

Germany may ink ₹45K-cr deal to build subs for India

ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems set to sign pact with Mazagon Dock today

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Boris Pistorius, Germany's visiting defence minister, will be present in Mumbai on Wednesday when German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) signs an agreement with India's biggest warship yard, Mazagon Dock Ltd (MDL), to cooperate in building six advanced submarines for the Indian Navy.

These submarines will be powered by a new technology called air-independent propulsion (AIP). They will be built under a ₹45,000-crore programme called Project 75-I.

The Project 75-I is being pursued under the so-called "strategic partner" model of equipment acquisition. This requires the ministry of defence (MoD) to identify Indian firms that have the capability and capacity to build and supply a particular weapons platform – such as a submarine, warship, fighter aircraft or tank. The advanced technology needed is obtained through partnership with a foreign original equipment manufacturer (OEM).

Chosen Indian strategic partners then tie up with approved OEMs and submit bids for designing and building the platform in India.

It is understood that the MDL-TKMS combine will be competing in Project 75-I with another combine, in which Larsen & Toubro (L&T) is partnering Spanish

REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE



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shipbuilder, Navantia.

Meanwhile, Naval Group of France, which is close to completing the build of India's six Scorpene submarines under Project 75, has been ruled out of consideration on the grounds that the AIP it proposes to supply — called MESMA (autonomous submarine energy module) AIP — lacks the capability that the Indian Navy seeks under Project 75-I.

AIP-equipped submarines enjoy significant operational advantages over legacy submarines, which run on diesel-electric propulsion. Diesel-electric submarines can operate underwater silently for up to 48 hours, but they must surface after that to run a generator to recharge their batteries. When surfaced, diesel-electric submarines

are easily detected by enemy radar, which can easily spot submarine masts or snorkels protruding out of the water.

AIP-equipped submarines can operate underwater for up to two weeks before they surface for battery charging.

The most difficult to detect are nuclear-powered submarines, which can remain submerged indefinitely. The Defence R&D Organisation (DRDO) is pursuing development programmes for both nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs).

On Monday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh met his German counterpart to explore ways to enhance the defence industrial partnership between the two countries. The Navy operates four German-origin submarines called the Shishumar-class, and has indicated its readiness to take on more. "Singh stressed that India and Germany could build a more symbiotic relationship based on shared goals and complementary of strength, namely skilled workforce and competitive costs from India and high technologies and investment from Germany," said the Indian MoD.

India and Germany have had a strategic partnership since 2000, which is being strengthened through inter-governmental consultations since 2011 at the level of heads of government. This is the first visit of a German defence minister to India since 2015.