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Metcalf House, Delhi- 110054

Defence minister issues 5-point rebuttal of Rafale accusations

By Ajai Shukla

Underlining the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) unease at Congress Party allegations of wrongdoing by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in the Rs 58,000 crore purchase last year of 36 Rafale fighters from French company, Dassault, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman led a counterattack on Friday.

Flanked by Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra and Indian Air Force (IAF) procurement chief, Air Vice Marshal Rathunath Nambiar, Sitharaman lashed out at the Congress on five counts.

First, she stated, the previous BJP government had, as early as 2000, "recognised the need to strengthen the IAF", leading to procurement being initiated for 126 medium multirole combat aircraft (MMRCA). Yet, the Congress Party was unable to conclude the purchase of Rafale fighters "for an entire decade between 2004-2014", she said.

That "act of omission" had led to severe fighter shortages in the IAF, Sitharaman charged. "This was the grim situation when this government came to power in 2014", she said.

In fact, the MMRCA procurement was initiated only in 2007, with the issue of a Request for Proposals (RfP or tender). Over the next four years, the IAF evaluated six contending fighters --- Boeing's F/A-18E/F Super Hornet; Lockheed Martin's F-16IN Super Viper; RAC MiG's MiG-35; Saab's Gripen C, the Eurofighter Typhoon and the Rafale --- in what was hailed worldwide as "the world's most professionally run fighter competition."

In April 2011, the IAF ruled out four fighters, leaving only the Eurofighter Typhoon and Dassault Rafale in the fray. In January 2012, the Rafale was identified as the winner of the contest and negotiations began with Dassault over the cost. Therefore, the UPA can, at worst, be accused of two years and three months of vacillation, until the BJP came to power in May 2014.

Sitharaman's second rebuttal related to the Congress accusation that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had not followed due procedure, and not even consulted his defence minister before announcing during a state visit to France in April 2015 that India would buy 36 Rafale fighters in fly-away condition.

"When the prime minister went to Paris in 2015 and agreed [on the purchase of 36 Rafales], he followed the due process of getting it cleared through the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)", said Sitharaman. "In September 2016, almost a year and a half later, the Inter-Governmental Agreement for buying 36 Rafales was signed in the presence of the defence ministers of France and India", she said.

While it is true the CCS cleared the Rafale purchase after Modi returned from Paris, no CCS permission, or from any defence ministry procurement body, was obtained before Modi and French President Francois Hollande announced the Rafale buy in April 2015.

Thirdly, Sitharaman countered the Congress' accusation that the NDA government had obtained the Rafale without transfer of technology, whilst the MMRCA contract the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government was negotiating involved full transfer of technology (ToT) for building the Rafale in India.

"This is simple economics. When we are talking about building 126 aircraft [in India], ToT makes economic sense. But when you are buying 36 aircraft across-the-counter... it makes no economic sense for ToT to be added on", she correctly stated.

Fourthly, Sitharaman rejected the Congress' oblique allegation that Anil Ambani's Reliance Defence Ltd (RDL) had benefited from his proximity to the PM to be unfairly picked as Dassault's Indian partner for discharging the 50 per cent offset clause that came with the Rafale deal.

“If two private firms come together, that doesn’t require government’s permission”, said Sitharaman. She argued the PM does not control the composition of his business delegation and it does not matter if it includes “a certain individual”.

Finally, Sitharaman argued that “The price we have obtained [the Rafale for] is far less [than the UPA]”.

However, she was unable to address media queries about how much the government was paying for 36 Rafales, compared to what the UPA government had negotiated.

“We will give you the figures that you want”, said Sitharaman, directing the query to the defence secretary. However, he did not have the figures either.

In April 2015, the announcement in Paris by Modi and Hollande of their agreement over the Rafale took the defence ministry by surprise. This was evident from a series of uncoordinated statements from then defence minister, Manohar Parrikar, who was left fielding questions in India.

The morning after the announcement, Parrikar erroneously told PTI in Goa that the 36 fighters would join IAF service within two years. Apparently distancing himself from the Rafale deal, Parrikar termed it “a great decision taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on better terms and conditions.”

Nor was Parrikar aware of how many Rafales would be bought. He told Doordarshan: “It may be worked out that we will buy another 90 Rafales... The ‘Make in India’ part will be decided only after government-to-government talks.”

With the Congress pressing home its attack over "insurmountable loss" of taxpayers' money, the BJP is marshalling its counter. On Thursday, IAF boss, Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa stated the NDA had pulled off “a cheaper deal” than what the UPA was contemplating.

In fact, between 2013-14, UPA defence minister, AK Antony, had repeatedly made clear his deep reservations over the Rafale procurement, telling close associates that he was never going to sign it.



Sat, 18 Nov, 2017

Nirmala calls Oppn’s Rafale claims ‘shameful’

By Ajit K Dubey

With the Congress alleging foul play in the Rafale combat aircraft deal, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday put up a brave defence to the charges and issued point-by-point clarification on the issues pointed out by the opposition party against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The defence minister termed Congress’ allegations as “shameful” and said that such bickering was a disservice to the armed forces because the aircraft deal was fully transparent. She blamed the Congress party for jeopardising national security by not taking a decision on the procurement for 10 years when it was in power from 2004 to 2014.

Flanked by Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra and Deputy Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Raghunath Nambiar in a hurriedly called press conference, Sitharaman said that Congress was leveling these baseless charges as it has failed to get any issue to criticise the government. Following are the charges levelled by the Congress and the rebuttal issued by the defence minister.

CONGRESS CHARGE

■ *The UPA govt negotiated a deal for 126 Rafale aircraft for ₹50,000 cr while the NDA govt renegotiated the deal to commit ₹ 60,000 cr for just 36 fighters without the provision for transfer of technology.*

■ *Deal benefited BJP's "crony capitalist friends" at the cost of a reputed public sector undertaking, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. An industrialist friend of the PM travelled with him to Paris for deal's announcement.*

■ *Due procedures like getting clearance from the Cabinet Committee on Security was not followed.*

MINISTER'S DEFENCE

■ **The deal signed by the NDA govt is far better than what the previous govt was negotiating for. The Congress did not care for the security preparedness of the air force, which had demanded the requirements in 2000. The defence procurement procedure allowed using the government-to-government route to buy the 36 aircraft in fly-away condition at the earliest. Since this was an emergency procurement, the transfer of technology would not have helped us.**

■ **The Prime Minister's delegation consisted only of the officials and no industrialist was part of it. Whenever the Prime Minister goes out of the country, he addresses the businesses of the both countries. Who goes in these business delegations, is not decided by us.**

■ **After Modi announced the deal in April 2015 in Paris, the agreement for 36 Rafale jets was signed the next year after lengthy discussions between Indian and French sides and approval by Cabinet Committee on Security. Not a single procedure was violated in procuring the jets.**

hindustantimes hindustantimes.com

Sat, 18 Nov, 2017

Drones to boost surveillance along U'khand border with Nepal, China

Dehradun: High definition cameras installed on drones will keep an eye on forests along Uttarakhand's border with Nepal and China, tracking poachers, timber mafia and Maoists, officials said.

The drones are also expected to play a crucial role in disaster management and employment generation, they added.

"A Drone Application and Training Centre (DATC) will be set up here soon," a state government source said.

National Training Research Organisation (NTRO) chairman Alok Joshi had during a recent visit to Dehradun announced that the state would have a DATC soon. Joshi had said a batch of 25 youth each would be trained in various technologies relating to all kinds of drone operations.

The proposed institute would be developed by the Doon-based Information Technology Development Agency (ITDA).

"The proposed DATC will (also) help generate employment," Amit Kumar Sinha, director, ITDA said.

According to sources, employees of the departments of forests, disaster management and police would also be trained in all aspects of drone operations.

"Drones will play a crucial role in disaster management as they will send images of the disaster hit areas, which will be of crucial importance for those engaged in relief and rescue operations," Sinha said, adding that talks were on with the Central government on various aspects of setting up the DATC.

Drones will also prove to be a boon in tracking the timber mafia and criminals engaged in poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

“Drones will also come in handy in monitoring the forests particularly in the high altitude areas where it is not humanly possible to reach,” the ITDA director added.

THE ASIAN AGE

Sat, 18 Nov, 2017

N. Korea ‘aggressively’ working on ballistic missile submarine: Report Trump wants China to put pressure on N. Korea: WH

Images suggest North Korea building SINPO- C ballistic missile submarine

Washington, Nov. 17: Satellite images taken this month of a North Korean naval shipyard indicate Pyongyang is pursuing an “aggressive schedule” to build its first operational ballistic missile submarine, a US institute reported on Thursday.

Washington- based 38 North, a North Korea monitoring project, cited images taken on November 5 showing activity at North Korea’s Sinpo South Shipyard.

“The presence of what appear to be sections of a submarine’s pressure hull in the yards suggests construction of a new submarine, possibly the SINPO- C ballistic missile submarine — the follow- on to the current SINPO- class experimental ballistic missile submarine,” 38 North said in a report.

The report said that throughout 2017 there had been continued movement Washington, Nov. 17: US President Donald Trump favours China taking a greater role in putting maximum pressure on North Korea to curb its nuclear weapons programme, the White House has said, following Beijing’s decision to send a special envoy to Pyongyang.

“The President certainly favours China taking a

of parts and components into and out of two parts yards adjacent to the constructions halls in the center of the shipyard.

It said the November 5 images showed two large circular objects that could be sections of a submarine’s pressure hull. It said these appeared larger greater role in putting maximum pressure on North Korea,” White House press secretary Sarah Sanders told reporters.

“Certainly, any effort in order to denuclearise the Peninsula there in North Korea, then China participating in that, the President certainly supports those efforts,” Ms Sanders said. than those for North Korea’s ROMEO- class attack submarine.

Images of a test stand indicated continued testing of a mechanism for ejection launch of missiles from a submarine. However, the report said no activity could be seen suggesting preparations for a new test of a submarinelaunched missile.

North Korea has been working to develop a nuclear- tipped missile capable of reaching the United States, sparking a major international crisis in which US President Donald Trump has said that all options are under consideration, including military ones.

North Korea is also thought to be working on a solid- fuel missile for submarine launches.

Last month, The Diplomat magazine quoted a US government source as saying US military intelligence had detected a new diesel- electric submarine under construction at Sinpo and dubbed it the Sinpo- C. It said the submarine was likely a larger successor to North Korea’s single experimental ballistic missile submarine.



Sat, 18 Nov, 2017

N Korea Rules out negotiations on N-Weapons

Geneva: North Korea on Friday ruled out negotiations with Washington as long as joint US-South Korea military exercises continue, and said that Pyongyang’s atomic weapons programme would remain as a deterrent against a US nuclear threat. In an interview with Reuters, Han Tae Song, North Korea’s ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, brushed off the new sanctions which the Trump administration has said it is preparing, as well as the possibility of North Korea being added to a US list of states sponsoring terrorism.

Han, asked about those bilateral talks in Seoul, replied: “As long as there is continuous hostile policy against my country by the US and as long as there are continued war games at our doorstep, then there will not be negotiations.” Reuters



Sat, 18 Nov, 2017

‘Us must make clear to pak terror safe havens won’t be tolerated’

President Donald Trump’s nominee for US Under Secretary of Defence for Policy John C Rood has expressed the view that the United States must make it clear to Pakistan that its continuing safe havens for terrorists will not be tolerated.

At a Senate confirmation hearing on Thursday, Rood said, “We can’t tolerate that sort of support (by Pakistan) that will undermine our efforts in Afghanistan where our troops have been fighting and we’ve had over 2,000 of our Americans killed in that conflict.”

Responding to questions from Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain, Rood said that Pakistan’s sheltering of the Taliban and Haqqani network has undercut US efforts in Pakistan. “Unfortunately, this is a problem that’s persisted really over the 16 years of that conflict, a very stubborn problem to solve,” he said.

While the US needs to maintain a constructive relationship with Pakistan to advance mutual interests, it should at the same time “demonstrate its serious concerns about Pakistan expanding its nuclear programme and providing safe haven for militant groups in its territory”, Rood said separately in written answers to questions from the Senate panel.

“Sanctuary and freedom of movement for the Afghan Taliban and associated militant networks inside Pakistani territory continue to be contributing factors that negatively impact security conditions and stability inside Pakistan,” Rood said, adding: “If confirmed, I will examine ways in which we can end Pakistan’s sanctuary for terrorist networks.”

In contrast to the tough posture against Pakistan, both Rood and Randall Schriver, the Trump nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defence for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs who also faced the panel for confirmation, strongly supported closer defence relations with India.

Describing India as the US' "natural" strategic partner, Schriver made the case for Washington continuing to deepen the defence ties with New Delhi. Commenting on the terror networks, he noted in a written response that Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and Jaish-e-Mohammed all present threats to US persons, allies, partners and interests in the region.

"I understand that the US-India security relationship is at its strongest point in our history," Schriver said, adding: "I am encouraged by our increasing level of defence collaboration with India. The designation of India as a Major Defence Partner in 2016 reflects the progress we are making to build a long-term and broad-based strategic partnership, and if confirmed, I will look to build on this progress."

Voicing similar sentiments on the growth of US-India security relationship, Rood said, if confirmed, he would look for opportunities to advance it with further steps to facilitate defence trade and cooperation. "I believe it is important for senior officials in the US Defence Department to maintain regular high-level exchanges with their counterparts in India's Ministry of Defence and continue efforts to facilitate close defence collaboration," Rood noted.



Sat, 18 Nov, 2017

US Congress Passes \$700 bn Defence Bill

The US Congress on Friday passed a nearly \$700 billion Defence budget for 2018 which imposes tougher conditions on Pakistan for military and security assistance while seeking advancement in military cooperation with major defence partner India.

The 2018 National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) sailed through both the chambers of the Congress — House of Representatives and the Senate — by a voice vote.

It now heads to the White House for President Donald Trump to sign it into law, which he is expected to do before the Thanksgiving holidays. The budget also accommodates the last minute additional White House's financial request implementing its new South Asia strategy.



Sat, 18 Nov, 2017

'PSLV built by domestic industry by 2020'

ISRO to outsource launch vehicle production

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is preparing to hand over the entire gamut of launch vehicle manufacture to domestic industry by 2020.

"Until now, public and private industries have only supplied devices, components and sub-systems for ISRO's launch vehicles, including the PSLV and the GSLV. Our effort is to give a push to industry for production of end-to-end systems. By 2020, we hope to have the first completely industry-built PSLV," Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) Director K. Sivan said here on Friday.

Consortium of companies

Inaugurating the National Aerospace Manufacturing Seminar (NAMS 2017) organised by the Society of Aerospace Manufacturing Engineers, he said efforts were on to set up a consortium of companies for the purpose. “Ultimately, we hope to see industry make the transition from vendors supplying parts, to partners providing integrated systems”.

The theme of the seminar was ‘Aerospace Manufacturing in India-Vision 2030.’

ISRO already has a partnership with private industry to produce satellites. The IRNSS-1H communication satellite aboard the ill-fated PSLV C-39 was the first to be produced by a consortium of six companies.

Dr. Sivan said ISRO had a partnership with about 500 domestic industries for the supply of various components and devices. “About 80% of the cost of launch vehicles and 40% of satellites are handled by these industries”.

He stressed on the need for industry to reduce the manufacturing and material cost without compromising on quality to bring down the launch cost. ISRO, he said, had tightened tolerance to error following the failure of the PSLV- C39 mission.

Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC) Director S. Somanath said the industry partnership for satellite production had paved the way for the transition to industry-made launch vehicles. He said automation and the increased use of composites and additives were turning the conventional manufacturing process on its head. “Reusable launch vehicles promise to bring down launch cost but pose a problem for industry due to lower demand. The solution is to create a market for more missions.”