

## Army inches closer to getting advanced assault rifles, carbines, machine guns



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NEW DELHI: The procurement of more than 70,000 advanced assault rifles, around 90,000 carbines and a large quantity of Light Machine Guns mainly for the army on a fast track basis has moved a step forward with the defence ministry today issuing Request for Proposals for the weapons, top ministry sources said.

The RFPs which also looks at meeting the requirements of the other defence services have been given to about 12 vendors, said sources. A RFP consists of the general specifications of an equipment, the numbers required, delivery timeframe, commercial

aspects and evaluation criteria.

The primary weapon for the army is the assault rifle and the army in the RFP has specified that it should have an effective range of 500 m. Experts said that this is a perfect range for such a weapon, because anything beyond this changes the trajectory of the bullet due to the wind affect.

"The rifle will have a calibre of 7.62x41mm bullets and should weigh less than four kg," said sources.

This calibre is more lethal than the 5.56mm calibre INSAS rifle being currently used by the army, added experts. The 7.62mm ammunition has longer range and better accuracy. Sources said that the Chinese PLA uses 7.62mm calibre rifles and the new assault rifle being procured by the army is to counter this. This assault rifle is being procured for the frontline soldiers, who have to engage the adversary first.

Even the carbines and Light Machine Guns (LMGs) being procured on fast-track basis are also for the frontline troops. The three weapons will be procured without the relevant sights such as telescopic sight and night vision sight, which will be procured separately.

# India, Russia close to deal for S-400 air defence systems



*The Indian Air Force (IAF) recently told the parliamentary panel on defence that the procurement of the S-400 air defence systems developed by Russia is imperative to tackle possible threats from China and Pakistan.*

India and Russia are in the final stages of negotiations to purchase S-400 air defence systems two years after their initial deal on the matter. A commercial contract is expected to be signed soon and could happen on Nirmala Sitharaman's maiden trip to Moscow as defence minister in the first week of April, according to persons with knowledge of the matter.

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parliamentary panel, on its part, has recommended that funds for this be made available during the year as per the IAF demand.

India and Russia have been working on the final commercial contract since October 2016, when the two sides concluded an intergovernmental agreement for the procurement of five S-400 systems, 200 Kamov helicopters, some of which will be bought and the rest made in India, and four stealth frigates. During Arun Jaitley's visit to Moscow last year as defence minister the two sides expedited the process of concluding contracts for these. Work on the stealth frigates have started.

The S-400 systems are capable of intercepting and destroying airborne threats at a distance of up to 250 miles and can simultaneously engage up to six targets. Each S-400 comprises tracking and search radar systems, eight launchers, 112 guided missiles, and command and support vehicles.

China was the first global customer of the S-400, said to be the world's most potent air defence system. It was delivered to China last year. Russia is also expected to begin implementing the contract on delivery of S-400 systems to Turkey in early 2020.

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## Chandrayaan launch put off till Oct

The launch of India's second lunar mission "Chandrayaan-2", slated for next month, has been postponed to October as the experts have suggested some tests, the ISRO said on Friday.

The experts had met recently and suggested the tests, following which the mission would now be launched in October, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman K Sivan said.

"Chandrayaan-2 will not be in April, it has been changed to October," K Sivan told reporters at the airport here.

Union Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, incharge of the Department of Space, Jitendra Singh had, on February 16 last, said the lunar mission under which the ISRO would, for the first time, attempt to land a rover on the moon's south pole, would be launched in April.

Sivan had earlier said the window to launch the Rs 800-crore mission was between April and November 2018.  
— PTI

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## MoD plans self-reliance by 2025

*By Ajay Banerjee*

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has proposed a major tweak to the defence-manufacturing policy, including higher Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) limits, a multi-billion dollar target for domestic production of military equipment by 2025, self-reliance and exports of critical technology.

The Department of Defence Production under the MoD has put out a draft of the defence production policy (DPP-2018). It has sought suggestions by March 30. The final policy will be released after that.

The new DPP draft says "the policy aims to achieve a turnover of Rs 1,70,000 crore (\$26 billion approx) in defence goods and services by 2025. It may be noted that the domestic production for 2016-17 was Rs 55, 894 crore, largely in the public sector.

The ministry says this will need an additional investment of around Rs 70,000 crore and aims to "achieve export of Rs 35,000 crore by 2025. The DDP identifies 13 sectors in which self-reliance needs to be achieved latest by 2025.

On the list are fighter aircraft, medium lift and utility helicopters, warships, land combat vehicles, autonomous weapon systems, missile systems, gun systems, small arms, ammunition and explosives, surveillance systems, electronic warfare systems, communication systems and night fighting enablers.

Off these, India is already producing Tejas jets, Dhruv helicopters, missiles and has had success in gun systems. The target will be achieved by faster absorption of technology, suggest the DPP.



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## Unravelling China's defence budget

*As a 'veil of ignorance and mystery' covers the Chinese defence budget, there are no takers for its official figures. By all estimates, China spends much more than it reflects.*

*By Bhartendu Kumar Singh*

Until a few years back, China's defence budget was eagerly awaited and reacted upon. However, of late, international reactions have been muted - like when China recently declared its defence budget for 2018 at \$175 billion, up by 8.1 per cent over the 2017 figures. The single-digit growth rate has been there for three years, departing from the days of double-digit growth year after year. The absence of major reactions notwithstanding, China's defence budget still remains mystery for outside world and needs to be decoded properly.

China's defence budget's justifications as 'conservative' and 'defensive' are based on shaky platforms. China claims that it accounts for just one-fourth of the US military spending. This has been the core polemics and not long back, China was estimated to spend anywhere between two and three times of its official figures. Consistent efforts by international community ensured more transparency and reforms in China's defence budget administration, accounting and reporting, thereby, reducing the gap between the competing claims.

However, the 'veil of ignorance and mystery' continues to define Chinese defence budget and there are simply no takers for its official figures. By all estimates, China still spends much more than it reflects.

China's other claim that many other countries have faster defence budget growth ignores its own double-digit growth for almost two decades until 2013. China could again resort to such a trend in future.

Similarly, China's claims that it lags behind major countries on per capita military expenditure has no takers since reputed annual publications, like the Military Balance (published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London), have been publishing year after year all aspects of Chinese defence expenditure, along with that of other countries. Many countries spend much less than China on a per capita basis. India, for example, spends roughly one-third of Chinese per capita figures.

China's conservative declarations on defence spending notwithstanding, estimating its correctness is a futile exercise without reflecting the appropriate military standing of China. One example would suffice. Most attempts towards military strength index place Russia marginally ahead of China. However, China has already emerged as the most important military power after the US. Most importantly, it is closing in on the US and would surely even up by 2050. This leapfrogging is not possible without massive investments in military modernisation. China, therefore, indulges into cross-subsidisation of its defence budget. Perhaps, this speaks why it is placed in low transparency category (category 5) of defence budget by Transparency International, a global NGO.

The higher side of the defence budget can be ascertained in several ways:

**1** First, many economic aspects of the defence modernisation process have changed in last two decades. For example, the guns vs butter debate is no more contextual in China's case. Given the huge economic base, even single-digit growth rate translates into a huge budgetary amount for the Chinese PLA. So, the PLA does not mind preferential treatment to developmental priorities, like the eighties and early nineties. Similarly,

technology and arms imports have dropped down; decades of techno-nationalism have, instead, ensured that China is exporting them to earn foreign exchange and diplomatic influence.

**2** Second, China has established self-sufficiency in most areas of weapons production. China's domestic military-industrial complex (MIC) is producing artillery guns, fighter jets, tanks, submarines, ships and has a steady going project on domestic aircraft carrier. Xi Jinping has long-term plans to facilitate China's leadership in strategic areas of weapons production, dual-use systems, high technology and advanced manufacturing. Moving beyond the realm of state-led growth, Xi is also encouraging private sector participation to plug the loopholes in financial and technological gaps in domestic arms production.

**3** Third, China has effected a transformation of the PLA: from being a manpower-oriented army capable of defending at best continental interests to a lean, thin and technology savvy army. It has undergone a complete change of command and control system through the establishment of a 'theatre command system' on the US pattern and is shedding extra manpower. The blue water capacity is now within reach and China is engaging foreign armies in more than 150 joint exercises every year. China has also established lead in aerospace and cyber command, something still beyond the reach of many aspiring great powers.

The impact of Chinese investments in military modernisation is visible in its approach towards neighbours, far-off countries and great powers. China is indulging in offensive realism and aggressive strategic culture, as is evident in South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region. The US' National Security Strategy (December 2017) named China as a revisionist power and placed it as a central threat along with Russia. A February testimonial before the US China Economic and Security Review Commission highlights how the Chinese PLA is challenging the US in its Pacific Command Operations and elsewhere. Other great powers are also feeling the heat of China's military power projection in Asia and Africa. Such a forceful power projection is not possible through the official budget alone! It is debatable if China would ever usher in defence budget transparency as per international benchmarks. Therefore, more investment is needed in studying Chinese defence modernisation trends, its strategic arsenals, and above all, its posturing on major issues challenging Asian security.

## THE ASIAN AGE

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### **Chandrayaan-2 launch postponed to October: ISRO chief**

The launch of India's second lunar mission 'Chandrayaan-2', slated for next month, has been postponed to October as the experts have suggested some tests, ISRO said today. The experts met recently and suggested the tests, following which the mission will now be launched in October, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman K Sivan said.

“Chandrayaan-2 will not be in April, it has been changed to October,”

he told presspersons at the airport here. Union Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, in-charge of the Department of Space, Jitendra Singh had on February 16 last said the lunar mission under which ISRO will for the first time attempt to land a rover on the moon's south pole, will be launched in April.

Sivan had earlier said the window to launch the Rs 800-crore mission was between April and November 2018. While the “targeted date” was April, ISRO would launch the mission in October or November, he had said. According to ISRO, Chandrayaan-2 is a “totally indigenous mission comprising an orbiter, lander and rover”. The Chandrayaan-2 spacecraft weighing around 3,290 kg, would orbit around the moon and perform the objectives of remote sensing the moon.

“The payloads will collect scientific information on the lunar topography, mineralogy, elemental abundance, lunar exosphere and signatures of hydroxyl and water-ice,” ISRO said on its website about the lunar mission. ISRO had launched its maiden lunar mission Chandrayaan-1 in 2008.



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## **Soldiers on borders to get new rifles & LMGs soon**

The government after some delay has finally set the ball rolling for the acquisition of a small number of new assault rifles, light machine guns and close quarter battle carbines, which were promised for infantry soldiers deployed on the borders with China and Pakistan under the fast-track procedure (FTP).

Defence ministry sources said the initial tenders or RFPs (requests for proposal) for 72,400 assault rifles, 93,895 CQB carbines and 16,479 light machine guns, which will together cost an estimated Rs 5,366 crore, were issued to selected foreign armament companies on Friday. Under the Defence Procurement Procedure's strict timelines for the FTP, which caters for urgent operational requirements, the RFP has to be issued within 10 days of a case being cleared by the Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC) to ensure the actual contract after technical and commercial evaluation is inked within a year.

The delivery of the weapons is supposed to thereafter take place in three to 12 months. But the three RFPs have been somewhat delayed after the Nirmala Sitharaman-led DAC approved the cases for the assault rifles (Rs 1,798 crore) and CQB carbines (Rs 1,749 crore) on January 16, and the one for light machine guns (Rs 1,819 crore) on February 13.

The Army will obviously be keeping its fingers crossed. The force had first asked for new assault rifles and CQB carbines for its 382 infantry battalions (each with 850 soldiers each) way back in 2005, while the case for the light machine guns was initiated in 2009. But the long-drawn procurement projects were repeatedly scrapped due to graft allegations or unrealistic technical parameters as well as the lack of indigenous options for well over a decade. Moreover,

the FTP route is only for limited numbers of weapons due to critical operational necessity. For instance, the overall requirement is for 8.16 lakh new 7.62x51mm caliber assault rifles to replace the existing glitch-prone 5.56mm INSAS (Indian small arms system) rifles. Similarly, the numbers are 4.58 lakh for close-quarter battle carbines (5.56 x 45mm) and 43,544 for light machine guns (7.62x51mm). While the bulk of the weapons are meant for the infantry, some have been earmarked for the Navy and IAF also.