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Tata Division to Build 16 Akash Launchers

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Published: 30 Mar 14:40 EDT (18:40 GMT)

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NEW DELHI - The Strategic Electronics Division (SED) of India's Tata Power will build 16 indigenous surface-to-air missile Akash launchers for \$36.4 million, to be delivered within 33 months.

"The order assumes importance for the company, as through this order Tata Power SED is now recognized as the premier launcher company in India," says a March 30 company press release.

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Tata Power SED has been associated with the Akash air defense system, developed by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), since 1991. In 2005, Tata Power SED delivered the Indian air force's version of the Akash launcher as its first integrated design-to-manufacturing project.

The 650-kilogram Akash missile has a range of 25 kilometers and can carry a 50-kilogram payload. It has a first-stage solid-fuel booster and a second-stage ram rocket sustainer motor. It is guided by ground radar and an on-board precision homing system.

The Akash is designed to defend large installations, like airfields, against enemy air attacks. One battery of Akash missiles will consist of three tracked vehicles mounted with four missiles each and a vehicle carrying a phased-array radar capable of tracking up to four targets at a time.

After the enemy target is detected, a DRDL scientist said, the Akash missile can align itself to the radar beams tracking the target within a few seconds and then approach the target at a speed of more than Mach 3.5.

The Indian army and air force are expected to order 3,000 Akash missiles in the next 20 years, and efforts will be made to export the missile, said a senior Defence Ministry official.

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