

## India to conclude user trials of first locally developed howitzer

The Indian Army (IA) is expected to successfully complete user trials of the 155 mm/52 calibre Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) within the next two months: a move that would pave the way to start series production of India's first locally designed howitzer.

Industry sources told *Jane's* that two different prototypes of the ATAGS, which was jointly developed by the state-owned Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and private-sector companies Tata Power SED, Bharat Forge and Kalyani Strategic Systems, have been undergoing trials with the IA since 24 May at Pokhran in India's north-western desert region.

They said that once these trials are completed around July, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) will issue a request for proposals to both Tata Power, which provided the 'G1' prototype, and Bharat Forge, which provided the 'G2' prototype, for the supply of 150 guns for the IA for an estimated INR36.65 billion (USD524 million). The MoD's Defence Acquisition Council had approved the ATAGS procurement in August 2018.

Thereafter, one of two howitzer prototypes, either Tata Power's G1 or Bharat Forge's G2, is expected to be shortlisted for procurement based on performance and commercial bids.

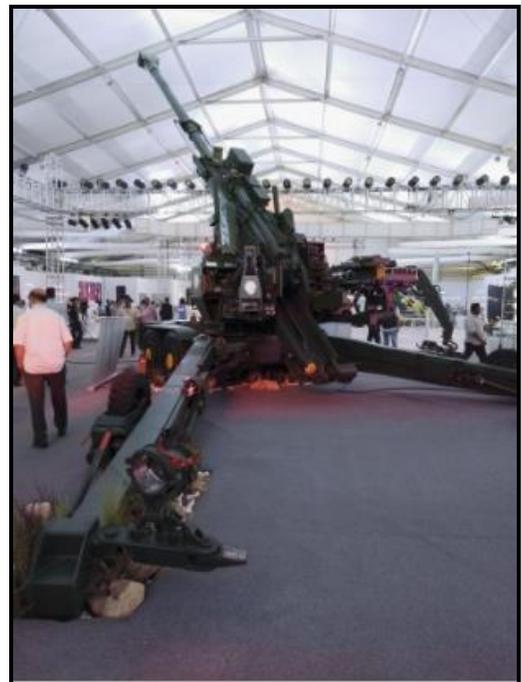
Officials said the lowest bidder, or L1, will be awarded a contract to build 100 of the 150 ATAGSs while the runner-up will be allowed to manufacture the remaining 50 guns (of the same model) in what will be India's first-ever public-private partnership (PPP) project in the defence sector.

The ATAGS programme was launched in 2013 by the DRDO's Armament Research & Development Establishment to boost the IA's depreciated artillery profile. In September 2017 the gun set a local record by firing three shells, reportedly undisclosed model high-explosive base bleed (HE-BB) projectiles, to a distance of 47.2 km at Pokhran.

This was made possible by the gun's 25-litre chamber, which allows for a revised propellant charge that increases the muzzle velocity of projectiles while staying within design pressure limits, giving the projectiles a longer range. Most other howitzers have a 23-litre chamber.

The ATAGS is also one of the few howitzers capable of firing a six-round burst in 30 seconds, unlike other 155mm/52cal guns that have three-round magazines and require re-loading after firing.

The ATAGS also features an all-electric drive that operates all of the gun's controls and ammunition handling systems, opening and closing its breech and ramming shells into its chamber. An auxiliary power mode, advanced communication and automated command-and-control system, complete the ATAGS.



Industry officials said these enhanced performance attributes have increased the weight of the gun to 17–18 tonnes. That said, the IA seems willing to accept the added weight because of the weapon's enhanced operational performance.

An executive associated with the ATAGS programme said Tata Power and Bharat Forge had made five prototypes, each of which test-fired over 1,000 rounds over the past two years in varied terrain and climates.

He also pointed out that the ATAGS has successfully cleared high-altitude winter trials in the Himalayan Sikkim region in north-eastern India, achieving a range of around 58 km using undisclosed ammunition.

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