

## Jaitley favours Indian over foreign for missile deal

By **Ajit K Dubey** in New Delhi

**IN LINE** with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's direction to promote Make in India in the defence sector and avoid imports, the defence ministry has decided to award an army missile contract worth around ₹18,000 crore to the DRDO over a foreign vendor.

The decision was taken by defence minister Arun Jaitley in the crucial meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council held last week, top government sources told MAIL TODAY.

The case for acquiring Short Range Surface to Air Missiles (SR-SAMs) was taken up for discussion during the DAC meeting where the government had to decide whether to go for a foreign missile system or the Akash surface to air missile systems. Jaitley went on for the indigenous option, sources said.

Top army sources confirmed that the force would be utilising the Akash missiles for protection against the incoming aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles of the adversaries as the system would be deployed on both the Pakistan and China border. Sources said there were a few specific systems and equipment available on the foreign system that were asked for by the army for the missile system which DRDO assured would be provided.

Akash missile systems are proving their worth in the recent times as they have been chosen by the IAF for its requirement.

The DRDO may have lagged behind in the indigenous development of aircraft and land warfare systems but it has helped India to become self-reliant in the strategic missile systems helping in giving advance capability to the armed forces while saving in precious foreign currency for the government.

It is learnt that three foreign vendors — Israel, Sweden and Russia — were in the race for bagging the contract for which the process was initiated in 2011, and trials were held in 2014.

One of the three contenders had to be chosen for the contract as the force wanted the two regiments of the missile system to be provided to the army air defence. The army air defence has been operating with obsolete equipment for a long time with the government recently saying around 98 per cent of it was outdated.

However, under the Modi regime, the force recently received a boost when the cabinet committee on security cleared the ₹17,000 crore Medium Range Surface to Air Missile project with Israel.