiles and the woman

The Missile Woman of India or Agni Putri, as she is fondly called, Tessy Thomas, has played key roles in many nuclear projects of India, particularly in the making of its long-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile, the Agni-V.

She is a scientist from India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), who became the first woman engineer to head a missile project (Agni- IV). Born in 1963, in Kerala, Tessy Thomas, who was named after Mother Teresa, grew up looking at rockets being launched from Thumba, a former space launching station in Kerala. Her love for science and mathematics started to take shape. After an M.Tech from Defence Institute of Advanced Technologies, Pune, she was taken at DRDO for a guided weapon course and then as a scientist in 1988. There has been no looking back since then. Like Tessy Thomas, there are quite a few women working in key weapons programmes in DRDO.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Missile deal a sign of deepening Israel ties

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India's decision to enter into joint development with Israel — cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) last week — for medium range surface-to-air missiles (MR-SAM) for the Indian Army is a further sign of improving qualitative ties between the two nations since diplomatic relations were normalised in 1992. The deal is expected to be pegged at around Rs 17,000 crores for five regiments of the missile consisting of 200

pieces having a range of 50-70 km. It seeks joint development between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).

The system will be manufactured in India and is likely to have 80 per cent indigenous content. Deliveries are set to begin by 2023. This system for the Army's use will be based on the older production of Israeli Barak-8 missile system and for the Navy's use collaboratively between DRDO and IAI.

To that extent, there is no novelty in the decision over medium-range missiles for the Army. Indeed, if Prime Minister Narendra Modi does visit Israel in the coming months, as appears likely, it is not unthinkable that a more ambitious India-Israel relationship may be posited. This will be on the lines of the elevating of India-UAE ties after the PM's trip to Abu Dhabi last year.

Given that India is already Israel's largest arms buyer, and Israel is among the top three arms sellers to India — along with the US and Russia — New Delhi's relations with the Jewish state have already attained something of a strategic dimension. Intelligence-sharing is also done due to common concerns relating to terrorism, even if on key international issues, specially those relating to West Asia, a gap still remains between India's perceptions and Israel's, although this gap is narrowing somewhat under Mr Modi, with India abstaining on UN resolutions which criticise Israel. This is the difference with the past.

Two leading considerations have guided the burgeoning of India's ties with Israel. One, India's relations with Israel's Arab neighbours remains sound, except that New Delhi doesn't allow one to have a veto over the other. Such a dynamic, underwritten by practical considerations, has not so far adversely affected either this country's political stance on the Palestinian question or its deepening all-round ties with Israel.

Two, it is also felt in New Delhi that positive and expanding ties with Israel will help New Delhi develop a special constituency in the United States, with which successive Indian governments have sought to build close strategic ties, sometimes to criticism within the country. All in all, positive bilateral relations with Israel are useful to both sides. Specifically on defence acquisitions, the net should be expanded to take in the key European powers as well.

IHS Jane's 360

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India approves Army MR-SAM acquisition

Key Points

- *MR-SAM solution will be a co-development between IAI and the DRDO, based of the Barak LR*
- *Proposed deal envisages five missile regiments comprising 40 firing units*

India's Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 22 approved an INR170 billion (USD2.53 billion) joint development of a Medium Range Surface-to-Air missile (MR-SAM) system with Israel for the Indian Army (IA).

A development of the Barak 8 (Lightening) missile system, now re-designated as the Barak LR by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), the 70 km-range MR-SAM system will be a collaborative arrangement between the IAI and India's state-owned Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).