

Seeker to Revolutionise Indian Defence

India and Israel are expected to ink a significant Defence deal worth over Rs50,000 crore for Seeker technology ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tel Aviv later this year. The cutting-edge technology will help India take a giant leap forward in manufacturing smart weapons within the country and rapidly modernise missile and rocket system used by the IAF, Army and Navy.

The talks for wrapping up the deal are in advanced stage between the two countries and Israel has agreed to transfer the expertise to develop and manufacture Seeker technology. It will enable the Defence forces to identify, acquire and then destroy an enemy missile or aircraft at long range or beyond visual range.

In simple terms, it means a warship can fire a missile at a hostile target at more than 200 km distance without visually sighting it as compared to the present 50 to 60 km. Seeker technology will also revolutionise the armoured corps as tanks will hit a target at a greater distance and same will be the case for fighter jets. In fact, this technology will cover the entire gamut of missiles ranging from Akash to Long Range Surface to Air Missiles (LRSAM) used by the three Services.

Elaborating upon the importance of this proposed deal, officials said here on Saturday the countries including the US and some European countries are reluctant to transfer Seeker technology to India resulting in the country's missile system lagging behind by at least two generations.

Against this backdrop, Israel has given a clear signal that it will provide the critical 'know why' instead of 'know how'. Starved of the state-of-the-art technology, the Indian industry depends on know how or technology transfer but has not been able to master entire process of manufacturing a smart weapon from scratch. In turn, it hampers the faster modernisation of the armed forces as they are using weapons which are at least 15 to 20 years behind in terms of technological advancement as compared to the US, China and NATO countries.

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will be the lead agency in developing this technology. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) had given an "in-principle" approval for setting up of an Rs6,000-crore facility by the DRDO for air missile defence systems last year.

Besides the Seeker technology deal, the two countries are likely to ink a Rs10,000-crore deal for joint development of a medium-range surface-to-air missile system for the Indian Army.

The other pacts include procurement of 164 laser-designation pods or 'Litening-4' for IAF fighters like SU-30s and Jaguars as well as 250 advanced 'Spice' precision stand-off bombs capable of destroying fortified enemy underground command centres. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) chaired by the Prime Minister may clear it next month, sources said.

Talks are also underway to finalise a Rs3,200-crore contract for 321 'Spike' anti tank guided (ATGM) systems and 8,356 missiles. The Army is in urgent need for third-generation ATGMs, with a strike range of over 2.5-km and fire-and-forget capabilities, to equip all its 382 infantry battalions and 44 mechanised infantry units.

The NDA Government in 2014 had selected the Israeli Spike ATGM over the US Javelin missile system, but the actual contract could not be inked due to some issues. The project involves an initial off-the-shelf induction, followed by large-scale indigenous manufacture by Bharat Dynamics Ltd (BDL).

The proposed medium range surface to air missile (MRSAM) project between DRDO and Israeli Aerospace Industries (IAI), too, is a big ticket item, officials said. The initial order is for one MRSAM regiment, with 16 firing units along with their multifunction surveillance and weapon control systems. BDL will manufacture these missiles. DRDO and IAI are already engaged in a project worth over Rs13,000 crore for Navy and IAF for developing similar missiles.

Incidentally, the Israel Defence industry is closely involved with the DRDO in more than 30 projects, including development of radars, electronic warfare systems and satellite based command and control systems for the three Services.

Moreover, Israeli made Greenpine radars are successfully integrated into the Agni missiles systems capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Israel is now the third largest weapon supplier after the US and Russia to India since diplomatic ties between the two nations were established in 1990.