

India's MoD Approves T-90MS Acquisition from Russia

Defense-aerospace



The T-90MS tank that India is buying is the latest variant of the T-90S tank, fitted with modified engine, a new air-cooling unit, advanced explosive reactive armor (ERA) and a remote-control weapon station. (UVZ photo)

MOSCOW - India's Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC) led by the Defence Minister, Manohar Parrikar approved the buying of 464 Uralvagonzavod's T-90MS main battle tanks (MBT) from Russia at the meeting on November 7, 2016, according to the Times of India newspaper.

Therefore, India is planning to acquire the tanks to the tune of Rs 13,448 (about USD2 billion). The potential contract is reported to be incorporated in the previous 2006 agreement between Moscow and New Delhi to build about 1,000 T-90S tanks at the Heavy Vehicles Factory (HVF) in Avadi near Chennai under the license issued by Russia. Hence, first 536 tanks are supposed to be built in the T-90S configuration, while the remaining one in the T-90MS one. However, this information has yet to be confirmed or disproven.

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Previously, the Mail Online India newspaper (a subsidiary of the British Daily Mail) said that the IA was planning to buy 464 advanced T-90 battle tanks from Russia to deploy them on its western borders with Pakistan. "[The tanks] will strengthen army's fire power along the land border stretch with Pakistan - from Jammu in north till the western flank in Gujarat," the newspaper said.

At present, IA operates 18 regiments of T-90S (named Bhishma in the Indian service) deployed in Rajasthan and Punjab. The Indian fleet of main battle tanks lacks night vision

capabilities, for the most part. Only T-90S MBTs of IA feature advanced night sighting hardware suite that includes both thermal imagers and night vision devices.

The introduction of T-90MS tanks to the Armed Forces will turn the tide, the sources told Mail Online India. A report issued by the comptroller and auditor general points out that the technical condition of the previously delivered MBTs' anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) firing systems and thermal imagers has worsened due to 'prolonged exposure to heat and dust'.

According to the Military Balance 2016 report issued by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), IA operates over 2,974 MBTs, including 124 Arjun, 1,950 T-72M1, and over 900 T-90S vehicles.

Therefore, T-90 has become the main modern organic tank of India's Armed Forces. It is rapidly replacing the early variants of T-72 and T-55 tanks issued to the units. At present, India operates about 850 T-90S Bhishma MBTs. According to the open sources, New Delhi has ordered a total of 1,657 T-90S tanks in 2001, 2006, and 2007. UVZ has delivered 248 tanks in ready-to-use condition, while HVF has assembled 409 vehicles.

It should be noted that the remaining MBTs (about 1,000) are to be manufactured under the license by 2020. However, HVF seems to have produced only about 200-300 tanks since 2009. Therefore, India has decided to acquire an additional batch of T-90 tanks in ready-to-use condition from Russia in the T-90MS variant. New Delhi is planning to operate a total of 1,657 T-90 tanks by 2020. "[However], the target of almost doubling the fleet in next three to four years seems a difficult task because the procurements were stuck due to issues related to escalating cost and local production," the Mail Online India newspaper said.

T-90MS is the latest variant of the world-famous T-90S MBT. It was unveiled at the RAE-2011 defense show in Nizhny Tagil. The tank features a number of upgrades over the basic model, namely, modified multifuel diesel engine, new air-cooling unit, an advanced explosive reactive armour (ERA), and a remote-control weapon station (RCWS). The UVZ corporation said that the updated T-90S MBT will be in high demand on the arms market of the Near East region.

According to the open sources, the T-90MS tank has a combat weight of 48 t, a crew of three tankers, a maximum road speed of 60 km/h, and a power-to-weight ratio of 24 h.p./t. The tank is armed with a 125mm stabilized 2A46M-5 smoothbore gun that can fire armour-piercing fin-stabilized discarding sabot (APFSDS), high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT), and high-explosive fragmentation (HE FRAG) rounds, as well as anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) with tandem warhead. The gun has an ammunition load of about 40 rounds.

T-90MS features a 7.62mm Kalashnikov PKTM coaxial machinegun (an ammunition load of 2,000 7.62x54Rmm cartridges) and an RCWS armed with one more PKTM (an ammunition load of 800 7.62x54Rmm cartridges). The gunner's seat is equipped with a combined day/night optical-electronic sight with an integrated thermal imager and laser rangefinder. The sight has a target detection range of 5,000 m (3,500 m using the thermal imager).

T-90MS is believed to feature the Relikt new-generation ERA developed by the NII Stali scientific-research institute (a subsidiary of the Tractor Plants Concern). The tank is powered by single V-92S2F (1,130 h.p.) multifuel turbodiesel engine coupled with an automatic transmission.