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Where security forces learn how to shoot

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Army personnel training at one of the simulators in Hyderabad on Saturday | express photo

HYDERABAD: Think of it like an arcade game, but only for the Indian armed forces to flex their shooting skills within the confines of a room. On a huge screen with a target on it, an Indian Army personnel can train to improve his or her shooting skills, be it with an INSAS machine gun or with grenade and rocket launchers. These arcade type simulators are what Indian Army personnel use for 'focused training'.

Simulators are used for Army training, giving the personnel a true to life experience without causing any harm to themselves or to the equipments. The use of simulators for combat training is not a new concept though. The earliest form of it was for on-ground flight training. It is now usually the first place where the mettle of a pilot is tested before he or she is given a real plane to train on.

Over the course of time, the military application of simulators have expanded from flight simulators to simulators for war games, gun training and even hand to hand combat training using virtual reality scenarios.

In 1993, Ashok Atluri asked himself a question, "How do we prepare our Armed forces to tackle real life war situation?"

Now the managing director of Zen Technologies, Ashok set up the first and only defence simulation company in India, with his brother Kishore Dutt, and friend Ravi Kumar.

The Hyderabad based company has been building training simulations for India's Armed forces, much before 'Make in India' became a slogan.

"If I get the designs for the wing of a plane from a foreign company and build them here, what is the contribution that I make? Nothing. The one who designs and develops the technology captures the market," said Ashok.

"We own the field. We are in and own the Intellectual Property (IP) of the technology. We chose to be the king in a niche area," he added.

Earlier this year the government had opened up the Defence industry to international markets with 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for the sector. With regulations on export of Defence equipments loosening, Zen Technologies are currently in talks with an African nation to help it develop training simulations for their counter-terrorism operations.

The simulation rooms designed and developed by the company look like a high end laser-tag game, but with armour plated rooms and bullet proof jackets that have trackers on them. From the command centre the performance of the Army personnel can be monitored and evaluated through a software.

Apart from combat rooms training simulations, the "shooting range simulations" were what Ashok said was a major cash cow for the company. From the outside, the shooting range looks like a shipping cargo container but on the inside, at one end of the container is a screen with a target for practice that Army men can train themselves. "What will you do with a weapon if you don't know how to use it? There is a shortage of shooting ranges for practice, we have taken shooting ranges to the people, you can live fire and train at these simulations," said Ashok.

"The government is laying stress on exporting Defence equipments, the government wants to touch 2 billion dollars in defence exports. We believe we can do it," said Ashok.

"This will serve other countries as we are a training partner to the world. We can even train people for full fledged war situations if needed," he added.

The company has been focusing on research and development for over 23 years and has developed 33 simulation products. However, the company developed its first shooting range simulation in 1993 but sold its first product only in 1996.

"It took us three years to sell our first product. We did not have any money and would not have made without funding from IBDI venture capital funds," said Ashok. "There was stigma that, how can an Indian company create such technology? Now we are established name and perceptions have changed," he added.