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Thu, 22 Dec, 2016

## Nuclear-capable Nirbhay cruise missile's test fails for the fourth time

By Rajat Pandit

NEW DELHI: Another test of the Nirbhay land-attack cruise missile, designed to carry nuclear warheads to a strike range of 1,000-km, failed on Wednesday. This was the subsonic missile's fourth test since March 2013, all of which have more or less failed to achieve test parameters.

The missile had to be destroyed in mid-air after it deviated from its flight-path along the coast in Bay of Bengal soon after launch from the Integrated Test Range at Balasore off the Odisha coast around noon on Wednesday. "The test was an utter failure, with the missile veering to the right within two minutes of take-off," said a source. While the missile's first test in March 2013 had completely failed, the second one+ was dubbed "a partial success" in October 2014. But the third test in October 2015 and the one on Wednesday also failed miserably.

DRDO may have come a long way in developing ballistic missiles like the Agni series, which have strike ranges from 700-km to over 5,000-km, but continues to flounder in the field of cruise missiles. The armed forces, of course, already have the supersonic BrahMos cruise missiles developed with the help of Russia, but they have a range of only 290-km as of now and carry only conventional warheads.

The Nirbhay, a stealth missile in the making for almost a decade now, was meant to fulfill the armed forces' demand for nuclear-tipped land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs) versatile enough to be fired from land, air and sea. The missile was said to be a counter to Pakistan's Babur LACM.

The real big test for DRDO, of course, will be the impending fourth test of the Agni-V intercontinental ballistic missile, with a strike range over 5,000-km, in its final operational configuration from the Wheeler Island off Odisha. This test of the three-stage Agni-V, after which it will undergo user-trials by the Strategic Forces Command, is planned for end-December or early-January, as was first reported by TOI.

While ballistic missiles like the Agni follow a parabolic trajectory, cruise missiles like Nirbhay are designed to fly at low-altitudes, virtually hugging the terrain, to evade enemy radars and missile defence systems.

The Nirbhay, after an initial blast off with a solid-propellant booster rocket engine to gain speed and altitude, is supposed to deploy its smallish wings and tail fins in the second-stage to fly like an aircraft thereafter.

The missile, which flies at a speed of 0.6-0.7 Mach and carries a 300-kg warhead, is designed to be highly maneuverable with "loitering capabilities" to first identify and then hit the intended target.

## THE ASIAN AGE

Thu, 22 Dec, 2016

## Has General Praveen Bakshi offered to quit? Speculation rife

*The BJP said issues related to the defence forces should not be politicised.*

New Delhi: A 15-minute meeting between defence minister Manohar Parrikar and Eastern Army commander Lt. Gen. Praveen Bakshi on Wednesday set the corridors of power in South Block abuzz with intense speculations as to whether the officer had indeed put in his papers.

Lt. Gen. Bipin Rawat's appointment as India's new Army Chief ahead of Lt. Gen. Bakshi and Southern Army commander Lt. Gen. P.M. Hariz on Saturday also sparked a fierce political row between a section of the Opposition and the government.

While concrete details of the one-on-one crisp meeting remained elusive with top ministry and Army officials preferring to remain tightlipped, ministry sources claimed the meeting to be a "courtesy call" requested by Gen. Bakshi.

It led to speculation that he might have come to express his intention to resign on December 31 rather than serve under a junior. Lt. Gen. Rawat, currently vice-chief of the Army Staff, is set to take over from General Dalbir Singh Suhag on December 31.

On the other hand, the possibility of offering Gen. Bakshi a yet-to-be set up post of the chief of defence staff (CDS) has also been talked about, although defence ministry sources ruled it out.

"It is unlikely at this point of time as the process of setting up such a post is still a very long way off... nor has a final decision been taken," a top source told this newspaper.

With the prevalent strict hierarchical nature of the 13-million-strong Army with its fierce ethos of regimental loyalty and honour, there has been just one exception to the seniority norm till date.

In 1983, General A.S. Vaidya was made the Army Chief overlooking the seniority of Lt. Gen. S.K. Sinha. Soon enough, the latter promptly put in his papers rather than take orders from his junior.

Without doubt, while the latest appointment has ruffled certain sections in the Army, the official stand is that it is the government's prerogative to choose the most suitable officer from a panel of five commanders.

According to sources, new Army Chief-designate Lt. Gen. Rawat's wide experience in counter terrorism and insurgency weighed in his favour.

The Congress and the Left asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday to spell out the "compelling reasons" behind the choice, while the government said it followed standard norms, and did not require the permission of 10, Janpath (Congress chief Sonia Gandhi's residence) for the same.

The BJP said issues related to the defence forces should not be politicised.

The slugfest also came at a time when the Opposition is bitterly opposed to the government's demonetisation move, disrupting an almost entire Parliament session.

## THE ASIAN AGE

Thu, 22 Dec, 2016

### Govt's thinking over Army 'merit' flawed

By Shankar Roychowdhury

*The selection of the Indian Army's Chief of Staff is undoubtedly the exclusive prerogative of the government of the day.*

"The Army's promotion structure is not a \*\*\*\* pyramid! It's a \*\*\*\* Eiffel Tower!" — Exasperated outburst, popularly ascribed to late Gen. K. Sundarji, former Chief of Army Staff

The announcement of the promotion of the Army's vice-chief as the next Chief of Army Staff with effect from December 31, superseding two Army commanders senior to him, has set a precedent that appears troubling to many in the veterans' community. Well-wishers of the fauj are asking: Could such contretemps be avoided? The answer is yes, if the well-established, guiding principle of seniority-cum-merit was maintained, and the seniormost eligible candidate (an Army commander from the Armoured Corps) had been promoted.

This time, the three seniormost eligible generals for being elevated to Army Chief on the present chief's retirement on December 31 comprise two Army commanders and the Army's vice-chief of staff. The first two are from the Armoured Corps and Mechanised Infantry, and the vice-chief is from the more ubiquitous standard infantry.

All three are vastly experienced officers and of proven competence — the seniormost amongst them being from the Armoured Corps, the next from Mechanised Infantry, and the vice-chief from an illustrious regiment of the traditional “foot” infantry. All three are quite capable of handling any type of operational or other contingency that could arise in the context of the ongoing conflict with Pakistan.

At this highest level of the organisational military hierarchy, it's a total fallacy to think that an officer with a background from the Armoured Corps or Mechanised Infantry is handicapped in any manner to undertake military operations in the jungle or mountainous terrain or in counter-insurgency. Also, it is simply not right to think that an officer with a background of “foot infantry” cannot employ armour or mechanised forces in the open desert or plains along the Pakistan border.

The announcement of the impending promotion of the vice-chief has generated additional smoke and dust and created further hullabaloo. Add to this are comments that are attributed to “unnamed spokespersons” in the defence ministry who are supporting the government's decision. They have added their own share by awarding “unasked for” certificates of merit to the Army's vice-chief, who is a thoroughly competent professional in his own right, and fully capable of standing on his own feet without the help of unsolicited testimonials from any quarter.

However, the supersession did spread ripples of heartburn, resentment and general uneasiness amongst the officer class. This is always undesirable in the interest of the organisation, and more so at the seniormost levels of the military hierarchy. Has the regional scenario of rapidly churning politico-military turbulence now been further aggravated by added civic turbulence of demonetisation stampedes throughout the country? All in all, this is not the right time to have added to the overall organisational stress, by supersession of the seniormost Army commander, considered to be first in line for the coveted honour of being promoted to Chief of Army Staff.

For officers of the Indian Army, personal and professional integrity and competence are paramount. Their operational experience has been hard earned. Thus, over a period, those who do make it to the upper hierarchy of the Army, regardless of the parent arm or service, have a memory bank of wide and varied knowledge that enables them to handle a range of contingencies and problems.

The apocryphal story of Napoleon's mule emphasises that though seniority is important, the seniority factor seen in isolation is inadequate for any balanced consideration of candidates. Also, information other than documentary is generally subjective, derived mainly from the personal opinions of a designated assessing officer. There have been endless discussions on long-standing contradictions between the concept of “promotion by seniority” vis a vis “promotion by merit” but these have never been resolved satisfactorily.

The Indian Army, to its credit, has extensively explored multifarious options of career planning and the outcome has been a hybridised guiding principle of “merit-cum-seniority” in military progression, based on an extensive system of annual assessment. However, the philosophical contradictions remain — because while “seniority” can be mathematically quantified, “merit” has to be a judgment call, and therefore thus essentially subjective and open to extraneous influences.

Any system of promotion opting for such a merit-based system, including the concept of “deep selection” as is mooted by some, is more vulnerable to extraneous influences, especially in the pervading political and ethical environment.

The selection of the Indian Army's Chief of Staff is undoubtedly the exclusive prerogative of the government of the day. But the government, in turn, also needs to remember that the office of Chief of Army Staff is an iconic institution and it must conduct the selection process with fairness and izzat to all possible contenders, and without trying to exert political influence or pressure to influence it. Public pronouncements during the

process by top Cabinet ministers or other “unnamed spokespersons” don’t really help, but only vitiate the environment further.

The government’s decision to supersede a very senior officer can’t be “rolled back”. The option of appealing to the court remains unedifying to the old-fashioned. The Indian Army officer would like to be seen as a gentleman, another old-fashioned concept. But does the government leave him with any options?

*General Shankar Roychowdhury is a former Chief of Army Staff and a former member of Parliament.*



*Thu, 22 Dec, 2016*

## **Army recruitment sub-centre opened in Rewari**

Former minister and Kosli MLA Bikram Singh Yadav today inaugurated the army recruitment sub-centre on the premises of the Sainik Parivar Bhawan here.

The centre was announced by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh while accepting the demand of Union minister Rao Inderjit at the Sainik Samman rally organised here on November 16.

“Now retired army personnel residing here need not to go to Charkhi Dadri to get their problems regarding pension and other benefits resolved. All their grievances will now be redressed here. Even, local youths will be able to get latest information about army recruitment from the centre,” said Yadav.

Meanwhile, Naresh Chauhan, general secretary of the Rezang La Shaurya Samiti, has urged the Centre to put up hoardings of the army recruitment on the premises of the Rezang La Memorial, Rezang La Shaheedi Park, District War Memorial, Rao Tularam Park, District Sainik Board, Sainik School and the Secretariat so that agents could not cheat the youths.



*Thu, 22 Dec, 2016*

## **Army begins defusing shells in border areas**

Taking advantage of the silence on the International Border, the defence authorities today started the process of defusing mortar shells fired from across the border during the last two months.

Two teams from the Engineer Regiment today conducted a village-to-village survey near the International Border and defused a number of unexploded mortar shells in residential areas and in fields.

For the last one month, an unexploded mortar shell from across the border had been lying on the premises of a house in Abdullian village in the RS Pura sector. Today, a special bomb disposal squad of the Army defused it. “For the last one month we have been living in constant fear due to the shell but today we are at peace,” said the house owner, Bodh Raj, as he recalled the shell landing in the backyard of his house but, fortunately, not exploding. Abdullian village is situated near the International Border in the RS Pura sector. This village came under heavy shelling in November.

Mohinder Singh of Old Agray Chak said when tension was at its peak on the border, some mortar shells fired from Pakistan landed on his fields. “As these shells had not exploded, we could not cultivate. Now the defence authorities have defused the shells and we can now begin farming,” Singh said.

## Nepal to hold military exercise with China

Beginning a new level of bilateral military engagement, Nepal will hold its first ever joint military exercise with China on February 10, senior military officials have told Nepali media.

The focus of the military exercise, named Pratikar-1, will be on training Nepali forces in dealing with hostage scenarios involving international terror groups.

Nepal's Chief of Army Staff General Rajendra Chhetri visited Beijing in March when both sides had resolved to strengthen military ties. Nepal has conducted exercises with India earlier.

### Unconventional move

Analysts say that though the military drill with China does not violate the 1950 India-Nepal treaty of peace and friendship, it does appear unconventional.

"Nepal can conduct military exercises with other countries without violating the agreement with India, but the upcoming exercise with China is certainly unconventional and alarming as China's definition of terrorism covers Tibetan agitators," said Prof. S.D. Muni, a distinguished fellow at New Delhi-based Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. He believes that China is planning the military move to targeting the Tibetans.

Reports suggested that the exercise will firm up Kathmandu's preparedness to deal with hostage situations like the one that caused large number of deaths in Dhaka's Holey Artisan bakery in July.

## THE ASIAN AGE

## Space age: ISRO'S very human test

*What if a rocket carrying India's Vyomanauts explodes just after launch? Our scientists are readying a 'quick exit'.*

It's not often that Indian space scientists chuck out precious cargo from their rockets, but will try their hand at it soon, albeit in the name of safety.

Safety? Certainly, of the crew, when the space agency gets a formal go-ahead from the government for the departure of two Indians on a journey into Space onboard an Indian rocket. An upcoming test will demonstrate how the crew could bailout safely in case a snag threatens to spell a disastrous end, just minutes after the rocket zooms from the Sriharikota range — the country's spaceport near Chennai. "We are getting ready for the pad abort test. It will happen soon," says A.S. Kiran Kumar, Chairman, Isro. Simply put, the test flight will show how fast the crew could punch out from the rocket in the event of an emergency, thus avoiding a repetition of the disaster which wrecked US space shuttle Columbia, and resulted in the death of seven crew members including mission specialist Kalpana Chawla.

Simultaneously, Indian Space scientists are getting their act together for this ambitious mission, designing space suits, an environmental control and life support system on board the spacecraft, and a host of other critical systems needed for a safe journey of Vyomanauts. All these systems and their tests will be completed before GSLV-III, the most powerful rocket designed by India, is "human-rated" or declared safe for a journey into Space by Indians. Current projections indicate the first journey of Indians onboard an indigenous rocket and from India soil could be in 2020-21.

Incidentally, all these critical systems and their tests are being accomplished with an infinitesimal part of the Rs 12,500 crore allocation sought by ISRO for the human spaceflight (HSF) programme. Reason: the government has maintained that it is not an "approved programme" and therefore, a small amount of about Rs 100 crore has been sanctioned for pre-project studies.

Indian Space scientists, who made history by reaching Mars in their first attempt, however, have lost the race to China in the launch of manned space flights. China has had two manned flights since 2013, and is inching towards a permanent space station by 2022. China, however, started way early, launching its manned space programme in 1992. It also plans to launch its maiden Mars mission in 2020 to match India and other nations.

Indian Space scientists are confident of a go-ahead by the government, along with the budget support, but are wary of critics who often pose questions on big-ticket outings into Space at a time when the country has not solved poverty and hunger. These critics carped about the Rs 450 crore spent on the Mars mission until the Prime Minister revealed how it had cost less than Rs 7 per kilometre to reach the Red Planet.

These scientists argue that the humans Space flight programme is not another catch-up effort but to develop technologies and systems for future expeditions. Besides, the technological spin-offs could help the country leapfrog in a wide spectrum of sectors—from communications to medicine.

In short, these scientists intend to develop a fully-autonomous three-ton orbital vehicle (a spaceship) to transport a two-member crew to orbit and return to Earth after a few orbits to two days. The extendable version of the spaceship will allow flights up to seven days, rendezvous and docking capability with space stations.

Isro would receive assistance in crew selection and training from Russia under an agreement signed in March 2008. One option was a flight of an Indian onboard a Soyuz capsule in the run-up to an Indian mission, but that was dropped. The process of crew selection, too, awaits a nod from the government with the space agency likely to bank of the Indian Air Force and the Institute of Aerospace Medicine, Bengaluru, to pick potential candidates.

Irrespective of whether this wait gets longer or not, Indian Space scientists are spending long hours to be mission-ready with all technologies being developed on home soil.