

Atmanirbhar push: PM for innovation in defence products

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Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech on Monday called upon the private sector to embrace innovation, in order to play a key role in the Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) initiative.

Voicing his oft-stated conviction that “India can make for the world,” the PM commended the military for taking Atmanirbhar Bharat into the realm of technological innovation.

As always, the government’s new initiative came with a catchy new slogan. Citing former PM Lal Bahadur Shastri’s iconic “Jai Jawan Jai Kisan” slogan and affixing Atal Vihari Vajpayee’s “Jai Vigyan” to it, Modi took it a step further by adding: “Jai Anusandhan” (hail to innovation).

Placing the onus for innovation on the citizenry, Modi said: “(In) self-reliant India, (innovation) becomes the responsibility of every citizen, of every government, every unit of society. Self-reliant India is not a government agenda or a government programme. This is a mass movement of society, which we have to take forward.”

“The world is seeing that India is changing. There is hope from India and the reason is the skills of 1.3 billion Indians,” the PM said.

The government has been drawing attention to its innovation programmes through statements and answers to questions in Parliament. On July 29, Minister of State for Defence, Ajay Bhatt, tabled a written answer to a question in the Lok Sabha, listing out measures the government had taken to promote innovation.

The answer stated that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) had launched a scheme called “Innovations for Defence Excellence” (iDEX) which was a medium for funding micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups that had submitted blueprints for innovative projects.

The PM had launched iDEX in April 2018, billing it as the MoD’s flagship for technological innovation. iDEX was to provide start-ups with a platform for co-creation and co-development in defence and aerospace technology.

Under iDEX, defence start-ups and MSMEs are encouraged to present technological solutions to functional problems that the military periodically raises as “challenges”.

Innovators are encouraged to engage directly with the military through the iDEX Open Challenge and to showcase what they have to offer. Selected applicants get a chance to pitch to the iDEX grand jury and qualify for grants and investments.

Last month, iDEX signed its 100th contract in New Delhi with a firm called Pacify Medical



Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspects the guard of honour during the 75th Independence Day function

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Technologies.

“With these actions of the government, the expenditure on defence procurement from foreign sources, which used to be 46 per cent of the overall expenditure, has reduced to 36 per cent in the past four years (2018-19 to 2021-22),” the MoD stated in Parliament last month.

iDEX is funded and managed by the “Defence Innovation Organization”, which is registered as a “not for profit” company as per Section 8 of the Companies Act 2013.

Its founder members are the two biggest defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs): Hindustan Aeronautics and Bharat Electronics.

The MoD has reserved certain projects and products for innovators. In March, it announced the reservation of 18 major defence platforms for industry-led design and development.

Last year, the MoD had notified three “Positive Indigenisation Lists”, reserving a total of 310 defence products and another 2,958 items for DPSUs.

These lists embargoed the import of products beyond specified timelines.