

Rosoboronexport a Contender for \$350M Indian Gun Contract

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Self-propelled howitzers like these, on display on Red Square in May, could be part of an offer to India's military. **Vladimir Filonov**

Moscow has a new target for an Indian defense contract — 100 units of self-propelled howitzer guns for an estimated value of \$350 million.

Rosoboronexport will be facing direct competition for this deal from India's L&T, a senior Indian official familiar with the details said on condition of anonymity as he is not authorized to speak to the media.

The official said field trials for the guns would be beginning very soon. The trials are likely to continue for about six months as the Indian defense ministry would like to conduct these trials in different terrains and various weather conditions. The final trials will be in the winter season during December and January.

L&T is expected to pose a stiff challenge to the Russians as the Indian company has entered into an agreement with South Korea's Samsung Techwin to produce the guns in India. The Korean company would be providing key technologies to L&T.

India's new defense procurement policy of 2013, announced on June 2, has a heavy focus on local purchases, but leaves ample scope for foreign companies collaborating with Indian firms. The Indian stock of howitzer guns has plummeted to a meager 200 because India has not added a single heavy gun in to its armory in 27 years since the Bofors scandal of the mid 1980s when senior politicians were accused of getting major kickbacks from a large purchase of 155 millimeter field howitzers made by a Swedish manufacturer. Then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was implicated in the affair.

India has set aside four billion dollars for upgrading its artillery stock in the near future. In the long run, the Indian army expects to acquire a total of 2,814 howitzer guns of various types for its arsenal, which will cost about ten billion dollars. Since such large quantities cannot be supplied by Indian companies alone, foreign firms have a fair chance of becoming suppliers, the official explained.

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