

ARMY-DRDO TUSSLE ENDS, GOVERNMENT TO START DESI LIGHT TANK ACQUISITION

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DRDO says its first light tank prototype will roll out by mid-2023

NEW DELHI: India is set to kick-start a mega indigenous acquisition project for 354 light tanks, the critical operational necessity for which has come to the fore during the ongoing over 30-month long confrontation with China in eastern Ladakh reports **TOI**.

Sources say the defence ministry has resolved the festering differences between the Army and DRDO over the light tanks meant for high-altitude warfare in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh as well as riverine areas like the Rann of Kutch and can be swiftly deployed after being transported by air.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh-led defence acquisitions council will soon take up the grant of AoN (acceptance of necessity) for the armoured fighting vehicle-Indian light tank (AFV-ILT) under 'Project Zorawar', at a cost of around Rs 17,500 crore, the sources told **TOI**.

The proposal is that 59 of the 354 light tanks, each weighing less than 25 tonnes with a high power-to-weight ratio as well as superior firepower and protection, will be reserved for the tanks developed by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).

The remaining 295 tanks will be manufactured under the government-funded design and development project for the Indian industry in the 'Make-1' category of the defence acquisition procedure (DAP). "DRDO can also compete with private players for this," a source said.

The Army had strongly pitched for all 354 tanks to be produced by the private sector under the Make-1 category. But the DRDO argued its Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment was already working to develop a light tank prototype with private sector giant Larsen & Toubro as the "lead system integrator".

"DRDO says its first light tank prototype will roll out by mid-2023. So, the decision is that 59 tanks be reserved for DRDO, with the condition that it delivers a successful prototype ahead of the others in the fray," the source added.

The 12-lakh strong Army had managed to deploy some of its heavier Russian-origin T-90S and T-72 main-battle tanks (40 to 50 ton each) in eastern Ladakh after the confrontation erupted in 2020.

