

Def ministry cracks whip on ordnance factories

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Bengaluru: With an iron resolve to enhance efficiency of defence production and to increase private participation, the ministry of defence has been cracking its whip on the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) in the past few months. It intensified after an intervention by the Prime Minister's Office brought 41 factories under its scanner in February.

According to an internal letter dated May 25, secretary (defence production) AK Gupta will, on June 2, hold discussions on whether the "time has come for ordnance factories to exit from making 'non-core' items". The letter comes on the heels of ministry circular on April 27, which directed ordnance units making 87 items to either wind up or make alternative use of the facilities.

The April circular now allows the Indian Army to directly buy the 87 items — 48 troop comfort articles and 39 under the crucial weapons section, including 12 types of ammunition boxes, three types of bombs, seven types of empty shells and two types of binoculars — directly from the private sector.

UNDER SCANNER

The meeting will include "...identification of facilities itemwise which will become idle after hiving off of non-core items." It will also discuss alternative use of plant and machineries engaged in production of such items and "redeployment/gainful utilisation of the affected manpower (taking into account superannuation et al)."

The April circular and May 25 letter are in line with the February 16 letter from PMO, which besides seeking details of all products made at ordnance factories had also sought information on land owned by these units.

Employees of ordnance factories claim the move is not in "national interest" and that "it could put the country's strategic needs at risk".

Land details: The defence ministry has formed a high-level committee to regulate land use by ordnance factories. While the PMO letter had sought details from all 41 factories, the committee has asked for details from those factories in Pune, Avadi (Tamil Nadu), Jabalpur, Medak, Dehradun, Kolkata and Kanpur.