

समाचार पत्रों से चयित अंश Newspapers Clippings

दैनिक सामयिक अभिज्ञता सेवा

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Mon, 06 Feb, 2017
(Online)

Cochin Shipyard holds hull blocks assembly ceremony for DRDO's ship

The ceremonial event of commencement of Mega Block Assembly of hull blocks of Ship No.20, the Technology Demonstration Vessel, being built for the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) of Government of India was held on 27 Jan 2016 at Cochin Shipyard Ltd. (CSL), the shipbuilding company said in a media release.

Dr S Christopher, Chairman, DRDO and Secretary, Department of Defence R&D, Chief Guest of the function, did the honours. Dr. Christopher, while addressing the gathering appreciated CSL for successfully undertaking construction of such a complex ship. They believed in the capabilities of CSL while awarding contract for this complex vessel. It is now paying off. He said.

The ship with a length of 118.4 meter, 20 meter width and 7.1 meter draft and having a steel weight of approximately 3900 Tonne was contracted in August 2015.

Shri Madhu S Nair, Chairman & Managing Director, Cochin Shipyard, in his welcome speech highlighted on the importance of this vessel for both DRDO and CSL. The Technology Demonstration Vessel has actually turned out to be a Capability Demonstration Vessel. He also said that the construction of the ship would be an opportunity to CSL to prove its capability in construction of hi-tech niche vessels.

The ceremony was also attended by Dr Subhash Chandra Sati, DG (NS&M), Dr (Ms) J Manjula, DG (ECS), Shri U Raja Babu Programme Director (PGAD), Dr Y Sreenivas Rao, Project Director (PGAD) and other senior scientists from DRDO. Shri Paul Ranjan, Director (Finance), Shri Sunny Thomas, Director (Technical) and Shri N V Suresh Babu, Director (Operations), senior officials, and other employees of CSL also attended the function. The initial milestone event of steel plate cutting was held on 10 Aug 2016.

CSL has successfully accomplished construction of 20 FPV series for the Coast Guard and the Deck Cargo Launch Barge, one of the largest of its kind to M/s NPCC Abu Dhabi. Further to construction of the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier for the Indian Navy, and the Technology Demonstration Vessel, CSL has commenced design work for building of two No. 1200 passenger cum 1000 MT Cargo” and two No. 500 passenger cum 150 MT Cargo” vessels for the Andaman & Nicobar Administration.

The two double ended RoRo ferries for the Kochi Corporation are also nearing completion.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

MoD wants “more objectivity, transparency and fairness” in army promotions, sets up a committee

The Army follows the QSS for promotion since 2011, which came into vogue following the orders of the Supreme Court.

Troubled by increasing number of complaints by senior army officers against promotions, the defence ministry has established a committee to review the promotion policy for army officers. Tasked with infusing “more objectivity, transparency and fairness in the system”, the two-member committee, with retired Lt Generals GS

Katoch and AK Ahuja as members, is scheduled to submit its report by February 16. The terms of reference of the committee, as given by the ministry, have asked it to “study and recommend appropriate amendments in the Quantified System of Selection (QSS) in order to infuse more objectivity, transparency and fairness in the system”. Besides recommending “changes required in the promotion policy presently followed in the army”, the committee has also been asked to suggest a “model calendar of selection boards”

The establishment of such a committee by the defence ministry is unusual on two counts. One, promotion policies for each of the defence services have so far been formulated by the service headquarters and approved by the defence ministry. This is the first time that the ministry is getting directly involved in army’s promotion policy. Two, the expert committee will only deal with promotions in the army, and does not include the navy and the Indian air force (IAF).

“The committee deals only with the army because maximum number of complaints about promotions come from the army. The IAF has streamlined its promotion system, where the vacancies in every financial year and the schedule of promotion boards is fixed. This is not the case with the army where promotion boards can be advanced or delayed, giving a perception that the system is being manipulated,” defence ministry sources explained.

The army follows the QSS for promotion since 2011, which came into vogue following the orders of the Supreme Court. In this system, only 5% marks are as per discretion of the army commanders who constitute the selection board. Defence ministry sources contend that as most senior army officials are rated as Outstanding – or given nine out of nine points in that confidential assessment reports – there is an increasing perception that the system is unfair.

“We asked the army to look at the system the IAF follows but their contention was that they are much larger and different organisation. Our initial attempt was for self-regulation from the army. After that, in consultation with the army, we ordered this committee,” defence ministry sources said.

Sources in the army, however, told The Indian Express that QSS was in any case due for a review in 2016 and they had sent a voluminous review report to the ministry in May last year. This report was prepared after an army committee visited 87 military stations for feedback, and the draft report was deliberated in the army commanders conference for the past 18 months. Another review report on the system of promotion and selection was sent to the ministry in November last year. Both the issues have now been handed over to this expert committee, army sources said, which is being assisted by a Brigadier from the army headquarters.

The army is expecting the committee to resolve issues pertaining to tenure of a corps commander, which is currently fixed at 12 months, and the minimum service requirement of two years to become an army commander. They also expect the committee to recommend measures to get the right balance between staff and command appointments for senior officers.

Sources in the army are, however, worried about defence ministry getting directly involved in the promotion board from Major Generals to Lt Generals via recommendations of this committee. Defence ministry sources told The Indian Express that they are not harbouring any such intentions.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

Navy multirole chopper deal to crash-land

A key Navy deal to procure 16 multirole helicopters from the US is virtually on deathbed as it has been stuck for over two years over the issue of price. “The contractual validity of the bid submitted by the American firm Sikorsky for its S-70 Seahawk choppers has already expired but the deal is stuck at the contract-negotiations stage for the last two years, including the price,” Navy sources told Mail Today.

Now, the deal will move forward only if Sikorsky, which has now been acquired by American defence giant Lockheed Martin, agrees to extend the validity of its commercial bid and also agrees to reduce the price of its

choppers, they said. Sources in defence ministry said the price of choppers asked for by the American firm is considered to be on a higher side when compared with the benchmark price decided by it at the time of issuing the tender nine years ago.

The contractual validity of the bid submitted by American firm Sikorsky for its S-70 Seahawk choppers has already expired but the deal is stuck at the contract-negotiations stage for the last two years, including the price.

—NAVY OFFICIALS

The 16 multirole helicopters are sought by the Navy for its warships and upgrading its anti-submarine warfare capabilities which are on a decline as the Seaking helicopters bought from the UK in the 1980s would be on their way out from the force in near future, they added. Sikorsky was selected by the Navy for its requirements in December 2014 as it emerged as the only bidder in the race after Finmeccannica was chucked out of the competition due to the chopper scam allegations on it.

After the tender bid was opened, sources said there was a demand made to raise the price of the choppers to meet inflation, but the defence ministry sought a further cut in the price demanded by the firm originally in its commercial bid. Other issues like liability clause were also responsible for holding up the deal for some time, sources said. Navy sources said the deal is required badly for the force as it has to find a replacement for the SeaKing — 42 choppers bought from British firm Westland helicopters. The Seahawk is a naval variant of the US Army's legendary Black Hawk UH 60 helicopter. The Navy had floated a tender for 16 helicopters with an option for another eight in 2008. Seahawk S-70B can be used for advanced anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare to take on underwater and over water threats.

Even if India signs the deal immediately for the S-70 choppers, it will take at least three years for the first chopper to be delivered as they are complex machines and take time to be integrated. The Navy also has plans of buying 123 more naval multirole helicopters which would be a more than `673.62 million (USD 10 billion) affair as it has plans of deploying two choppers each on its outgoing destroyers and frigates which operate in high seas and need these planes for critical operations. Navy's light utility chopper contract was scrapped two years ago and the force is continuing flying the vintage Cheetah choppers. The tender for new choppers is stuck as the defence ministry is waiting to clear the strategic partnership policy.



Tue, 07 Feb, 2017

(Online)

US make changes in export control laws to benefit India

Highlights

- *US has made changes in export control laws that would benefit India by facilitating smoother transfer of technologies.*
- *This means - only under the rarest circumstances will India be denied licenses.*
- *Now, companies will not need a license after becoming a Validated End User.*

Washington: Recognising India's status as a 'Major Defence Partner', the US has made necessary changes in its export control laws that would benefit India by facilitating smoother transfer of technologies and arms to it.

The new rule that makes necessary changes in the export control laws creates a presumption of approval" for Indian companies seeking to import Commerce Department-controlled military items, except Weapons of Mass Destruction-related goods.

This means that only under the rarest circumstances will India be denied licenses, a source familiar with the changes said.

"I'm pleased to see India's status as a 'Major Defence Partner' - a designation that we have strongly supported - being translated into tangible regulatory reform," said Mukesh Aghi, president of US India Business Council (USIBC).

The new rule also amends the law so that companies will not need a license at all after becoming a Validated End User (VEU).

"Indian and US companies operating in India can seek VEU status for both civil and military manufacturing, and by doing so, they do not need to obtain individual licenses. This makes it far more convenient to build a global supply chain and react quickly to changing market conditions," explained Benjamin Schwartz, USIBC's Director for Defence and Aerospace.

Over 810 licenses representing some USD 5 billion in trade in the last half decade have been granted for goods covered under this new rule.

Most of these licenses are being focused on aerospace systems and ground vehicles. Additionally, under the new regulation, Indian companies will not be required by US law to seek approval for the re-export of platforms that contain less than 25 per cent US content.

"This is a very favourable policy for Indian companies. The rule will make business substantially easier for Indian companies in the defence sector, especially those partnering with American companies. This gives Indian companies and US companies operating in India the ability to be reactive in real time to meet their supply chain needs," Schwartz said.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

Uncertainty over U.S. nuclear plants for India

There is uncertainty surrounding the construction of U.S. nuclear reactors in India after Toshiba Corp decided to move out of the reactor building business. Officials said they were expecting some clarity in a month after Toshiba's Board meeting. "We have not had anything on it officially. But what we read is that they will be completing the reactors that are under construction. We expect a decision after their Board meeting soon. Our discussion is going on. We don't have a clear answer to this today, may be in a month," Sekhar Basu, Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), said on Tuesday.

Following the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal, India has been in discussion with Toshiba's U.S.-based Westinghouse since 2005 to build six AP1000 nuclear reactors. After protracted negotiations and concerns on the nuclear liability there were hopes that a deal would be concluded soon. Last week, it was reported that Toshiba was planning to withdraw from building nuclear plants in the U.K. and India. Toshiba had acquired the U.S.-based Westinghouse, which specialises in nuclear reactors, in 2006.

Other officials said discussions were going on. The company's offer on six reactors was very good, the officials said and hoped that the deal would continue. "Normally such big companies don't shut down. We are hearing that someone will bankroll them — either the Japanese government or the Japanese Development Bank," one official said.

The NPCIL. and Westinghouse had agreed to "work towards finalising the arrangements by June 2017."



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

'India is meddling in China-S Lanka ties'

India is working against Chinese interests in Sri Lanka by interfering in a port project funded by Beijing because New Delhi is worried about losing its influence in the Indian Ocean, state media said on Tuesday.

Quoting local academics, nationalistic tabloid Global Times said Sri Lanka was made to repeatedly "vow" that China will not be allowed to indulge in military activities at the island nation's Hambantota port – although the facility was always meant for civilian use.

Karunasena Kodituwakku, the Sri Lankan ambassador to China, said Colombo will not allow China to set up a military facility at any port in the country. Chinese investors have also been informed that no civilian facility will be allowed to be used militarily, he added.

“We have to consider the neighbours’ concerns. We do not want to create any situation, which... may become (a source of) suspicion. We know the Indian Ocean is a very important ocean in international trade.”

The Hambantota port is an important part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese president Xi Jinping’s ambitious connectivity project. Kodituwakku’s statement has apparently riled the state media, prompting a retort.

“Sri Lanka’s promise is unnecessary because the port is meant for civilian use. It shows that India is interfering in Sri Lanka’s affairs,” said Chu Yin from the University of International Relations. “The BRI always focuses on civilian projects to help developing countries, and China respects these countries’ security concerns when pushing infrastructure development.”

Sri Lanka has had to repeatedly pacify its neighbour even over projects intended to promote Sri Lanka’s economic development, Yin said, adding India is “preoccupied with China’s presence in the region”.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

Pakistan strong enough to deny one-sided win to India: Expert

Despite India’s “cold start” military doctrine, nucleararmed Pakistan is strong enough to defend its sovereignty and it will not be a one-sided victory as assumed by New Delhi, a top Chinese strategic analyst has told the state media.

The “cold start” doctrine is an Indian armed forces’ manoeuvre developed to swiftly seize Pakistani territory and end the war before it escalates into a nuclear conflict. Army chief General Bipin Rawat made a rare mention of it in a recent interview, seemingly putting a stamp of confirmation about its existence.

Zhao Gancheng, director of Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies at Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, told the nationalistic tabloid Global Times that comments like the one Rawat made will increase India-Pakistan tension – especially because of the uncertainty in the US foreign policy after President Donald Trump took over.

“Against this backdrop, any remark that might threaten the delicate peace between the two nations from the Indian military authority will undoubtedly trigger a strong reaction in Pakistan,” Zhao said.

Despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s initial overtures to Pakistan, Zhao blamed India for derailing the peace process between the two countries by accusing Pakistan of harbouring terrorists. “Due to a number of other factors, such as India accusing Islamabad of terror attacks in Kashmir and New Delhi’s bid to add Pakistan-based organisation Jamaat-ud-Dawa and Masood Azhar to the UN Security Council’s terror list, India-Pakistan ties worsened,” Zhao said.

But India, he said, should remember that even if there is a gap militarily between the two countries, Pakistan is strong enough to defend itself.

“However, both India and Pakistan are nuclear-armed countries. Even if the cold start strategy sounds intimidating and there is indeed a gap between the two powers’ military might, it does not mean that New Delhi can easily win a landslide victory against Islamabad. The truth is, Pakistan has considerable strength to safeguard its sovereignty and its nuclear weapons should not be ignored,” Zhao said. He added the US’s role in India-Pakistan ties will be crucial and Trump’s policy could be different from predecessor Barack Obama. “Trump called Pakistani prime minister first after winning the election, which may be a crucial signal - he would take a more balanced strategy between New Delhi and Islamabad.”

Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

Pak to build 50 bunkers along border

Pakistan today decided to build at least 50 bunkers for civilians along the working boundary with India in the Punjab province to provide protection to villagers during cross-border firing.

During a Cabinet meeting, three federal ministers, including defence minister Khawaja Asif, urged the Nawaz Sharif government to take measures to avoid civilian casualties along the border.

“The Cabinet decided to build 50 bunkers along the working boundary to provide refuge to villagers living in the area during cross-border firing from India,” information minister Maryam Aurangzeb said.

The government also announced to enhance compensation for those killed and injured in the cross-border firing incidents.

The information minister said the families of those killed will be given Rs5,00,000 as compensation and those injured will get Rs1,50,000. — PTI



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

Pak militants incite Rohingyas, India warns Myanmar

New Delhi: India has warned Myanmar that Pakistan-based militants were exploiting radicalisation among the Rohingya community, which posed a security risk to both the countries and will go on to ‘haunt the region’, sources told HT.

India asked Myanmar to find a political solution to defuse the “ticking bomb”, citing information that the radicals among the minority ethnic community were being abetted by outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Delhi conveyed this message to Myanmar’s national security adviser U Thaung Tun, who was on his maiden visit to India last week, sources said. “We told the NSA that this issue is a major threat. Rohingya radicals are being abetted by Lashkar. This will have consequences for the region. And we have advised them to find a political solution to the issue soon,” an official told HT on condition of anonymity.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

Close On Heels of Doval's Moscow Visit - Russia-Pakistan Ties to Remain `Quite Limited'

By DipanjanRoy Chaudhury

All reports that Russia could also sell Su-35 fighters to Pak are false: Russian official

Russia has clarified that its cooperation with Pakistan will remain “quite limited“ and it will never sell weapons to the country that could potentially change the balance of power in the Indian subcontinent. The assurance comes after national security adviser Ajit Doval's visit to Moscow and high-level counter-terrorism dialogue between India and Russia in Delhi last week.

“All reports arguing that Russia could also sell Su-35 fighter jets to Pakistan are false... Islamabad would want to buy these aircraft and other Russian weapons, but Moscow is unlikely to agree on anything more than a

transfer of a limited number of fighter and transport helicopters in future," a Russian government official told ET on condition of anonymity .

Russia's cooperation with Pakistan will always remain quite limited, the official said, the recent deal between the two countries on supply of four Russian fighter helicopters to Pakistan notwithstanding. The deal had sparked concern in India over the possibility of Pakistan acquiring more defence equipment from Russia.

When Doval visited Moscow last week, the situation in Af-Pak region was among the issues discussed threadbare. Simultaneously, Russia's deputy foreign minister was in Delhi to hold a counter-terrorism dialogue with his counterparts in the external affairs ministry . India and Russia decided to launch a joint counter-terror action plan and deradicalisation initiative to combat international terror. Russia has "deliberately" limited its military partnership with Pakistan since it will never risk its strategic relations with India, the Russian official cited earlier said.

The Russia-Pakistan joint military exercise in Pakistan last year had raised some eyebrows in India, as did the subsequent Russia-China Pakistan meeting on the future of Afghanistan. Russia, however, was the first major power that supported India's surgical strikes across the Line of Control in Pakistan occupied Kashmir after the terrorist attack in Uri.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

अमेरिका और जापान ने किया संयुक्त मिसाइल परीक्षण

वाशिंगटन, 7 फरवरी (एएफपी)।

उत्तर कोरिया के मिसाइल कार्यक्रम पर बढ़ते तनाव के बीच अमेरिका और जापान ने एक संयुक्त तंत्र का इस्तेमाल करते हुए पहली बार बैलिस्टिक मिसाइल लक्ष्य अवरोधन का परीक्षण किया।

अमेरिका और जापान 2006 से ही स्टैंडर्ड मिसाइल-3 के एक स्वस्व को विकसित करने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं। यह पोत से प्रक्षेपित की जाने वाली एक ऐसी मिसाइल है, जो एजिस बैलिस्टिक मिसाइल रक्षा तंत्र के

हिस्से के रूप में काम करती है। अमेरिकी मिसाइल रक्षा एजेंसी ने कहा कि शुक्रवार का परीक्षण हवाई के काउंडर के तट पर हुआ। इसमें स्टैंडर्ड मिसाइल-3 'ब्लॉक 2ए' ने अंतरिक्ष में अपने लक्ष्य को सफलतापूर्वक भेद दिया।

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

Taiwan to Build New Jet Trainer Fleet by 2026 in Defence Push

Taiwan officials said on Tuesday a new generation of locally built jet trainers would be completed by 2026, part of a push to strengthen the defence industry against a growing China threat.

The island has developed jets and missiles at home in the past, but relies on its main ally the US as its biggest arms supplier.

Relations are worsening with China, which sees Taiwan as a breakaway province to be brought back within its fold -by force if necessary.

President Tsai Ing-wen has faced a mounting backlash from Beijing since she took office in May because she has refused to recognise that Taiwan is part of "one China".

Beijing has severed all official communications with Taipei and reportedly discouraged Chinese visitors from travelling to the island. The current ageing trainer fleet will be replaced by 66 advanced jet trainers by 2026,

with their first flight scheduled for 2020, according to the military-run National Chung Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST). The programme has a budget of some Tw\$68 billion (\$2.2 billion).

Tsai said on Tuesday that a robust aerospace industry was crucial for Taiwan's security.

“It would be a big crisis for national security and industry if capabilities in aerospace development were broken, she said at a NCSIST research centre in Taichung.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

Charting the fascinating path that robots have taken over the years

By Vidya Ram

The Science Museum in London will host a unique exhibition for seven months

Introductory speeches are commonplace at press meetings, but far rarer is for one of them to be delivered by a robot. RoboThespian, a lanky, luminescent, human-like robot, who will be on display at the London Science Museum's blockbuster exhibition charting the history of robots, is a charismatic speaker, with the animated intonation of a confident orator, and digital eyes that focus and look around in an eerily-human way.

Precisely when robots came to be created does of course depend on one's definition of a robot, and, as curator Ben Russell points out, there are 30 or 40 different characterisations. The exhibition links robots to our quest to “recreate ourselves in mechanised form” and therefore takes the starting point as around 500 years ago, when in the 16th century, the quest to understand the workings of the human body spurred the creation of mechanical devices.

On display is one of the earliest of such automated pieces: an automaton monk from 1560, created for Philip II of Spain, which could pray and walk across the table, moving its lips and raising its crucifix. There's a spectacular silver swan from the 18th century that attracted huge crowds at the time with its ability to elegantly sway and pick up ornamental fish and lots of other fascinating mechanical pieces from across the world, that pushed the boundaries of science as was known at the time.

However it wasn't till the 20th century that the word “robot” was coined: derived from the Czech word “robota” which means forced labour, and which was used by author Karel Čapek in his 1920 play about artificial humans, *Rossum's Universal Robots*. It was also at this stage that robots began to take the shape that we traditionally associate with them —the metallic, somewhat humanoid figures that have dominated literature and film. There's a replica of one of the earliest — the ‘Maria’ robot used in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* in 1927, and ‘Eric’, one of the earliest ones made in the U.K.’

These were beings that unlike their predecessors ran on electrical batteries and radio control. On display is Cygan, a massive 500-kilo Italian robot from 1957, which is driven by 13 electric motors and has spent many years performing at shows.

Artificial intelligence

It was in the 1950s that the quest to imbue robots with intelligence and the ability to operate without remote control began. On display is a cybernetic tortoise from 1951 that had the ability to find its own way. The exhibition also highlights the huge range of ways robots are capable of aiding human life: from those used in factories to the home, and even one capable of acting as a mediator for children with autism, helping them learn about social interaction.

However, many challenges remain, as the exhibition carefully sets out. It highlights some of the current research under way, in particular efforts to create robots that are able to learn from humans and its surroundings. There's Lucy, a British robot with 50,000 artificial neurons that over a period of years has

learned to distinguish bananas and apples, and iCub, one of an Italian series of 30 robots that mimic toddlers, as they learn to discover the world around them, through their senses, learning as they go.

However, surprisingly to many, the biggest challenge lies not in artificial intelligence but in something more fundamental, says Will Jackson, the director of Engineered Arts, the British company behind RoboThespian. “Software is way ahead but the biggest challenge is mechanical,” he says, noting that we are yet to have a robot capable of sustained and close human interaction and replicating the preciseness of human beings, or the strength of our muscles.

The exhibition is open at the Science Museum in central London from February 8 to September 3, 2017.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

India to frame policy on synthetic biology

The technology could help produce drugs, vaccines, fuel components and other chemicals

India is taking its first steps to evolve a policy on synthetic biology, an emerging science through which new life forms can potentially be made in labs and existing life forms, such as bacteria and other microbes, tweaked to produce specific proteins or chemically useful products.

The Environment Ministry will be convening a group of experts on biodiversity and biotechnology, to assess synthetic biology work pursued in Indian labs, potential benefits and risks, and the implications of the trans-boundary movement of such life forms.

Synthetic biology in microbial systems holds promise for production of drugs, vaccines, fuel components and other chemicals. A popular example is the production of artemisinin, a powerful anti-malarial drug, in yeast, at a commercial level. Microorganisms have also been constructed to act as sensors that can detect a toxin in vitro (outside a living organism) or in vivo (inside a living organism).

There are assorted labs in India that work on synthetic biology.

Last December, officials from the Environment Ministry participated in the United Nations Biodiversity Conference of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at Cancun, Mexico, where about 8,000 delegates from 180 countries discussed matters related to biodiversity.

India, so far, has no policy on synthetic biology, and according to a presentation made at the venue, it has promised to “put in place a Synthetic Biology Team for articulating India’s view” at a forthcoming meeting.

“We do not have any obligations to put in place any policy immediately,” Amit Prasad, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, told The Hindu.



Wed, 08 Feb, 2017

SpaceX to launch every 2-3 weeks with new site in Florida

Space Exploration Technologies Corp, better known as SpaceX, plans to launch its Falcon 9 rockets every two to three weeks, its fastest rate since starting launches in 2010, once a new launch pad is put into service in Florida next week, the company's president told Reuters on Monday.

The ambitious plan comes only five months after a SpaceX rocket burst into flames on the launch pad at the company's original launch site in Florida. SpaceX, controlled by billionaire Elon Musk, has only launched one rocket since then, in mid-January.

“We should be launching every two to three weeks,” SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell told Reuters in an interview on Monday.

SpaceX was approaching that pace last autumn, before the Sept. 1 accident, which happened during a routine preflight test. The explosion destroyed a \$200 million Israeli satellite and heavily damaged the launch pad.

Shotwell said repairs to the launch pad at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, which are still underway, should cost “far less than half” of a new launch pad, which she said runs about \$100 million. The new launch pad is at NASA's Kennedy Space Center, just north of the Cape Canaveral site.

SpaceX is also modifying the rocket's engines to increase performance and resolve potential safety concerns, said Shotwell.

The company plans to change the design of the Falcon 9's turbopump - which provides propellants to the rocket's engines - to eliminate cracks that have prompted concern from NASA and the U.S. Air Force.

NASA has hired SpaceX to taxi astronauts to and from the International Space Station starting in late 2018.

Shotwell said the new turbopumps will be installed before the first unmanned test flights of the commercial space taxi, scheduled for November.

SpaceX is one of two companies certified to fly military and national security satellites for the Air Force, the other being United Launch Alliance, a partnership of Boeing Co (BA.N) and Lockheed Martin Corp (LMT.N).

“For us, the concern was not the cracks, but do they grow over time? Would these cracks cause a flight failure?” Shotwell said. “I think NASA is used to engines that aren’t quite as robust, so they just don’t want any cracks at all in the turbo machinery.”

SpaceX discovered two types of cracks during ground tests of its Merlin engines in 2015, Shotwell said. The cracks were not related to the Sept. 1 launch pad explosion.

To fix the more serious cracking issue, the company devised a software fix and then redesigned the turbine wheel, Shotwell said. The first of the redesigned turbine wheels flew in July 2016.

A second set of cracks in welds and shrouds are not a concern for flight, but NASA and the Air Force have asked for a redesign, Shotwell said.

SpaceX has a backlog of more than 70 missions, worth more than \$10 billion. It has successfully flown 27 out of 29 times since the Falcon 9’s debut in 2010.

The company flew eight missions in 2016 before the launch pad accident in September grounded the fleet. The rocket returned to flight last month, flying from a second launch site in California, which is only used for satellites heading into polar or high inclination orbits. A fourth launch site in Texas is under construction.