

Homegrown submarine plan launched

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Navy officers look on yesterday as President Tsai Ing-wen waves from the hatch of a submarine at Zuoying Military Harbor in Kaohsiung.

Photo: Chang Chung-i, Taipei Times

The nation is hoping to build its first homegrown submarines within eight years and commission them into service within a decade, the shipbuilder tasked with carrying out the program said yesterday.

CSBC Corp, Taiwan (中華造船) chairman Cheng Wen-lung (鄭文龍) said there were problems that needed to be worked out because Taiwan lacks experience in building submarines, but added that the difficulties were being addressed.

CSBC, the nation's only listed shipbuilder, has built more than 100 ships for the navy and will use that experience in developing the local submarine program, he added.

Cheng's comments came as CSBC and the Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the navy earlier yesterday in Kaohsiung to jointly build submarines for the military.

The project is part of a broader initiative to develop an independent national defense industry.

The project will have two main phases, the MOU said.

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The first will be to complete the design for the submarines and will have a budget of about NT\$2 billion (US\$65.66 million), Cheng said.

The second stage will involve building the submarines, he said, without giving any cost projections for the vessels or estimates of how many submarines would be built.

According to the schedule, the indigenous submarines are to be completed within eight years and then commissioned into service within a decade, he said.

Cheng was asked about the planned submarines' design and whether it would be based on the designs of existing submarines in the navy's fleet, which were purchased from the US in the 1970s and the Netherlands in the 1980s.

"The design will be based on a model that meets the needs of Taiwan's self-defense," he said.

Institute vice president Gao Chung-hsing (高仲興) said that the most important part of the program is building a system that integrates all equipment and ensures the safety of ships operating underwater.

The institute will cooperate with CSBC in these areas, Gao said.

Yesterday's signing was also witnessed by President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), who said the construction of submarines is the most challenging aspect of the nation's policy to create an independent national defense industry.

The government will exhaust all means and pool its resources to solve any problems associated with building the submarines, she said.

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Minister of National Defense Feng Shih-kuan (馮世凱) also attended the signing ceremony, which was preceded by the formal send-off of a fleet of navy vessels on a training mission that will include goodwill visits to some of the nation's diplomatic allies.

During the ceremony, Tsai boarded the Hai Lung-class submarine the Hai Hu in Zuoying Military Harbor to watch a simulation of a torpedo launch.

Taiwan has long tried to acquire submarines from other countries with little success because of their reluctance to upset China.

In 2001, then-US president George W. Bush authorized the sale of eight diesel-electric submarines to Taiwan, but the deal never came to fruition because of political wrangling in Taiwan and questions over whether the US, which did not produce conventional submarines at the time, could supply the vessels.

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