

# India's national defense systems are right on target

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

The successful launching of the medium-range Agni III technology demonstrator missile on Feb. 19 from the coastal state of Orissa has proven that India is steadily increasing its security through the coupling of land- and air-based weapons for its defense.

The Indian response to the success of the Agni was reflected in the President's speech before Parliament on Feb. 21. Addressing a joint session of the Lok Sabha (Lower House) and the Rajya Sabha (Upper House), President Shankar Dayal Sharma said: "Honorable members will join me in applauding the successful demonstration of high technology in the launch of Agni last Saturday. . . . Restrictions being placed on transfer of technology require us to rely even more on our own talents. The government is determined to give every encouragement for this to happen by tapping the great potential that the country possesses."

For more than a year, the test-firing of the medium-range Agni missile and deployment of the short-range Prithvi missile had been a bone of contention between India and the United States. With the first successful launching of Agni on May 22, 1989, a flood of criticism was unleashed, mostly from Washington. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a former Senate Armed Services Committee member, went on record saying that "Agni is clearly useful as a nuclear weapons delivery system for it lacks the accuracy to be effective against conventional, biological, and chemical weapons"—implying that India is in the process of developing nuclear-warhead carriers, without presenting a shred of evidence that such is the purpose behind the development of Agni. Since then, Agni has gone through two further test-firings and the success of the recent demonstration indicates that Agni has come of age. The fact that no one can prevent India from developing its own indigenous technology-based missiles has also been established.

## About Agni

Agni, a Sanskrit word meaning fire, is 21 meters in length, two meters longer than Agni I, and has a take-off weight of 19 tons. Its range, as specified, is 1,500 kilometers with a payload of 1 ton, or a smaller warhead of 500 kilograms over a longer range of 2,500 kilometers.

The Agni project began in 1983. After six years of efforts which involved 5,000 engineers and staff, Agni I was launched in 1989. The 600-second duration of the flight tested a re-entry vehicle structure as well as control and guidance

package. The test was successful in fulfilling its parameters, but, as McCain pointed out, Agni I's accuracy—which was not a test parameter at that stage—was not great. In 1992, Agni II was tested, but within two seconds of its launch, the missile veered off course and exploded. Later, it was stated that by making Agni II longer and heavier, the missile's vibration had increased and that led to the failure. It is evident from the test results of Agni III that the missile has overcome most of its shortcomings, although it is likely that more refinements will be required before it is formally inducted into the defensive system.

With the arrival of Agni, India now has four different missiles at various stages of testing. Prithvi, the Sanskrit word for earth, is a short-range missile with a range of 150 km with a 1-ton payload, or 250 km with a 500 kg payload. Prithvi has been tested 12 times already and is practically ready for deployment. The anti-tank missile Nag, the Sanskrit word for snake, was also tested successfully twice in January. The Nag missile tests were carried out with missile carrier track vehicles in the user configuration which has also been developed indigenously. The Nag missile, equipped with heat sensors, has a range of about 4 km and a top attack capability to pierce advanced armor.

In addition, earlier in February, India successfully tested the multi-target surface-to-air missile Akash, the Sanskrit word for sky. The successful test of the Akash missile, which is meant to be integrated with a multi-target phase-array radar system, brings India closer to the Patriot missile defense system. As a state-of-the-art defense system, the Akash, fitted with multiple warheads, can target four to five enemy aircraft and missiles simultaneously. The unique feature of the Akash missile system is that while a normal rocket has an oxygen supply system built in, the Akash is equipped with a ramjet rocket system which draws air during its flight for combustion in conjunction with a fuel-rich propellant.

## Reactions from abroad

Despite the official policy of the government of India, which is to develop a sound defense system for India's security, particularly in light of the induction of high-technology-based weapons systems by the nuclear weapons states, India will be subjected to a barrage of adverse criticism generated in the West. The United States, which had earlier made it known to India that the deployment of the Prithvi and test-

firing of Agni would not be appreciated in Washington, is expected to make the usual noises about India's alleged intention to become a nuclear weapons state.

Recently a classic disinformation-peddling book has been published, *Critical Mass*, by William Burrows and Robert Windrem. Using vivid imaginations, the authors allege that India and Pakistan were on the verge of nuclear war in 1990. The book has been labeled a "big lie" in India by analysts and top military brass. It contains a chapter on how India procured its missile technology. Interspersed with such inanities as that Dr. Homi Babha, the father of India's nuclear program, wanted the bomb (a statement attributed to an unnamed French "expert"), the book goes on to couple India's nuclear power program and space program as exemplary of Delhi's supposed single-minded obsession to become a nuclear weapons state.

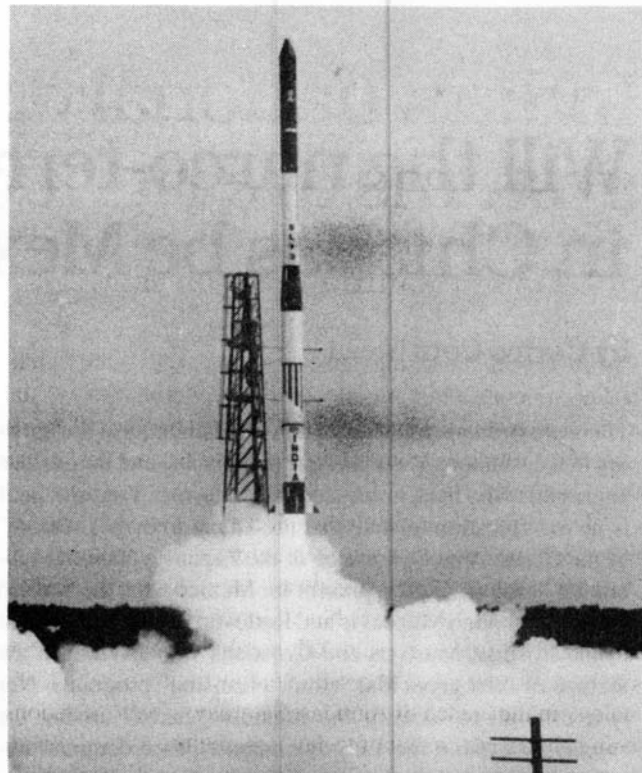
Of course, the U.S. State Department has been drumming on this theme for years. While the State Department pushed this big lie to previous American Presidents with the ostensible purpose of imposing sanctions and technological apartheid on India, Pakistan, and other developing nations, the same big lie has now been delivered to President Clinton in a package marked "gross violation of human rights." So far, the knee-jerk reaction from Washington has been directed toward pressuring and cornering India on the violation of human rights and forcing it to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which India, as Pakistan, has never signed.

### The Kashmir question

Recent State Department efforts, led by the high-profile assistant secretary of state for South Asia, Robin Raphel, have centered on impressing upon Clinton that the Kashmir dispute is not only causing a massive violation of human rights, but will lead to an exchange of nuclear weapons between India and Pakistan. Hence, the residents of Foggy Bottom claim, all efforts are to be made to resolve the Kashmir dispute, even if it means involving Kashmiri terrorists and making Kashmir an independent state, and forcing India and Pakistan to sign the NPT.

Raphel, who has been told by the Indian Foreign Ministry that March would not be the right month for her to visit India, has decided to come anyway, uninvited. What must be worrying the State Department is that India is paying little attention to Washington's nuclear concerns.

On Kashmir, the Indian government is now allowing ambassadors accredited with the government from selected countries to visit the area and see for themselves the actual conditions on the ground. It has also been stated that the Red Cross, and even Amnesty International, will be allowed to visit Kashmir. But at the same time, it was the government in Delhi that organized a mass demonstration of 10,000 by the Youth Congress members, along the line of actual control in Kashmir on Feb. 5, protesting against efforts by others to claim that Kashmir is not an integral part of India. Since then, a number of foreign heads of state have come to Delhi



*The successes of India's rocket program are not to the liking of the international advocates of "technological apartheid" for the Third World.*

to express solidarity with India's claim over Kashmir.

Delhi has also indicated that if the Pakistan government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, allegedly dependent on its friends in the State Department for its own survival, brings the Kashmir issue to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights, charging human rights violations by India, the foreign secretary-level bilateral talks between India and Pakistan will come to a halt. Moreover, Delhi has made it clear, and even has procured Beijing's support on the matter, that no third party will be allowed to mediate on the Kashmir issue. The Indian President, inaugurating the budget session of the Parliament on Feb. 21, said categorically: "Jammu and Kashmir is an inalienable part of India and we shall foil any attempt to destabilize it either from across the border or from any other quarter."

In addition, Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao recently told the visiting U.S. Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.) that it is a shame that India has been accused of human rights violations, when India has a constitution which allows a fair judiciary system, a democratic political system, and a free press, and India has even constituted its own human rights commission. In the area of nuclear nonproliferation, the Rao government has not budged from its belief that the NPT is discriminatory, and hence cannot be endorsed. India, Rao also pointed out, has not helped in the proliferation of nuclear weapons—a claim none of the nuclear weapons states can make.