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40 Ordnance factories make the bulk of India's small arms



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Diversified engineering and construction group, Punj Lloyd, has made a formal debut in defence manufacturing, with small arms. The company has recently inaugurated India's first private sector small arms manufacturing plant at Malanpur, an industrial hub some 10 km from Gwalior's Air Force base, in Madhya Pradesh.

The small arms will be manufactured by Punj Lloyd Raksha Systems, a joint venture between Punj Lloyd and Israel Weapon Industries (IWI). The joint venture PLR plant will manufacture Tavor assault rifles, X95 carbines and assault rifles, Galil sniper rifles and Negev Light Machine Guns (LMG).

Why is this important? Firstly, it is India's first private sector small arms manufacturing unit. So far, the job of manufacturing small arms, ammunitions etc. has been vested with the Ordnance Factories Board (OFB), under the Department of Defence Production. The OFB has more than 40 ordnance factories under it. Secondly, the PLR plant will be a major boost to domestic defence manufacturing.

In fact, the Indian Army is in the process of procuring a basic assault rifle for its forces that will support it in Close Quarter Battle or CQB. Incidentally, Galil Ace carbine manufactured by IWI had qualified in the earlier tender which was cancelled in 2016, due to a single vendor situation. Officials in the defence ministry say that the CQB deal is on a fast track as it has to urgently fulfil the requirements of the Armed Forces.

The PLR facility was formally inaugurated by Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan. "This is the first JV under the Make in India initiative. For defence manufacturing, I call upon everyone to Make in Madhya Pradesh," Chauhan said, amidst murmurs that he was

among the possible contenders for the defence minister's post in the Modi Cabinet. Finance minister Arun Jaitley now has additional charge of defence.

Initially, Punj Lloyd's Malanpur plant will manufacture components for assault rifles and will in subsequent phases, begin manufacturing complete small arms, for which licences are still awaited.

Till then, PLR will also take care of the maintenance and support of IWI weapons already in use by sections of the Armed Forces. "In the next few months, the licence is likely to be done. It is in the final stage of approval with the Home Ministry," said Atul Punj, Chairman, Punj Lloyd. Punj Lloyd Raksha Systems will hopefully, prove a beacon for the private sector.