

Air Marshal Harish Masand writes on

India's ASAT missile – and the indigenous defence industry



The ASAT on display at the Republic Day Parade, 26 January 2020

27 March 2019 is recalled in Indian history as a proud day when Indian scientists demonstrated their prowess to successfully test an Anti-Satellite (ASAT) missile and so register the country as “a space power”. As PM Narendra Modi stated, this made India the 4th country in the world, after the US, Russia and China, to possess

such strategic capability. Without going into the politics of this test, in my opinion, the PM was absolutely right in announcing this important landmark to the nation even as he congratulated scientists as well as the entire nation on this achievement. The world over such events are brought before the nation – and the world – by heads of

state owing to the strategic significance and security implications of such developments and achievements. Going back to 1998, the nuclear tests of 1998 were also announced by the then PM, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, without any kind of controversy at that time!

Be that as it may, the strategic implications and the boost in our national security because of the ASAT capability have already been widely debated by experts and I do not intend to repeat these. What I consider equally, if not more, significant in this achievement was the fact that the entire development and test was totally indigenous, as claimed by then Finance Minister Arun Jaitely, who was accompanied by then Defence Minister and others in a press conference that very afternoon. To be sure, as we have learnt from our nuclear and missile programmes over the years, no nation parts with such advanced technology without major strings attached.

Charting a course of strategic autonomy with India's stance of non-alignment, we have had to live with sanctions after the nuclear tests of 1998, which denied us even dual-use technology for a long time and impacted on other indigenous programmes including the LCA. It is to the credit



Pair of LCAs in formation take off