

## European defence major, Swedish firm in race to clinch deal for Navy's missile project

*Indian Navy is looking to buy short-range surface-to-air missile systems to replace its Israeli Barak-1 air defence systems on Kamorta class corvettes*

*By Snehesh Alex Philip*

New Delhi: A number of foreign companies, including European defence major MBDA and Swedish firm SAAB, are set to submit their proposals to the Indian Navy, which is looking to buy short-range surface-to-air missile (SRSAM) systems to replace its Israeli Barak-1 air defence systems on the Kamorta class corvettes.

Though it was initially meant to be a Make in India project, the Request for Proposal (RFP) has been issued under the Buy (Global) category. The 'Buy (Global)' category refers to the outright purchase of equipment from foreign or Indian vendors. In case of procurement through foreign vendors, the government-to-government route may be adopted for equipment meeting strategic or long-term requirements.



The last date for the submission of bids is 17 October.

The Navy plans to buy the SRSAM systems for four ships — about 150-odd missiles.

Each SRSAM system will have a command and control system, a fire control system, a command link radar and a launcher for a particular number of missiles.

It is hoped that once this contract is signed, new generation missile vessels and corvettes will be equipped with the same system, a project that would be worth several billion dollars.

### **'RFP only for immediate requirements'**

Navy sources told ThePrint that the RFP is only to meet the immediate requirements. The Navy is looking at getting over 10 SRSAM systems in total but the rest are likely to come through the state-run Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO), which is working on its own indigenous systems.

Asked about the future missile vessels and corvettes, the sources said everything would depend on the timeline offered by DRDO. "The thinking is that any system selected now will go on to future platforms. But DRDO is the first priority," a Navy source said. "There is a process for that and the ser trails are yet to happen. Everything would depend on the delivery schedule of the DRDO. If some vessels are manufactured before the delivery schedule, they will need SRSAM even if not the DRDO ones."

The Navy will be using the SRSAM along with other air defence systems against supersonic and subsonic anti-ship missiles, precision-guided munitions, a wide range of aircraft, including fighters and bombers, UAVs, swarms of Fast Inshore Attack Craft among others.

Besides MBDA and the SAAB, as also the Russians, others expected to participate in the bidding process include the Israel Aerospace Industries, the Rafael Advanced Defense Systems of Israel and Samsung of South Korea.

American firms are unlikely to offer bids because of the cost involved.

## **MBDA offers Sea Ceptor**

The European defence firm MBDA is offering the Sea Ceptor missile, which has a range of 25 km and has entered into service with the Royal Navy in 2018. It has also been acquired by New Zealand and Chile while Brazil has shortlisted it. The European firm is offering the system through its joint venture L&T MBDA Missile Systems Ltd.

“We are offering Sea Ceptor through our Joint Venture with L&T that showcases our belief in India,” said Michele Lastella, regional head of MBDA Group, (Corporate Marketing). “There is an Indian policy. We are there to deliver the Indian policy.”

Asked about the Transfer of Technology (TOT) for Sea Ceptor, he said it would be gradual.

“At the beginning, the TOT will be very raw and will be very high in the end. We need to go through the learning curve,” Lastella said. “For us as MBDA, Buy (Global) is easier but we don’t want that. We see India as a market that can be used eventually for manufacturing.”

Andrew Blackburn of MBDA said the Sea Ceptor has multiple roles including defence of aircraft carriers, ports, cities and oil fields among others.

## **Maitri project junked**

The much-touted Maitri SRSAM project, a collaboration between DRDO and MBDA, has been junked, the sources said. Project Maitri was initiated in 2007 and an MoU was signed between India and France in 2013 to jointly develop the system.

A source said the DRDO is working on its own SRSAM that will be offered to the Navy.

The Maitri was supposed to be a tri-service project. However, the Air Force and the Army settled for the indigenous Akash air defence system leaving the Navy alone.

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