

## Brahmos cruise missiles to be assembled in Kerala

Brahmos, the world's fastest cruise missile jointly developed by India and Russia, would be assembled in Kerala, an official said here Sunday.

Keltec, a state public sector unit here, would start assembling Brahmos supersonic missile in three years, said A. Sivathanu Pillai, MD and CEO of Brahmos Aerospace, here Sunday. The unit would be renamed as Brahmos Aerospace Thiruvananthapuram Ltd.

'We are taking over Keltec and tomorrow (Monday) Kerala Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan would hand over the unit to the Defence Minister A.K. Antony,' Pillai told reporters at the campus of the unit.

'Considering the engineering capability, quality of the workforce at Keltec and the contribution of the staff to the country's space programme, the taking over became smoother,' said Pillai, who till 1982 worked as a scientist at the ISRO space centre.

In the first phase, Rs.1.25 billion would be invested at the existing campus. Of this Rs.750 million would be invested by the Brahmos Corp and Rs.250 million each would come from ISRO and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Pillai said that all the existing 225 employees of Keltec would be retained and will be given adequate training.

'In less than three years time the first missile would be ready to be assembled here and by then I am certain that many jobs in this sector would also come up,' added Pillai.

The Brahmos can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft or land. Brahmos is about three times faster than the US subsonic Tomahawk cruise missile. It has the capability to attack surface targets as low as 10m in altitude and has a maximum range of 290 km.

It is a joint venture between India's DRDO and Russia's NPO Mashinostroeyenia who have together formed the Brahmos Corp. Currently, the assembly of this state of the art and the best available supersonic missiles in the world takes place at Brahmos unit in Hyderabad.

'By now several countries have approached for buying these missiles that have already been supplied to the Indian Army and Navy.

'I am unable to give details about which country has approached and who would be given. These are all issues that would be jointly taken By Russia and India,' said Pillai.

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