

Reports Successful Test of Ballistic Missile

Ayaz Gul

Islamabad

03 Oct 2003, 10:55 UTC

Pakistan says it has successfully tested a short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile that can carry nuclear weapons. Pakistani officials say they will conduct more tests in the coming days.

Pakistan's military says this is the second test of what it calls the indigenously developed Hatf-III Ghaznavi missile - a rocket with a range of up to 290 kilometers.

That is enough to hit targets inside of rival India, with either conventional or nuclear warheads.

Major-General Shaukat Sultan is the spokesman for Pakistan's Army.

"I would say that it can carry all type of warheads," he said.

He did not say where the test was conducted. But he did note Pakistan plans to conduct more tests of the Ghaznavi missile in the next few days to maintain the pace of its missile development program.

However, officials say the tests have nothing to do with developments in the region - a reference to rival India's missile programs. They say the timing of the test is based on Pakistan's own missile defense needs.

Ayesha Siddiqa is a defense analyst and a former member of the state-run Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad.

"This is the technological advancement that we want and we have to improve our ballistic missile delivery systems and that is basically it. Plus you know there is always this tactical political advantage of testing. It sends a message across that we are pretty determined to defend ourselves. It happens on both sides, on India and Pakistan," she said.

India confirmed that it received the required notification from Pakistan in advance of the missile test.

India and Pakistan are armed with nuclear weapons and have been locked in a long-running conflict over Kashmir. Both South Asian nations claim the entire region, which has caused two wars between them.

India accuses Pakistan of sponsoring a Muslim separatist insurgency in Kashmir. Tensions have eased in recent months but the two countries have yet to open peace talks.