

Indian election: Armed forces look for end to procurement nightmare

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With a new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government taking shape in New Delhi, India's industrial base and military exporters are optimistic that the incoming administration will back up its campaign rhetoric and push for greater and faster defence procurement reform.

If prime minister-elect Narendra Modi - seen as a pro-business and decisive leader - lives up to his reputation and cuts bureaucracy and addresses corruption, it is certain to improve the long-term outlook for India's defence modernisation and procurement programmes.

Despite fielding a million-plus strong military that is one of the largest and most professional in the region, India faces significant challenges in adequately equipping, training, and maintaining armed forces that can meet the country's potential internal security risks and carry out deployments on its western and northern frontiers.

Equipment deficiency, which is a serious concern for all three services, is a result of severe delays to procurements that have led to many platforms undergoing repeated upgrades to extend their operational lives.

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Tough neighbourhood

India has continued to augment its presence in the northeast of the country along its disputed frontier with China and in 2011 the government approved the deployment of a regiment of BrahMos cruise missiles in Arunachal Pradesh, making it India's first offensive tactical missile deployment against China.

Additional BrahMos-equipped artillery regiments are planned or in operation in that region, along with at least two regiments equipped with Pinaka 214 mm multiple rocket systems.

These forces may be complemented by new infantry divisions and a 90,000-strong mountain strike corps. It is unclear, however, how these plans will materialise given the equipment challenges facing the service. As an example of this, the army has not received a new artillery piece since 1986; although in 2012 there were several tender requests in accordance with the Field Artillery Rationalisation Plan, *IHS Jane's* assesses that it will be years before the army is properly equipped.

Internal challenges

The government faces a number of demographic, political and separatist challenges that have a direct effect on India's strategic planning and military posture.

With a population that is expected to exceed that of China by 2025, the greatest danger facing India in the longer term is resource scarcity. Delhi regards securing existing resources as a priority as it already suffers from regular water shortages and is heavily dependent on fossil fuels to boost economic growth. This has placed it in direct competition with its neighbours and regional rivals, especially China, in the race to secure resources.

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Air force procurement - up in the air

The Indian Air Force (IAF) faces similar equipment shortages: with the exception of the Sukhoi Su-30MKI multirole fighter aircraft and some medium- and heavy-lift purchases from the United States (in the form of C-130J-30J and C-17 Globemaster III aircraft), the inventory is in need of refurbishment, upgrade, and/or replacement.

There has been slow progress on major replacement programmes, such as the indigenous Tejas light combat aircraft and the Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft programme, which is intended to be fulfilled by the Dassault Rafale but has been held up by lengthy negotiations and cost increases.

It is conceivable that stop-gap measures, including the purchase of further aircraft in fly-away condition - such as Su-30s from Russia - will be necessary if the IAF is to maintain its diminishing numerical superiority over the Pakistan Air Force. The IAF also has to address its poor safety record and high accident rate, which is attributed to aircraft obsolescence, poor maintenance, inefficient procurement and rebuild programmes, spares shortages, and inadequate pilot training.

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Manpower shortages

The services and Ministry of Defence (MoD) also need to examine the causes of personnel shortages across the armed forces and come up with ways to increase recruitment. As of March 2013 the shortfalls in officer numbers were 21% in the army, 23% in the navy, and 5% (almost all pilots) in the air force. Understaffing and undertrained personnel may have contributed to some of the more serious accidents that have hit the services over recent years.

For example, IN officials have long stated that, although the navy has received new platforms in the past decade, the MoD and finance ministry have declined to provide additional funds to pay for the subsequent increase in staffing levels. This, the navy contends, has led to meagre resources being stretched and to officers with limited experience assuming charge of technically advanced vessels.



In 2013 the MoD identified several reasons for overall manpower shortages in the armed forces, including "accretion in force levels from time to time, availability of multiple and lucrative alternative career avenues with the growth of the nation's economy, stringent selection criteria and difficult service conditions coupled with a perceived high degree of risk". Reforms to pay and conditions of service have not yet had the desired effect of stemming outflow or encouraging the enlistment of officers.

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