

Light Chariot Heavy Punch



The Indian Army released an RFI on 22 April for the procurement of 350 light tanks in a phased manner. It is not the first of such kind. Some years ago another RFI was released for the procurement of both the wheeled and tracked version, but this time exclusively tracked light tank is desired, though later a wheeled version might be procured as well. India was engaged in a serious stand-off with China which months ago attempted to usurp swathe of Indian land with brute force. The ongoing disengagement process has done a little to decrease the tension between the two Asian giants. The Red Army deployed various armoured vehicles including light tanks to make a psychological impact on deployed Indian Armed Forces. To counter Chinese deployment India wants similar platform to have an edge in any future confrontation.

Though the Type-96A is the mainstay of the PLA armoured concentration and Type-99A1, unarguably the best tank currently deployed in Tibet, it was the light Type-15 tank which gave China potential advantages in some areas. Unlike the main battle tank, the light tank to be deployed in such terrain where the opponent has least chance to counter it. At high altitude, where a main battle tank can't be deployed due to narrow navigable terrain and limited air transportability, the Indian Army best could deploy BMP-II Sarath which is infact an infantry combat vehicle and can't match the sheer fire power of the Type-15 and Type-88A.

The desired platform has to be a 25T vehicle. The platform must be deployable in the high altitude as well as in the desert and light enough for rapid overseas deployment. The IAF uses two heavy transport aircraft, the Il-76MD and C-17 Globemaster III. It is obvious the weight category has been

sought to match the payload capacity of IAF transport aircraft as well as to maintain amphibious capability. It will be a modular design, two (or three) crew platform. The main armaments hasn't been specified but it must be capable of firing smart anti-tank ammunition and anti-tank guided missiles. It must have automotive gun control system with auto-loader. There will be multiple secondary armaments including a remote control weapon system capable to neutralise various grounds and aerial threats including UAVs and PGMs. The modular design will allow upgrades of armaments according to necessity. The platform must have ERA coverage for the protection against HEAT warheads. And to augment further protection, an Active Protection System with Soft Kill and Hard Kill capability is desired. The vehicle will be equipped with CBRN protection, IFDSS and CABIS enhancing crew survivability. ECM and ECCM will protect the platform from electronic attack. The power to weight ratio must be at least 25:1 hp/t.

Currently there are only a few manufacturers capable of manufacturing light tanks. Most notable of them is Russia's Volgograd Tractor Plant which makes the famous Sprut SD light tank. This is unarguably the lightest tank currently available anywhere around the world. With just 18T weight it carries a 125 mm smoothbore gun and provide the same firepower of T-72 main battle tank! With 510 hp water cooled diesel engine and hydro-pneumatic suspension it has an excellent mobility as well as credible amphibious capability. The platform is based on BMD-3 chassis which is a light air transportable infantry fighting vehicle. According to some

Russian sources, a better variant of it is being developed where a new modified chassis will be mated with the latest 2A46-M5 gun thus enhancing the firepower significantly. Just for reference, it is the same gun used by the advanced T-90MS.

Another potential offer can be from Hanwha Defense of South Korea. It has a 105 mm rifled gun with Cockerill XC-8 turret on a K-21 infantry fighting vehicle chassis. This version weighs just 25T and is a three man crew platform. Moreover, the gun can fire Falarick 105 anti-tank guided missile at a range of 5 km and can defeat up to 550 mm of rolled homogeneous armour.

DRDO is supposed to be working with L&T to develop two different platforms optimizing the K-9 chassis. The first option will see a 34T platform with 105 mm rifled gun with Cockerill modular turret. While the second option explores opportunity by mating 125 mm smoothbore gun to have a 38T 'beast'. Prototypes will be readied in three years while production rate is expected to be 100 per year.

But as the new RFI was released, it is obvious there will be now some significant changes in the project. In the past a home grown platform was developed by placing GIAT 105 mm turret on BMP-2 chassis. But it couldn't convince the army at that time. This time, facing an adversary, superior in both technology and numerical strength, India is trying to cover the gap as fast as possible. As modernisation of the armoured forces is in full swing, the Indian Army is hoping to dominate the heights by Light chariots with Heavy punch! 🦅

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K-21-105