Updating India's T-72 MBT Fleet

Upgrades, Retrofits Are Preparing India's Large T-72 Force For the Next Century

The Indian Army fields nearly 2,000 T-72M1s (Ajeya), most of them indigenously manufactured. By 1986, the limitations of the Soviet design became apparent and the Indians embarked on the first stage of "Operation Rhino," primarily to update the fire control system. The first 50 tanks came off the assembly line in 1987 at $835,000 apiece, but budgetary limitations delayed continuation of this project until 1990. The shortcomings of the ARJUN project have renewed emphasis on the Ajeya upgrade program.

Military sources say that one third of the Ajeyas in service will be completely retrofitted, with the remainder receiving partial upgrades, depending on their condition and serviceability. The fully upgraded Ajeyas will receive modern fire control systems and 840-hp diesel engines, as well as reactive armor, which is claimed to reduce ATGM effectiveness up to 80 percent, and a gyro-stabilized land navigation system. Night fighting capabilities will also be improved.

Apparently, a select group of Rhinos will receive thermal imaging systems and will be capable of firing the SS B 119M "Svir" ATGM. The 1993 "Svir" cost of $45,000 made 30 rounds equivalent in cost to an entire T-72. While the Russian basic load of "Svir" is four rounds, the Indians appear ready to issue six.

In late April 97, Russia also publicly offered India the Arena active defense system for its Ajeya fleet. The Russians claimed the system would double the tank's survival rate against Pakistan's planned purchase of 320 T-80UD tanks, though retrofitting of the system would increase the cost of the ongoing T-72 tank upgrade project by 10 to 25 percent. Other Russian sources figure the Arena's cost to be 20 percent of a T-80's export price (or $400,000 U.S. in '95-'96). The current plan is to fit an initial 500 T-72M1s (nine regiments) with the system, with the remaining 1,500 equipped if and when funds become available.

Since the cancellation of the 1996 Winter Firing Exercises, the Indian Army has acquired 250 Simfire training systems for Ajeya gunnery and tactical training.

'AJEYA' T-72M1

Crew: 3
Combat Weight: 44,500 kg.
Ground Pressure: 0.90kg/cm2
Engine: V-12 MFI, 840 hp @ 2000 RPM
Fuel Capacity: 1000 ltr
Maximum Speed: 60 km/h
Range: 480 km w/o long range fuel tanks, 550 km w/long range fuel tanks.
Transmission: Synchromesh, hydraulically assisted, w/7 forward and 1 reverse gear.
Steering: Clutch and brake
Suspension: Torsion bar
Electrical System: 24V
Gradient: 60%
Side Slope: 40%
Vertical Obstacle: 0.85m.
Trench Crossing: 2.28m wide.
Armament: 125mm gun w/45 rounds (6 ATGM)
7.62mm Coax w/2000 rounds
12.7 mm AAMG w/300 rounds
Gun Elevation/Depression: -6 to + 14x
Smoke Grenade Launchers: 4 x 2

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