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2023 witnesses record defence exports, all-time high productions

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NEW DELHI: In the year 2023 the ministry of defence it witnessed defence exports reaching an all-time high--almost Rs 3,000 crore more than the previous financial year--and defence productions crossing the figure of Rs one lakh crore for the first time. The year also saw growing 'global' demand for LCA-Tejas, light combat helicopters, aircraft carriers and others.

To achieve 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence and armed forces modernisation surged ahead with renewed thrust, the strengthening of border infrastructure, utilising Nari Shakti and ensuring ex-servicemen welfare were at the core of the functioning of the defence ministry.

As per the defence ministry, exports reached an all-time high of around Rs 16,000 crore in the financial year (FY) 2022-23, almost Rs 3,000 crore more than the previous financial year and a rise of over 10 times since 2016-17.

India is now exporting to over 85 countries. Indian industry has shown its capability of design and development to the world, with 100 firms exporting defence products at present.

Major platforms being exported include Dornier-228, 155 mm Advanced Towed Artillery Guns, Brahmos Missiles, Akash Missile System, Radars, Simulators, Mine Protected Vehicles, Armoured Vehicles, PINAKA Rockets & Launchers, Ammunitions, Thermal Imagers, Body Armours, besides Systems, Line Replaceable Units and Parts & Components of Avionics and Small Arms.

The Fifth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) of the department of military affairs (DMA) comprising 98 items was released by defence minister Rajnath Singh during the plenary session of 'Swavlamban 2.0'.

The list includes: Highly complex systems, sensors, weapons and ammunition have been included in the list. All these items will be procured from indigenous sources as per the provisions given in Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 in the staggered timeline.

The DMA had earlier promulgated four PILs comprising 411 military items. Separately, the department of defence production (DDP) has notified four PILs consisting of a total of 4,666 items, including Line Replacement Units/Sub-systems/Spares and Components for DPSUs. The fourth PIL of 928 items was released by DDP this year.

The value of defence production in the financial year (FY) 2022-23 crossed the figure of Rs one lakh crore for the first time. It was Rs 95,000 crore in FY 2021-22. The government is continuously working with defence industries and their associations to remove the challenges faced by them and promote defence production in the country.

Several policy reforms have been taken to achieve the objective of ease of doing business, including the integration of MSMEs and start-ups into the supply chain. Due to these policies, industries, including MSMEs and start-ups, are forthcoming in defence design, development & manufacturing, and there has been almost a 200 per cent increase in the number of defence licences issued to the industries in the last 7-8 years by the government.

Also, a record 75 per cent--around Rs one lakh crore--of the defence capital procurement budget was earmarked for the domestic industry in FY 2023-24, up from 68 per cent in FY 2022-23.

This was announced by defence minister Rajnath Singh during the 14th Aero India in Bengaluru.

In FY 2023-24, the ministry of defence was allocated a total budget of Rs 5.94 lakh crore, which is 13.18 per cent of

the total budget (Rs 45.03 lakh crore). The capital outlay of modernisation and infrastructure development was increased to Rs 1.63 lakh crore.

Moreover, the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) Helicopter Factory was dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Tumakuru in Karnataka.

The factory is India's largest helicopter manufacturing facility and will initially produce Light Utility Helicopters (LUHs). The LUH is an indigenously designed and developed three-ton, single-engine multipurpose utility helicopter with unique features of high manoeuvrability. Initially, the factory will produce around 30 helicopters per year, which can be enhanced to 60 and then 90 per year in a phased manner.

HAL handed over the first twin-seater Light Combat Aircraft 'Tejas' to the IAF in the presence of Union defence minister of state (MoS) Ajay Bhatt in Bengaluru. It is a lightweight, all-weather multi-role 4.5-generation aircraft designed to support the training requirements of the IAF and augment itself to the role of a fighter in case of necessity.

It is an amalgamation of contemporary concepts and technologies such as relaxed static stability, quadruplex fly-by-wire flight control, carefree manoeuvring, advanced glass cockpit, integrated digital avionics systems and advanced composite materials for the airframe. The IAF placed an order for 83 LCAs with HAL.

The year was also marked by the formal induction of the first C-295 transport aircraft into the Indian Air Force.

The first C-295 MW transport aircraft was formally inducted into the Indian Air Force in the presence of the defence minister in September.

The aircraft are being inducted through a collaboration between Tata Advanced Systems Limited and Airbus Defence and Space S A, Spain.

Fifteen more aircraft will be delivered in flyaway condition and they are scheduled to be received by August 2025.

The remaining forty will be manufactured at the C-295 transport aircraft manufacturing facility; the foundation 'Made in India' aircraft is expected in September 2026.

This medium-lift tactical aircraft, which is capable of taking off and landing from unprepared landing grounds, will replace the HS-748 Avro aircraft.

The ministry also said that in 2023, the Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Rajnath Singh, approved in its meetings proposals worth a total of over Rs 3.50 lakh crore to enhance the operational preparedness of the Armed Forces.

118 infrastructure projects of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) were dedicated to the nation by defence minister Rajnath Singh this year.

Currently, BRO is working on 20 tunnels, with 10 under construction and 10 in the planning stage. In the current year, 3,179m of bridges have been completed. The second phase of the upgrade of the Amarnath Yatra Tracks commenced in September, it said.

Shattering the glass ceiling, Captain Shiva Chauhan became the first woman officer to get operationally deployed in Kumar Post, Siachen Glacier, in January.

Siachen is the world's highest battlefield. In December, captain Geetika Koul became the first woman medical officer to be deployed at Siachen after completing the induction training at Siachen Battle School. Days later, Captain Fatima Wasim became the first woman medical officer to be deployed on an operational post on the Siachen Glacier.

The government order for revision of pensions of Armed Forces Pensioners/family pensioners under One Rank One Pension (OROP) effective July 1, 2019, was issued on January 4, 2023.

The induction of women officers (WOs) in the Regiment of Artillery is in progress. 10 women officers were commissioned in the Regiment of Artillery during 2023.

Under the Agnipath scheme, the first two batches (40,000) have completed their training and are under posting to the allotted units.