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Bulava Missile Test Delayed to 2011

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The military has delayed the next submarine test launch of its troubled intercontinental nuclear missile Bulava until 2011, Itar-Tass reported Wednesday.

The Bulava missile, which Moscow plans to make the cornerstone of its nuclear arsenal over the next decade, has failed seven of its previous 14 tests, endangering the future of a project estimated to cost at least $3 billion.

The next test had been scheduled for Friday.

"The White Sea region, from where the Bulava was to be launched, is covered with ice," said a defense industry official who had been due to attend the test launch, Itar-Tass reported.

"The exact date of the next test launch of the Bulava in 2011 is not yet decided, but it will take place in the first half of the year," the unidentified official said.

Test launches have sent the nearly 37-ton missile from Russia's border with Finland to the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia's Far East.

Defense sources have said the 12-meter-long Bulava, which means "mace" in Russian, would not enter service until tests proved it 98 percent to 99 percent reliable.

The missile self-destructed in previous tests, leading to doubts about its reliability. One missile can hold six to 10 nuclear warheads, which would deliver an impact of up to 100 times the atomic blast that devastated Hiroshima in 1945.

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