

# India plans to be self-reliant in forged wheels for trains

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India may well become a net exporter of forged wheels—specially-designed wheels for trains—in the next three-to-five years if the proposed plan of the consortium of Ramkrishna Forgings and Titagarh Wagons to set up a manufacturing unit with an annual capacity of producing 2,00,000 wheels comes on stream.

India currently imports various types of forged wheels from the UK, Brazil, China, Japan, Russia and Ukraine. However, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has led to supply constraints leading to delay in imports.

With a view to reduce import dependence, the Centre recently floated a tender inviting the industry to set up a facility to produce these wheels, which will primarily be used for semi-high speed trains (Vande Bharat) and high-speed trains (bullet train).

According to industry sources, the Indian Railways is estimated to have imported close to 80,000 forged wheels amounting to around ₹520 crore from China and Russia.

Ramkrishna Forgings, a supplier of rolled, forged, and machined products, in consortium with Titagarh Wagons was recently declared the lowest bidder (L1) by the Ministry of Railways for manufacturing and supplying of forged wheels under the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative.

According to Umesh Chowdhary, Vice Chairman and Managing Director, Titagarh Wagons, plans are afoot to set up a unit with a capacity to manufacture close to 2,00,000 wheels per annum. Of this, nearly 40 per cent (80,000) would go towards meeting the requirement of Railways and the remaining would go for the domestic as well as export markets.

"We have been declared the L1 and we are waiting to get the 'Letter of Award'. Once that comes in, we will be forming an equal joint venture company and then decide



**MADE IN INDIA.** To reduce import dependence, the Centre is planning to set up a facility to produce wheels for Vande Bharat and bullet trains

on the way forward as to where the unit would come up and what would be the total area etc. The approximate investment on the project is likely to be close to ₹1,000 crore," Chowdhary told *businessline*.

As per the tender, the selected bidder would be required to set up a wheel test centre at a railway site for prototype testing of newly designed wheels. The consortium will also be required to set up a manufacturing facility for forged wheel production and be able to supply approximately 1.6-million-wheel discs of different rolling stocks of Indian Railways over a period of 20 years at about 80,000 wheels per annum.

"We have been in the industry for over 25 years and have always seen a shortage of wheels. Never ever has such a project been envis-

aged which promises an assured off-take by Railways. We feel India could become a net exporter instead of net importer once this is operational," he said.

## PRODUCTION TO KICK-START

According to Lalit Khetan, CFO, Ramkrishna Forgings, the estimated time span given to kick-start production, as per the contract, is three years. However, the consortium is hopeful of commencing it within the next two years.

"We are yet to finalise the location but the manufacturing unit is likely to come up in eastern India. We are hopeful of commencing production in the next two years. The domestic demand has also been growing so we will cater to the domestic market first and whatever is in excess we can look at exports," Khetan said.