

Project 75 India

Anchor:

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Participants:

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Context:

As a major initiative towards 'Make in India', the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has issued a Request of Proposal (RFP) for the first acquisition program under the Strategic Partnership Model for the construction of six AIP fitted Conventional Submarines named Project 75 (India) P-75(I) for the Indian Navy, on July 20, 2021.

Background:

- Project 75 India is a part of India's thirty-year-old submarine building plan by which all the six submarines which are under the project should already be sailing and it should have been followed by the submarines now for which the RFP has been issued.
- It is a long-awaited and long-overdue project. This should have happened way back but it got delayed because it was difficult to find a strategic partnership model.

Introduction:

- The long-awaited Request for Proposal for six conventional submarines under Project 75 (I) has finally been issued to two shortlisted Strategic Partners, M/s Mazagaon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) and M/s Larsen & Toubro (L&T).
- The submarines to be made in India under Strategic Partnership Model (SP) are going to cost Rs 43,000 crore and will be fitted with Fuel-Cell-based AIP (Air Independent Propulsion Plant).
- Under this project, there will be six modern indigenous conventional submarines fitted with modern missiles, state-of-the-art countermeasures systems, advanced torpedoes, Fuel Cell-based AIP, weapons and sensors as well as contemporary equipment.
- Project 75 (I) also includes a training and spares package; associated shore support; and Engineering Support Package.

Ground reality:

There is a larger reality that underlies the whole discussion:

- China is increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and this is creating pressure on the Indian Navy in sprucing up the submarine arm.
- The submarines have been a crying deficit with the Indian Navy for a number of years. There is a growing sense that if we do not get this technology and other undersea assets, then we will be left behind and China would take over our strategic neighborhood.

- The Indian Navy is pivoted to the reality that submarines are the new way to go. That is why there is increased stress on the SSN program also which is the nuclear attack submarine program.
- There is still a dilemma when it comes to Project 75 (I) whether to give time and develop the technology that we own or we go for the technology that is readily available and that the original manufacturers will never transfer to us. Hence, there is little clarity on what is the way forward.

Role of the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs):

- Under the strategic partnership model (SP model), these OEMs will be the technology partners and will enable the SP in the construction of the submarines, ToT (Transfer of Technology) for various technologies needed in this project as well as help in achieving high levels of indigenization.
- By providing ToT for the design and other technologies, these OEMs will also set up dedicated manufacturing lines for these submarines in India. This step will help in making India a global hub for the design and production of subs.
- India has never made diesel submarines on its own, it has always made it under license or in collaboration with other countries. Hence, a lot of technologies have not come and they have not been transferred. But, it should be remembered that L & T and MDL have experience in making submarines even if in collaboration and therefore when they tie up with these partners, they also have some responsibility to the Navy and the government.
- We have a warship overseeing the team so, there will be a lot of negotiations on how much technology the OEMs will transfer, and related issues.

Significance of Air-independent propulsion (AIP):

- AIP has the fuel cell technology which permits the batteries of the submarines to continue functioning even after it gets discharged. It also reduces the chances of detection because the moment it comes closer to the surface, submarines are very prone to detection and after that, it becomes very difficult for a submarine to hide because it cannot move quickly under the water.
- Hence, AIP gives longer endurance to submarines than what a conventional battery submarine can offer. AIP is required on an urgent basis for the Indian Navy subs in view of the growing presence of the Chinese in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The strategic importance of modern submarines:

- The submarine is going to remain a very important operational platform for any navy in the world. Conventional submarines are important but they are only as important as nuclear attack submarines.
- India is planning to develop nuclear attack submarines as well but the gestation period is very long because that kind of technology takes a lot of time to develop. So, the stress at the moment is on the conventional submarines and India might get them in 10 years or 12 years. However, as India wants to register its presence in the Pacific Ocean, it will need nuclear attack submarines.
- As China can send its nuclear submarines to the Indian Ocean, India should also be capable of sending its submarines to the western Pacific.
- However, it must be noted that developing both conventional and nuclear attack submarines is going to take lots of time and resources. The SSN program itself is about Rs. 60,000 cr and over a period of time, it may touch Rs. 70,000 or 80,000 crores.

- Given this, the Submarines will play an important role in determining the strength of the Navy. For covering the Indo-Pacific region, the requirement of a nuclear submarine is essential. On the other hand, for the Indian Ocean, AIP submarines are sufficient.
- On choke points, attack submarines have been deployed there to monitor the traffic passing through those choke points.
- As per the 30-year-old submarine building programs, India requires 24 submarines. Out of this 13 or 14 are in service, 6 are on build and 6 more will come. The present plan is to develop 18 conventional submarines and 6 nuclear attack submarines. This is sufficient as far as our defense needs are concerned with given resource constraints.

Conclusion:

Our existing conventional submarines are sufficient for the Indian Ocean region. However, we require nuclear attack submarines if we want to have a presence in the Indo Pacific region.

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