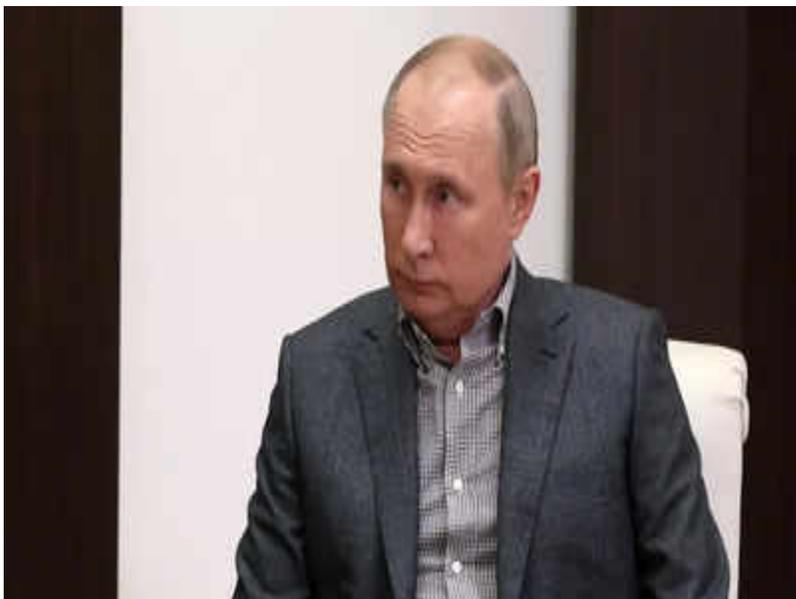


MoD clears hurdles in AK rifle project with Russia, approves domestic satellite for IAF

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NEW DELHI: Ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India early next month, the defence ministry on Tuesday cleared the hurdles in the long-pending over Rs 5,000 crore project to build AK-203 Kalashnikov rifles in India, while also giving the initial nod to a Rs 2,236 crore project to launch the GSAT-7C satellite for IAF.

Sources said the defence acquisitions council (DAC), chaired by defence minister Rajnath Singh, approved the requisite changes in the joint venture with Russia to manufacture over six lakh AK-203 rifles over a 10-year period at the Korwa ordnance factory in Amethi district of Uttar Pradesh.

The DAC had granted the "acceptance of necessity" (AoN) for the AK-203 rifles project at an estimated price of Rs 4,358 crore way back in January

2019. But it has been stuck since then over costing, royalty, technology transfer and other issues, as reported by TOI earlier.

There was no official word on the rifle project on Tuesday, but the MoD said the DAC had accorded the AoN to the IAF proposal for the GSAT-7C satellite and ground hubs for real-time connectivity of software-defined radios.

"The project envisages the complete design, development and launching of the satellite in India. Its induction will enhance the ability of the armed forces to communicate beyond the 'Line of Sight' among themselves in all circumstances in a secure mode," an official said.

The GSAT-7C, which will be launched in another two to three years, will be the second dedicated satellite for the IAF. The force already has GSAT-7A, which was built by ISRO primarily for communications.

The GSAT-7C, in turn, will be more geared towards “secure operational data links” between aircraft and drones, which could be flying deep into enemy territory or over the Indian Ocean, as well as ground stations.