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India, Pakistan test-fire missiles

NEW DELHI, India --India and Pakistan conducted tit-for-tat test-firings of short-range nuclear-capable ballistic missiles Wednesday -- the latest in a series of test launches this year adding to fears of a heightened arms race between the two South Asian rivals.

India said it performed a routine test of a surface-to-surface Prithvi missile from the Chandipur testing range in eastern Orissa state.

A defense ministry said the test, designed to improve the Prithvi variant used by the Indian army, was "successful in every respect."

The Indian announcement was immediately followed by a similar statement from Islamabad on Pakistan's launch.

Pakistan said it tested an Abdali missile -- which like the Prithvi can carry a nuclear payload but with a longer range of 132 miles (209 km).

However, the Pakistani announcement did not reveal where the test took place nor whether it was before or after the Indian test. It too was described as a "routine" test.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said India was informed of the test, but added Pakistan was surprised at the Indian firing.

"They didn't tell us about it beforehand," he said. New Delhi said its missile had a range of only 25 miles (40km) and had been scheduled since January. Therefore India was not required to inform its neighbor, the government said.

Tit-for-tat missile tests are common among the South Asian neighbors whose nuclear rivalry dates back to a series of Indian tests five years ago.

In 1998, New Delhi declared itself a nuclear power after five underground nuclear tests. Economic sanctions and international outrage greeted the news.

Pakistan then conducted its own nuclear tests.

India has carried out several tests of the Prithvi system as it works on perfecting the missile's capability to carry a nuclear payload. Sixteen launches have taken place since the first test in 1988.

India's missile arsenal includes:

- the Trishul, a surface-to-air missile which targets aircraft and can counter sea-skimming missiles
- the intermediate-range Agni, which can reach 1,500 miles (2,410 km)
- the short-range ballistic missile Prithvi with a range of 95 miles (153 km)
- and the anti-tank Nag missile.

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