

DRDO lines up crucial trials of Agni-V and K-4 missiles

By Hemant Kumar Rout

Bhubaneswar: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is contemplating crucial tests of India's longest range and most potent Agni-V and Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) K-4 this month.

The two nuclear capable homegrown strategic missiles scheduled to be tested in the first month of the mission calendar are expected to add more teeth to the armed forces once they are inducted.

Defence sources said while this will be first user associate trial of 5,000-km range Agni-V before going into series of production, a successful trial of 3,500-km underwater missile K-4 will pave the way for development of its long range sibling K-5, which will have a strike range of over 5,000 km.

"The missile systems are ready. We are expecting the launch schedule in next few days. The Agni-V will be fired from a canister and the K-4 from an underwater pontoon (replica of a submarine). Both the missions are crucial for the defence preparedness," said a defence official from New Delhi.

Considered as a game-changer, the 17-meter long and two-meter wide three-stage solid-fuelled Agni-V missile can carry a payload of 1,500 kg.

The payload is likely to be heavier once the MIRVs are fitted with the missile. The 50-tonne missile can destroy targets in all Asian countries and parts of Africa and Europe. Since an anti-satellite variant of long range weapon system is possible, DRDO has started looking for such variants of the most complex Agni-V, which has been developed with all advanced technologies.

Meanwhile, the priority is on integrating the missile system with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) and maneuvering warheads which can deceive enemy ballistic missile defence systems.

However, the scientists are more keen on K-4 trial as the last attempt on December 17 had failed. The missile could not be launched from the pontoon positioned in the Bay of Bengal off the Vizag coast due to some technical snags. The missile, world's best in this class, will have to undergo a couple of more developmental trials before being inducted in the armed forces.

The 12 metre tall missile weighs around 17 tonnes and can carry a warhead weighing up to 2,000 kg. The missile is powered by solid rocket propellant.

The manoeuvrable missile having an innovative system of interlacing in three dimensions can also cruise at a hypersonic speed and this exceptional feature makes it difficult to be tracked easily and destroyed by any anti-ballistic missile defence systems.

Both the missiles have strengthened the country's position in the exclusive club of six nations including Russia, US, France, UK and China which have the capability of firing nuclear tipped missiles from air, land and undersea.