

# Missile Man

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The repeated failures and delays to test launch the Agni missile created quite a buzz in the press. Such delays are common in rocket science, but the nation was in no mood to understand. Our difficulties were ours alone.

People interpreted the delay in their own way and suggested some hilarious alternatives. There was an Amul cartoon that suggested Agni should use their butter as fuel!

While the press was outraged over the delay, my team was utterly demoralised by the repeated failures. I recalled the various occasions when my team leaders had boosted our morale and I thought of doing likewise.

I called for a meeting and addressed my team of two thousand members. "A great opportunity has been given to us. All major opportunities are accompanied by equally major challenges. We cannot give up. Our country doesn't deserve anything less from us." I finished by telling my people, "I promise you that Agni will be launched successfully on our next trial." My team regained its energy! Renewing their enthusiasm, they worked with tremendous concentration and willpower.



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The launch was finally scheduled for 22nd May 1989. Dignitaries such as the Chief of Army Staff and the Defence Minister had come to witness the launch. On the previous night, we had all gone for a walk on the beach that was lit up by a full moon. The waves roared and crashed over the rocks.

Would we succeed with the Agni launch tomorrow? The question was on everyone's mind, but none of us was willing to speak. Finally, the Defence Minister broke the silence and asked me, "Kalam, how should we celebrate the Agni success tomorrow? Is there something your heart desires?"

It was a simple question, to which I could not find an immediate answer. What did I want? What was it that I did not have? Then I found the answer. "We need a hundred thousand saplings to plant in our research centre," I said. The Minister's face lit up with a friendly glow. "You are buying the blessing of mother earth for Agni. We will surely succeed tomorrow," he predicted warmly.

The next day Agni took off at 7:10 in the morning. It was a perfect launch. It was like waking up to a bright, crisp morning from a nightmarish sleep. Five years of continuous work at various work centres had finally paid off. A mere six hundred seconds of elegant flight washed away all our fatigue. What a wonderful culmination to the many years of labour! It was and will remain one of the greatest moments of my life.

THE END



# Vocabulary

(All meanings given in context to the story)

Blame	-	Made responsible for doing something badly or wrongly
Cheer	-	A shout of joy, support or praise
Complex	-	Made of many different things and often difficult to understand
Critics	-	Experts who pass judgement
Dread	-	Great fear
Launch	-	Put something in motion
Orbit	-	The path of a satellite around the earth
Satellite	-	An object sent into space to move around the earth
Scheduled	-	Arrange for something to happen at a particular time
Spellbound	-	Completely held by what you are listening to or watching



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