

NEW DELHI : After the successful launch of the indigenously developed semi-high speed Vande Bharat Express, also known as Train 18, India is looking to export the rakes to other nations, said two people in the know.

"Neighbouring countries in South Asia and a few countries in Latin America have evinced interest. Infrastructure consultancy and engineering firm RITES Ltd, which is the Indian Railway's rolling stock export arm, is looking to send at least one rake for testing in each of these markets so that it generates enough interest to translate into export orders," said one of the two people, seeking anonymity.

"Neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal expressed interest for Train 18. Teams from these countries visited India to get a look and feel of the modern semi-fast trains. We will look to export once the domestic demand is reasonably met," V. G. Suresh Kumar, director, projects, RITES, said.

He said Vande Bharat trains could be exported to countries using broad gauge railway networks as initial production of the trains from Railway's Integral Coach Factory in Chennai will be for the broad gauge systems. "The product may be available in standard gauge at a later date to expand its scope for Western and Central Asian markets," he added.

The Railways has set a target to roll out 400 rakes of Vande Bharat in the next three years to cater to India's needs on different routes.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged the Railways to produce at least 75 rakes by August 2023 to launch the services connecting 75 key cities, as part of the central government's plans to celebrate 75 years of Indian Independence.

The Integral Coach Factory is building capacity to manufacture 10 Vande Bharat trains every month. The Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala and the Modern Coach Factory in Rae Bareilly will also start manufacturing the rakes to meet the target.

Two Vande Bharat trains are running on the Delhi-Katra and Delhi-Varanasi routes. Two more are likely to be commissioned next month. The new and improved versions will have the Railways' latest train collision avoidance system (TCAS) or Kavach to prevent signal passing at danger cases, unsafe situations arising due to over speed and train collisions in the station area as well as in the block section. The coaches will also be quipped with modern fire alarms, emergency light systems and emergency exit windows and aircraft like seating arrangements with reinforced exterior to minimise damages.

Train 18 is being touted as a state-of-the art, Make in India product, that has the potential to become a global brand.

It is Indian's first semi-high speed train having a test speed of 180 kmph, with a maximum speed of 160 kmph. The manufacturing cost of a 16-coach Vande Bharat train is around 130 crore. "The cost advantage of Vande Bharat trains could make it a strong contender for any country that is looking to strengthen inter- city travel infrastructure," said the second person cited above.

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