

MoD 'nominates' DRDO for building e-warfare systems

By Ajai Shukla

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Monday announced it had approved the purchase of Rs 3,300 crore of indigenously designed and developed military equipment.

The private sector is up in arms. Despite repeated Ministry of Defence (MoD) assurances that private firms would be allowed to compete for defence contracts on equal terms with the public sector — which includes the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), eight defence public sector units (DPSUs) and 41 ordnance factories — the DAC has ‘nominated’ the DRDO for designing and developing an indigenous lightweight electronic warfare system for mountains (hereafter, Mountain EW system).

The Mountain EW system “would be designed and developed by DRDO and manufactured by design-cum-production partner from the Indian (private) industry,” announced the MoD.

This denial of a design and development role to the private industry comes even as a private firm, Tata Power (Strategic Engineering Division, or SED), is building two far more complex integrated Mountain EW systems, a global tender it won in 2013 for Rs 926 crore. An amended order was placed in July, which is on track to be delivered in 24 months.

Meanwhile, a public sector partnership between DRDO and Bharat Electronics is floundering in developing two similar systems, for which they were ‘nominated’ by the MoD at twice the price bid by Tata Power (SED).

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (Ficci) has strongly protested this sidelining of private firms. In a letter addressed directly to Rajnath Singh on October 10, Ficci wrote: “It is understood that serious considerations are being given to nominate (the Mountain EW system tenders) to DRDO/DPSUs, disregarding the private sector having equal, if not better, capability and skill sets in EW technologies,” wrote Ficci.

“Ficci would request your personal intervention to advise that all the EW programme requests for proposals, or tenders, like all other capital acquisition programmes, as issued on competitive tendering basis,” the letter said.

Invoking Tata Power (SED)’s strong, two-decade-old track record in developing EW systems, Ficci wrote: “Private sector companies were involved in developing the critical command and control software and platform engineering for the integrated EW system Samyukta (in the 1990s). This was even acknowledged by Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, then DRDO chief”.

The MoD cites ‘security concerns’ to place orders for EW systems with the DRDO/DPSUs. This has been strongly protested by the private sector, which cites its own stringent security protocols.

“Any security concerns raised to justify DPSU/PSU nomination be discouraged as all ‘A category’ licensed private Indian vendors are covered under the same security guidelines issued by the MoD, as are DPSUs,” wrote Ficci.

Business Standard has reviewed Ficci’s letter to the defence minister.

EW systems are a crucial military force multiplier. They are built around a powerful receiver that picks up, records, and analyses enemy (or militant/terrorist) transmissions to obtain valuable intelligence. Its integrated direction finder establishes the precise location of the enemy transmitter.

That location can then be attacked, using aircraft or ground forces. Alternatively, at a crucial stage of battle, the enemy's transmissions can be disrupted with high-power jammers, throwing his plan into disarray. Good EW systems allow an army to dominate the electromagnetic spectrum.

The Mountain EW system that the DAC cleared on Monday is a lightweight system that can be physically carried to remote locations, or heli-lifted onto high mountains. It is particularly useful in counter-militancy operations.



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LCA Tejas: Did it serve the purpose, can it replace ageing MiGs?

By Vikas SV

New Delhi: If all had worked according to plan, then IAF's depleting squadron strength would not have been so severe a problem as it now appears. MiG-21 and MiG-27 are the oldest fighters in the Indian Air Force (IAF)'s fleet. These were inducted way back in the 1960s and are set to retire by 2022.

LCA Tejas was to replace these. Tejas Fighter should have replaced Mig-21 fleet by now. Before the induction of the Su-30 MKI aircraft, Mig-21 was the frontline fighter with the Mig-29. LCA Tejas was to be the Third Line of fighter for India.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is staring at a massive problem of depleting fleet size. The IAF should ideally have a strength of 42 combat squadrons but currently, its fleet has shrunk to around 30-32 squadrons and many MiG fighters are set to retire in the next 5 years.

Tejas was supposed to have played a key role in IAF's scheme things. It was thought that India's requirement for single engine fighters could be met with LCA Tejas. But due to multiple problems encountered during Tejas's development and HAL's failure to meet the delivery deadlines, IAF was forced to look at other foreign aircrafts.

Some 120-odd MiG-21s continue to be in service. These will be retired in phases till 2021-2022. The IAF will phase out nine squadrons of the MiG-21 and 2 MiG-27 over the next 5 years. Two squadrons of Rafale fighters, two of the LCA Tejas and two more Sukhoi-30MKI are to be added by then, making the number of 28 squadrons by 2022, a report published in The Tribune said.

This is how it is looking right now for IAF.....

LCA Tejas was to be the Third Line of Fighter for India. At present, the problem is that the production speed of Tejas is just too slow. Given this, India will have to look to buy fighters from foreign manufacturers. There are also AMCA Programme/ HAL Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) of India and MWF/Medium Weight Fighter Programmes that many opine have not yielded desired results.

The development of Kaveri Engine has also not gone as per plans. According to initial plans, it was the Kaveri Engine which was to be fitted in Tejas, but as of now Tejas has an imported GE engine.

India manufactures helicopters, drones and HAL has quality manufacturing lines to make quality fighters. If Tejas production gets underway in full swing, it would create an aviation ecosystem in the country which may pave way to design and production of much more sophisticated aircrafts.

In the nutshell, Tejas was supposed to have served as the first major step by India towards manufacturing of fighters. As far as meeting the requirements of the IAF is concerned, HAL has been given green signal to start manufacturing of Tejas Mk1 under Final Operational Clearance (FOC)

configuration. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) has ordered 40 Tejas LCA Mark-I with HAL. 20 Tejas LCA in initial operational configuration - 16 fighters and four trainers - have been produced so far (this was as of January this year).

The weaponised version of Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas equipped with capabilities of mid-air refuelling, AESA radar, electronic warfare suites and a variety of other features is likely to be inducted into the Indian Air Force by this year-end.

Indian Air Force's Squadron strength (as per information in public domain):

According to the information available in the public domain, the IAF currently has around eleven squadrons of the Su-30MKI, three each of the MiG-29 and Mirage 2000, six of the Jaguar and six of the MiG-21. The MiG-27 and the MiG-21 are one of the oldest in the IAF inventory. The MiG-21 and MiG-27 squadrons have been in decline and the MiG-23 has been phased out completely. The IAF will phase out nine squadrons of the MiG-21 and 2 MiG-27 over the next 5 years.

Two of the LCA Tejas and two more Sukhoi-30MKI are likely to be added in the coming years .

IAF will get the MiG-29 fighters upgraded to the latest standards by Russia, and get them at virtually throwaway prices, reportedly Rs 200 crore per piece. They will augment the 62 MiG-29 fighters that are in the IAF's fleet which are also being upgraded to give them an all-weather multi-role capability.

In fact, there are reportedly 15 more such aircraft. IAF is in advance talks with Russia for an urgent procurement of MiG 29 fighters that can be delivered at relatively short notice. The plan to acquire 21 additional aircraft to make a new squadron of MiG 29 jets that were first purchased in the 1980s has been discussed in detail last month and is expected to cost the Indian exchequer less than Rs 6,000 crore. The MiG 29s, if procured, will cost significantly lesser than the Rafale fighter jets.

<https://www.oneindia.com/india/lca-tejas-did-it-serve-the-purpose-can-it-replace-ageing-mig-2968966.html>