

Interview | Neeraj Gupta

'We Are One of the Few With the Wherewithal to Design and Manufacture Both Hard and Soft Armour'

—Managing director, MKU Pvt Ltd., Neeraj Gupta

What is the scope and extent of MKU's interests in the defence sector? What domains are your primary areas of interest?

MKU has nearly 25 years of experience in providing protection solutions to the leading armed forces of the world. We have extensive knowledge of varied domain theatres across varied geographic locations. Till date, MKU has provided fortification to 1.5 million soldiers across the globe, and has designed splendid solutions, and delivered them in the best possible manner to more than 1500 platforms.

MKU offers products designed for personnel as well as platform protection across land, air and sea, and offers Night Vision Device (NVD) solutions as part of its product portfolio. These will be the areas where MKU will look to offer solutions to the Paramilitary forces as well as the army, navy and air force.

MKU has a direct established customer base in over 100 countries worldwide. It is uniquely capable of offering global solutions while at the same time ensuring local support.

The current 2013-14 ministry of defence (MoD) budget is USD 37 billion and is a meagre 5.3 per cent increase over the previous year. On the other hand, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has increased its budget by almost 19 per cent and its current 2013-14 budget is Rs 52,265 crore or USD 8.5 billion. The variance in percentage increase in MoD and MHA highlights India's growing internal security concern as compared to crossborder conflict. The trend is prevalent largely in all countries worldwide. Over the next decade, the Indian government will look to equip themselves against existing and emerging internal and external threats, and also hardware obsolescence.

MKU appears to be unique in the sense that it participates in almost all international defence and aerospace exhibitions. What is the reason for that? Do you have a customer base outside India?

MKU has a direct established cus-



tommer base in over 100 countries worldwide, which are serviced through its employees and factories in India and Germany. It is capable of offering global solutions while at the same time ensuring local support. This understanding of global environment gives MKU an unparalleled edge to deliver cutting edge solutions to its customers who get localised support through MKU's offices and networks located around the world through contract strategy of channel partners. MKU has a very strong vision of becoming a global leader in the protection and surveillance domain by attaining technological excellence. Our participation in over 25 exhibitions through 2013 has helped establish MKU firmly on the global map.

Who are your primary customers?

MKU offers products designed for personnel as well as platform protection across land, air and sea and offers NVD solutions as part of its product portfolio. MKU has a large customer base in the domestic and international market. In

India, we service the Paramilitary forces, Indian Army, Indian Navy, Indian Air Force, special operations teams like the National Security Guards (NSG), Special Protection Group (SPG), Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) etc. Internationally we are serving 230 forces in over 100 countries.

What are your current Indian military programmes?

MKU is committed to provide the latest cutting edge technology to its customers in India and around the globe. MKU participates in all major and minor Request for Proposals (RFP) and Request for Information (RFI) to support the Indian armed forces with state-of-the-art products.

What are your current programmes with the paramilitary forces?

MKU is among the selected vendors for field trials for Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Night Vision binoculars and monoculars. We also participate in other RFIs for protection of equipment.

What is the surveillance equipment that is in the service with the forces? Do you have any direct programmes with the Border Security Force (BSF) on this?

Yes, we are working on several night vision and thermal projects with BSF.

MKU seems to have a vast portfolio for the personnel protection equipment. Do you have any ongoing programmes with the CRPF and Indian Army specifically?

Yes, we have a vast portfolio. In fact, we are one of the few with the wherewithal to design and manufacture both hard and soft armour. We have capacities which are unmatched in India. As mentioned earlier, MKU is among the selected vendors for field trials for the CRPF NVD. MKU is also associated with the soldier modernisation programmes.

Can you elaborate on the vehicle/platform protection systems of the MKU? Which of this equipment is in service today? Also, what new products are

you planning to bring to the market?

MKU has the competence to design, manufacture and integrate the protection system for all the three platforms viz. air, land and naval. We have till date delivered more than 1,500 protection systems for various land, naval and air platforms worldwide. In India we have already delivered protection systems for several projects, both naval and land. MKU is an AS9100 certified company and has several patents to its name. We are currently supplying the protection system for one of the projects of the Indian Navy.

What is your scope of research and development (R&D) in the Indian market?

MKU was amongst the pioneers in introducing light weight protection for personnel in the Indian market. Over the years we have invested heavily in R&D in the field to continuously upgrade on the solutions and meet with the expectations of the users worldwide. We have recently established a dedicated R&D centre in Kanpur to further focus on development of new and lighter solutions. We invest almost five per cent of our turnover in R&D.

Do you have any partnerships with Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to manufacture the equipment? Is there any such collaboration in R&D?

We have been working with the different labs of DRDO in developing prototypes and other solutions for their projects. Details of the projects cannot be divulged since the information is confidential.

Given that there are a number of 'Make (Indian)' programmes that the armed forces are keen on, what advantages do you think MKU will have as a domestic player? Are you involved in any of the upcoming programmes?

We strongly believe that the domestic industry should be encouraged through such 'Make (Indian)' projects. In fact, wherever the capability exists, the government should look into the possibility of launching such projects. This will not only help Indian domestic industry to grow, it will also help the government save costs

Tell us about your armouring and integration solutions for land, air and sea platforms.

MKU specifically works on developing

light weight solutions for land, sea and air platforms. Not only do we design and manufacture the armour protection, we design and manufacture the complete ready-to-fit solution including the special attachment systems. Our solutions are varied and tried and tested over the years. We have the unique experience of having worked for customers in different parts of the globe and bring the acquired experience and knowledge to our applications.

MKU offers products designed for personnel as well as platform protection across land, air and sea and offers NVD solutions as part of its product portfolio. MKU has a direct established customer base in over 100 countries worldwide. It is uniquely capable of offering global solutions while at the same time ensuring local support.

Our protection solutions based on cutting-edge technology are used by armed forces, police, Red Cross and others who need protection in various theatres of operation. While expanding its global footprint, MKU remains conscious of the end users of our products and ensure that we do not sell to any irresponsible nations or establishments.

Survival in today's hi-tech battle and riot-prone environment requires sophisticated protection, knowledge, expertise and latest manufacturing technologies to develop protection solution scenarios.

Personal Protection: Personal protection equipment from MKU include helmets, body armour, armour plates, ballistic shields, de-mining suits and bomb blankets for the diverse needs of armies, Paramilitary and police forces.

Vehicle protection: MKU offers light weight precision cut composite panels and kits for vehicle protection. It also offers armouring and integration solutions for land, air and sea platforms.

In modern combat scenarios and during special operations, troops need to engage effectively during night or very low light conditions. Use of any light source in such scenarios gives away their tactical advantage with respect to position, information and manoeuvres. MKU manufactures NVDs which provide them the ability to see, manoeuvre and shoot at night or during periods of reduced visibility.

Some of the products offered by MKU include MKU's Instavest. The swift and instant release action of this vest helps soldiers in extreme combat and life threatening situations where immediate doffing of the body armour becomes

imperative in order to save one's life. The specially developed Quick Release System of Instavest immediately divests the vest off the soldiers' body with a single action and complements body reflex.

Another MKU product, the Boltfree helmet uses No Drill technology in order to provide uniform protection throughout the helmet shell. The No Bolts technology used by MKU in its Boltfree helmets reduces the risk of injuries due to secondary fragmentation in helmets.

A rare combination of extra light weight helmet with ultimate ballistic protection, G-Factor helmets from MKU offer optimum protection. Ergonomically designed, these helmets provide extreme comfort in combat zones. Made of light weight composite material, G-Factor helmets weigh below 1 kg and are much lighter than traditional helmets.

MKU products are also available in prestigious NIJ 0101.06 certified ballistic packages including Soft Armour and Hard Armour. Various models of ballistic packages of MKU have been certified by NIJ. These certificates are issued only after stringent testing to ensure the ballistic performance is maintained over a period of time even after rugged use.

MKU offers complete project management for design, development, manufacturing and integration of protection solutions for land, air and naval platforms using special patented technologies and systems which have been developed over years of R&D efforts.

MKU is certified as a NATO supplier and the supplier to the German Defence Technology and Procurement Department. Can you tell us about your product portfolio and the ongoing programmes in Germany and the NATO countries?

Yes, we have ongoing projects in Germany but cannot divulge details for reasons of confidentiality.

Who do you think are your biggest competitors in the Indian market?

Our competitors are the other manufacturers who are in the business of designing and manufacturing protection systems. However, we feel the kind of investment we make in R&D, and the efforts we make to develop and test new solutions keep us ahead of the curve. We already have very large capacities, which are unmatched in India, and are now expanding it further to better service our customers worldwide. At MKU we believe in setting benchmarks. ||