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Deep-strike BrahMos to be test-fired soon

Will Be Tested From a Sukhoi This Week

By Rajat Pandit

New Delhi: India is now all set to upgrade its deadly precision-strike weapon into a deep surgical-strike one. The sleek BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, which flies almost three times the speed of sound at Mach 2.8, will be test-fired from a Sukhoi-30MKI fighter jet for the first time this week.

The “marriage” between the fighter, with a cruising range of 3,200-km, and the missile will be “a deadly combination”. The air-to-ground BrahMos missiles can conceivably be used for pinpoint strikes on terror camps located deep inside enemy territory, or to take out underground nuclear bunkers, command-and-control centres and other high-value military targets like aircraft carriers on the high seas, from long stand-off distances, say sources.

The armed forces have already inducted the 290-km range land and warshipbased versions of the BrahMos missiles over the last decade. Having placed orders worth over Rs 27,150 crore, the Army, Navy and IAF have clearly shown their preference for BrahMos as their conventional (not nuclear) precision-strike weapon in the years ahead.

With India joining the 34-nation Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in June 2016, which “removed the caps” on the range of the missile developed jointly with Russia, the armed forces are also testing an extended range BrahMos that can hit targets 450-km away. The MTCR basically prevents the proliferation of missiles and drones over the range of 300-km.

Moreover, initial work has also begun on developing a hypersonic version of the BrahMos, capable of flying at a speed of over Mach 5. And now, a lighter BrahMos missile — weighing 2.4-tonne instead of the original 2.9-tonne — will be tested from a twinengine Sukhoi fighter over the Bay of Bengal this week, say defence ministry sources.

Sources say 42 Sukhoi fighters will eventually be armed with BrahMos missiles once the air-launched missiles have undergone a battery of successful tests. IAF has till now inducted 240 of the 272 twin-seat Sukhois contracted from Russia for over \$12 billion, with the bulk of them being licenced produced by defence PSU Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL).

HAL and BrahMos Aerospace for the last few years were working on integrating the BrahMos missiles on two Sukhois for flight trials, which kicked off in June 2016. While the Sukhois required some structural modifications, the weight of the missiles also had to be reduced and its satellite navigation and other systems made compatible with the fighter avionics. “All arrangements are now in place for the first live firing of the missile from the air this week,” said a source.

Incidentally, the government has approved the deployment of Block-III version of the BrahMos missile, which has “steep dive, trajectory manoeuvre, and top-attack capabilities” for mountain warfare, in Arunachal Pradesh as a deterrent against China, as was earlier reported by TOI.