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Premium

Decoding the \$5 billion defence exports target, which PM Modi spoke of at Aero India 2023

India currently exports defence equipment to over 75 countries. What efforts are being made to ramp up defence exports?

Written by **Amrita Nayak Dutta**

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the recently concluded Aero India 2023 in Bengaluru earlier this month. (Express Photo by Jithendra M)

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The defence ministry's target to **raise India's annual defence exports to \$5 billion** by 2024-25, from the \$1.5 billion currently, was reiterated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the recently concluded Aero India 2023 in Bengaluru earlier this month.

In the past few years, there has been a strong government push towards achieving self-reliance in defence, which is subsequently expected to increase India's defence exports as well.

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Towards this, the defence ministry has brought in several new policies, such as earmarking 75 per cent of its defence capital budget for 2023-24 towards procurements from domestic sources and three positive indigenisation lists items, for which there would be an embargo on import beyond timelines specified against them. Also, two defence industrial corridors are being set up in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, and there is an ongoing simplification of processes for ease of doing business aimed at boosting defence exports.

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India is in talks with several countries to export several of its indigenous big-ticket platforms, such as the Light Combat Aircraft Tejas and the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile made by BrahMos Aerospace Pvt Ltd, a joint venture between India and Russia.

Multiple officials that *The Indian Express* spoke to said the key to reaching the \$5 billion defence export goal lies in expanding indigenous offerings, ramping up production for faster and timely deliveries, particularly for PSUs, and developing niche and critical technologies for export for fighting modern warfare but also to eliminate competition.

“Steps to encourage defence research are also being undertaken, such as earmarking 25 per cent of the defence research budget for the private sector in 2022-23, for newer innovation and developing niche technology,” an official said.

Current export figures

As per government data, India’s defence export value till December 2022 had reached Rs 6,058 crore.

India’s defence exports have grown by 334 per cent in the past five years. They touched nearly Rs 13,000 crore in 2021-22.

This includes munition list items under category 6 of Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies (SCOMET), for which the Department of Defence Production (DDP) under the Ministry of Defence issues an authorisation.

Which defence equipment does India export?

The major defence items being exported are Personal Protective items, Offshore Patrol Vessels, ALH Helicopter, SU Avionics, Bharati Radio, Coastal Surveillance Systems, Kavach MoD II Launcher and FCS, Spares for Radar, Electronic Systems, Light Engineering Mechanical Parts, among others.

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In December last year, the government told Parliament that major items exported by India in the last three years include lightweight torpedoes, weapon locating radar, fast patrol vessels, 120 mm mortar armoured protection vehicle, 0.338 Lapua magnum sniper rifle, and simulators.

What are the major defence platforms India is looking to export?

India is in talks with Argentina and Egypt, among other countries, to export its indigenous LCA Tejas. The aircraft had in the past few years participated in several air shows, including at Singapore last year, as well as in Malaysia, Bahrain and Dubai, so it could be showcased to other countries.

India was hopeful of selling the platform to Malaysia, but the country signed a deal with Korean Aerospace Industries for the supply of 18 FA-50 light combat aircraft.

LCA Mk2 Project Director at Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) Dr V Madhusudana Rao recently told The Indian Express that the LCA Mk 2 has seen interest from nearly 16 countries and efforts are on to identify private production agencies to ramp up manufacturing of the jet.

India is looking to export the indigenous Advanced Light Helicopter to several countries—and has signed a contract with Mauritius for the export of one Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH Mk III) for Mauritius Police Force. The country already operates the ALH and Do-228 aircraft, which is a multi-purpose light transport aircraft.

India is in talks with Guyana to export the Dornier 228 and fast patrol vessels and will aim at exporting the latest HTT-40, Light Utility Helicopters (LUH) and Light Combat Helicopter (LCH).

Last year, India signed a \$375 million contract with the Philippines to export the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. Defence officials had recently told The Indian Express that India is looking to export the weapon system and its lighter next generation version (BrahMos NG) to over 10 countries, including South Africa, Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

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Last year, it was showcased at the Africa Aerospace and the Defence Expo in Cape Town.

Last year, Armenia inked a government-to-government deal to buy the DRDO-developed Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launchers, rockets and ammunition. In 2020, the country is also learnt to have bought Swathi weapon locating radars from India.

Private defence manufacturer Kalyani Strategic Systems last year bagged an export order worth \$155 million from an unspecified country for artillery guns.

Africa, Myanmar among major export destinations

India's private companies and Defence PSUs currently export defence equipment to over 75 countries.

As per the DDP, Italy, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Russia, France, Nepal, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Israel, Egypt, UAE, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, Poland, Spain and Chile have been some of the major export destinations for defence equipment and platforms.

Last year, a report released by India Exim Bank stated that Mauritius, Mozambique, and Seychelles have been among the top customers for India's defence exports between 2017 and 2021, of which Mauritius was at 6.6 per cent, Mozambique at five per cent and Seychelles 2.3 per cent.

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According to a Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report released last year, India is among the top 25 exporters of major arms. Myanmar has been the biggest importer of Indian arms at 50 per cent during the 2017-2021 period, followed by Sri Lanka at 25 per cent and Armenia at 11 per cent.

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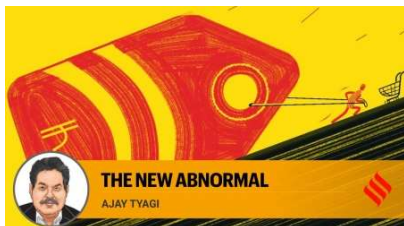


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