

PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION



The new manufacturing unit at Malanpur, near Gwalior, will have testing and firing range facility where the Galil-style weapons (seen above) could be tested.

Make in India edge for future surgical strikes

By **Ajit K Dubey** in Gwalior

WHEN the Indian Army Special Forces went inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to carry out the famous surgical strikes last September, they used the deadly made-in-Israel Tavor-21 and Galil assault rifles to eliminate the terrorists and Pakistan Army troops supporting them.

However, next time if they carry out similar operations, they may be equipped with the same weapons which could be made in India as Indian firm Punj Lloyd and Israeli Weapons Industry have signed a joint venture to produce these rifles under a new joint venture facility at Malanpur near here.

"We are making the whole range of IWI weapon systems at the facility here including the Tavor-21 and Galil assault rifles along with the Negev Light Machine Guns, Galil sniper rifles and the X-95 close quarter carbine rifles here. We would be offering all the types of weapons required by the armed forces," Ashok Wadhawan, in-charge of Punj Lloyd's defence manufacturing business told MAIL TODAY.

The new joint venture has been named as PunjLlyod Raksha Systems (PRS). Showcasing the capabilities at the facility, he said, "all the guns to be supplied to Indian forces under existing orders. For the future tenders, they will be fully made in India."

For the creation of the new facility, IWI has helped in setting up machines in the plant which is exactly the same as they have in their facility near Tel Aviv.

The manufacturing facility will also have testing and firing range in the next few weeks where the weapons could be tested before they are dispatched for supply.

Asked about the motivation behind coming up with an assault rifle manufacturing facility, Punj Lloyd group Chairman Atul Punj told MAIL TODAY, "We wanted to pro-

3,500

sniper rifles to be acquired



44,837

close-quarter carbines to be acquired

1.85 lakh

assault rifles to be procured

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— Atul Punj,

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He said his company was fully committed towards making products under Prime Minister's pet project Make in India under the defence sector and would be looking to enhance the firepower of the forces.

The facility is also coming up at a time when along with the Army, the IAF and the Navy are also looking to equip themselves with assault rifles for their special forces and the normal ground troops both.

However, the Army would be the biggest potential customer for the weapons produced by the facility as the force is looking to procure more than 1.85 lakh assault rifles to replace the existing inventory of

indigenous INSAS rifles which have not proven to be effective in the past.

The Army is also looking to acquire over 3,500 sniper rifles for the Ghatak platoons of its infantry battalions and special forces while it has also issued a new tender for acquiring 44,837 close quarter carbines for dealing with anti-terrorist operations.

Indian Air Force's Garud Special Forces and Marine Commandos of the Navy are already using the Tavor and Negev rifles and are too looking for more weapons.

Company officials say the new facility would also help the Israelis in cutting down their production cost and may also help in bringing down the cost of these weapons for Indian forces as well.

Punj Lloyd officials said they are also in the race for supplying the upgraded version of the Soviet-era Zu-23 air defence guns and upgunning of the 130 mm Russian artillery guns to the latest 145 mm 45 calibre standard.

Indian firm Punj Lloyd has signed a joint venture with Israeli Weapons to produce Tavor-21 and Galil assault rifles in Madhya Pradesh