

Army accepts 'Mark1-A' version of Arjun tanks

Upgraded Arjun has a 120mm rifled gun that can fire range of high-intensity ammo

By Ajay Banerjee

New Delhi: An upgraded version of the Arjun tank, having better firing and mobility, has been accepted by the Army following month-long validation trials in Rajasthan.

The trials were completed in December last and a report has followed. The Army is looking at 118 pieces of the new version. In 2010-11, the first version of the Arjun had joined the Army and 124 pieces had been ordered.

The production of the new version, dubbed as Arjun 'Mark 1-A', is likely to commence within this year at the existing facility at Avadi in Tamil Nadu. It has a total of 14 upgrades over the existing version. These include an auto-target tracker, automatic gear system and improvement in suspension.

Only the missile firing ability remains to be validated, which will be done once the missiles, being developed by the DRDO, are ready. The DRDO missile programme has been a major success and firing of missile from a tank is being fine-tuned.

As part of the arrangement with the Army, the DRDO has promised to set up a system to maintain the Arjun within India. It will be an annual maintenance contract with one of the PSUs such as Bharat Earth Movers Limited.

The tanks, as part of the trials, have already done some 4,000 km of run. The upgraded Arjun has a 120mm rifled gun capable of firing a full range of high explosives, laser homing anti-tank (LAHAT) missile that had a tandem warhead, which is capable of defeating all types of modern armour.

In December last year, the Ministry of Defence had informed Parliament that the 'Arjun Mark 1-A' was being validated at trials. This was the first official confirmation that the 'Mark 1-A' will be an additional version of the tank till the 'Mark 2' version, somewhat lighter in weight, is readied and accepted.

The development shows that the MoD is ready to keep on improving the Arjun, be addition of more power or wanting the weight to be reduced. The Army was okay with the 'Mark 1-A' version, but wants the next version to be lighter than its present weight of 68 tonne. Most modern European tanks are of the same weight, and tank-transporters (specialised trucks) for Arjun are available to ferry it.

The 'Mark 2' will have to be lighter by some 3 tonne. This may require some modification in the hull of the tank for the final contours to emerge.

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