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# DRDO Completes ULPGM-V3 Trials: India's UAV-Launched Precision Missile

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# DRDO Completes ULPGM-V3 Trials: India's UAV-Launched Precision Missile

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## Why in News

On **May 18-19, 2026**, the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** completed the **final deliverable-configuration trials** of the indigenously developed **Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Launched Precision Guided Missile (ULPGM)-V3** at the integrated test range near **Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh**. The third-generation lightweight munition was fired in both **air-to-ground (A2G)** and **air-to-air (A2A)** modes — engaging stationary and moving ground targets with high precision and intercepting simulated aerial drones in counter-UAV roles. Press coverage of **May 20-21, 2026** described the trials as the closing milestone before user-trial induction with the armed forces.

### WHAT IS ULPGM-V3?

The **ULPGM-V3** is a **third-generation, dual-mode, UAV-launched precision-guided munition** designed for integration onto indigenous medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) and tactical drones. Its defining characteristic is **dual targeting capability** — a single munition cleared for both surface attack and counter-air engagements, reducing the need for separate weapon stations on the launch platform.

## Key Design Parameters

PARAMETER	SPECIFICATION
Generation	Third-generation precision-guided munition
Mode	Dual-mode — Air-to-Ground (A2G) + Air-to-Air (A2A)
Class	Lightweight (estimated under 25 kg)
Guidance	Dual-mode seeker (electro-optical / image-recognition + millimetre-wave radar)
Role	Stationary and moving ground targets; counter-drone (single drone and swarm)
Launch platform	Indigenous UAVs — Tapas, Archer-NG, Drishti-10 class

## A2A Counter-Drone Significance

The A2A mode is the most novel element. With **slow, low, small (SLS)** aerial threats — quadcopters, FPV drones, loitering munitions — proliferating across modern battlefields, a UAV-launched air-to-air munition allows an Indian MALE drone to **act as an airborne counter-drone picket** without committing a manned fighter or surface-based air defence missile, both of which are cost-inefficient against sub-₹1-lakh quadcopter threats.

### DEVELOPERS AND PRODUCTION PARTNERS

The ULPGM-V3 reflects the **DRDO–Defence Public Sector Undertaking (DPSU)–private industry** triad that the **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020** seeks to deepen.

ENTITY	ROLE
DRDO — DRDL Hyderabad / RCI Imarat	Lead missile system design and seeker development
Newspace Research & Technologies, Bengaluru	UAV airframe and weapon-platform integration
Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), Hyderabad	DPSU production partner (warhead, motor, integration)
Adani Defence Systems & Technologies Ltd.	Private-sector production partner

This four-way arrangement — **government laboratory + drone OEM + DPSU + private prime** — mirrors the **Buy Indian-IDD** (Indigenously Designed, Developed, Manufactured) acquisition category, which sits at the top of the DAP 2020 priority hierarchy.

### OPERATIONAL CONTEXT — INDIA'S DRONE DOCTRINE POST-

The need for an indigenous UAV-launched precision munition is informed by three contemporary conflict lessons and one Indian operation.

#### Conflict Lessons Drawn

- **Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020):** Azerbaijan's use of the Turkish **Bayraktar TB2** with MAM-L munitions decisively defeated Armenian armoured columns and air defence — establishing the MALE-drone-with-precision-munition concept as a **doctrinal** mainstay.
- **Russia–Ukraine War (2022– ):** First-Person-View (FPV) drones and **Lancet** loitering munitions have generated a new economics of land-warfare attrition, where ₹50,000 quadcopters destroy ₹50-crore main battle tanks.

- **Israel–Hammas operations:** Persistent ISR-strike loops by Israeli MALE drones with **Spike NLOS** munitions have shaped Indian thinking on cross-border precision options.

## Operation Sindoor and the Bhairav Drone Force

In **May 2025**, India’s **Operation Sindoor** — launched in response to the Pahalgam terror attack — saw the operational employment of drone-strike packages and the **consolidation** of the Indian Army’s **Bhairav Drone Force** as a dedicated combined-arms unit. ULPGM-V3 is, in effect, the **purpose-built munition** for that force.

## Drone-Export Ambition

The **Drone Federation of India (DFI)** has set an export target of **USD 2 billion by 2030**. Indigenous, qualified munitions like ULPGM-V3 are an essential complement: drones without certified weapon options have limited export attraction beyond the surveillance market.

## POLICY AND ACQUISITION FRAMEWORK

INSTRUMENT	YEAR	KEY FEATURE
Drone Rules	2021	Liberalised airspace zoning (Green / Yellow / Red); single-window registration via DigitalSky
PLI Scheme for Drones	2021	₹120 crore corpus over three years; incentive 20% of value addition
Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP)	2020	“Buy Indian–IDDM” placed at apex of priority categories
Positive Indigenisation Lists (PIL)	2020-24	Successive lists (4th issued 2024) bar imports of listed items by phased dates
iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence)	2018	Startup and MSME challenges; SPARK grants
Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy	2020	Targets defence exports of ₹35,000 crore by 2025

## GLOBAL COMPARATORS — UAV-LAUNCHED PRECISION MUNITIONS

COUNTRY	MUNITION	MODE	LAUNCH PLATFORM
United States	AGM-114 Hellfire	A2G	MQ-1 Predator, MQ-9 Reaper
United States	AGM-176 Griffin	A2G	MQ-9, AC-130
United States	AGM-114R9X (Ninja blade)	A2G (kinetic, no warhead)	MQ-9
Israel	Spike NLOS / Spike LR2	A2G / dual	Heron, Hermes-class UAVs
Türkiye	MAM-L / MAM-C / Kemankes	A2G	Bayraktar TB2, Akinci
China	AR-1 / AR-2	A2G	CH-4, Wing Loong
India	<b>ULPGM-V3</b>	<b>A2G + A2A</b>	Tapas, Archer-NG, Drishti-10

The ULPGM-V3's combined A2G + A2A clearance places it in a small global cohort that includes the latest Spike variants — a meaningful indicator of the seeker and guidance maturity reached by DRDL/RCI.

## DRDO — INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Founded	1958
Headquarters	New Delhi
Parent ministry	Department of Defence R&D (DDR&D), Ministry of Defence
Chairman & Secretary, DDR&D	Dr. Samir V. Kamat
Laboratory network	~50 specialised laboratories
Key laboratories for ULPGM-V3	DRDL (Hyderabad), RCI Imarat, ARDE (Pune), ADRDE (Agra)
Mandate	Self-reliance in critical defence technologies

DRDO's portfolio relevant to drone warfare also includes the **Rustom-II / Tapas BH-201** MALE UAV, the **SWIFT** stealthUCAV demonstrator, and a family of **anti-drone systems** integrating laser DEW and radar-jammer kill chains.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

- **GS Paper 3 – Defence and Security:** Indigenisation of defence technology; Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence; emerging warfare domains (drones, autonomous systems); internal security implications of small UAV proliferation along borders.
- **GS Paper 3 – Science & Technology:** Achievements of Indians in science; awareness in the fields of IT, robotics, and defence technology; technology missions.
- **GS Paper 3 – Economy:** Defence manufacturing, exports, and the role of PSUs and the private sector; PLI schemes; investment models.
- **Essay / Ethics linkage:** Ethics of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWS); proportionality of drone strikes; sovereignty implications of cross-border armed-drone use.

## Facts Corner

- **ULPGM-V3:** Third-generation, dual-mode (Air-to-Ground + Air-to-Air) UAV-launched precision-guided missile.
- **Test dates:** May 18-19, 2026.
- **Test location:** Integrated test range, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh.
- **UAV integrator:** Newspace Research & Technologies, Bengaluru.
- **Production partners:** Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), Hyderabad + Adani Defence Systems & Technologies Ltd.
- **Lead DRDO labs:** DRDL Hyderabad and Research Centre Imarat (RCI).
- **DRDO founded:** 1958.
- **DRDO Headquarters:** New Delhi.
- **DRDO Chairman & Secretary, DDR&D:** Dr. Samir V. Kamat.
- **DRDO laboratory count:** ~50 specialised labs.
- **Indigenous UAV platforms:** Tapas BH-201, Archer-NG, Drishti-10 (Hermes-900 transfer of technology).
- **Drone Rules:** 2021.
- **PLI Scheme for Drones:** 2021 — ₹120 crore corpus.
- **DAP 2020 highest priority category:** Buy Indian–IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed, Manufactured).
- **iDEX:** Innovations for Defence Excellence, 2018.
- **Operation Sindoor:** May 2025 — saw operationalisation of the Indian Army’s Bhairav Drone Force.

- **Drone export target:** USD 2 billion by 2030 (Drone Federation of India).
- **Global comparators:** AGM-114 Hellfire (US), Spike NLOS (Israel), MAM-L (Türkiye), AR-1 (China).

Sources: [Press Information Bureau](#), [Ministry of Defence](#), [DRDO](#)

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