

समाचार पत्रों से चयित अंश Newspapers Clippings

दैनिक सामयिक अभिज्ञता सेवा
A daily Current Awareness Service

Vol. 42 No. 259 22 November 2017



रक्षा विज्ञान पुस्तकालय
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‘NDA Rafale aircraft 15% cheaper than UPA ones’

The Rafale fighter aircraft procured by the Narendra Modi government are 16 per cent cheaper than the ones which were negotiated by the UPA government under a global tender— which was scrapped due to multiple complications — top government security sources said. The NDA government has signed a contract for procuring 36 Rafale planes from France under which French firm Dassault Aviation that would manufacture and supply them under fly-away condition at a cost of approximately Rs. 60,000 crore.

The Congress has been levelling allegations on the NDA government about a scam in the aircraft deal, saying the price of the planes was highly inflated than what it was negotiated from 2004 to 2014. “The cost of the 36 planes is almost 16 per cent less than what the UPA government was negotiating. However, they could not even close the deal after sitting on it for 10 long years,” the sources said. The government has also ensured that the country gets a more capable aircraft from France, which will ensure that 75 per cent of the aircraft area is available for operations.

“We are getting a far better deal in terms of avionics, weaponry as we will get longer range air to air missiles where the French would maintain the aircraft for 10 years,” they said. Asked why the government opted to buy only 36 aircrafts against the requirement of 126 planes, the sources said the government wanted to go in for only the bare minimum requirements of the air force, whose squadron strength had fallen from the sanctioned 42 to 33 when NDA came to power in 2014. They said even in the scrapped tender for 126 planes, the air force was planning to get 18 aircraft in fly-away condition and that is the reason why 36 aircraft. On the allegation that the government’s deal benefited a private defence firm, the sources said the present government has nothing to do with any such company as it was only the French who have to deliver the offsets contracts.



Martyrs’ Widows Don’t Need to Marry Bro-In-Law for Benefits

In a major relief to widows of martyrs, the Defence Ministry on Tuesday decided to do away with a condition that they have to marry the deceased’s brother for being eligible to receive gallantry awards monetary allowance. The Ministry has now decided that the widow can now marry any one and will still get all the dues, including allowance, till her death.

Terming it as a major step to remove a “regressive” rule, officials said as per the existing norms, a widow is not entitled to the allowance and other benefits if she remarried or died. However, if she marries the brother of her deceased husband and “lives a communal life with the living eligible heir,” the woman are entitled for family pension.

The Defence Ministry in a statement said it decided to scrap the present criteria after several representations to remove the condition of the widow’s remarriage with the late husband’s brother for continuation of the monetary allowance.

The revised condition states that the allowance shall be admissible to the recipient of the award and on his death to his widow lawfully married by a valid ceremony. The widow will continue to receive the allowance until her death.

Elaborating upon the earlier rule, officials said in order to provide enough financial support to parents of the martyr, the widow remarried the brother of her late husband. However, with fast changing society and joint family making way for unitary family, the present norm was giving rise to several complications. They included tension within the family, and, in many cases, ill treatment of the widows.

Also, due to this rule, many war widows, whose husbands were awarded gallantry medals and others who died fighting terrorists, were denied their dues. One such case was that of Janak Anand, whose first husband Captain SK Sehgal, was killed during the 1971 war with Pakistan and awarded Vir Chakara. She later married another Army officer and was denied all the allowances.

After several petitions to the authorities, the woman then approached Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) which in September this year questioned the validity of the rule. The Tribunal also said on the one hand, the President of India confers the gallantry award to the woman as a mark of respect to her late husband and on the other such rules denying her monetary allowances amount to humiliation.

Recipients of the gallantry awards are entitled to the monetary allowance as per the letter of 1972 of the Defence Ministry superseded by letter in 1995, which have been revised from time to time. As per the existing condition for grant of monetary allowance, the allowance shall be admissible to the recipient of the award and on his death to his widow lawfully married by a valid ceremony.

Moreover, the old order stipulated that the widow will continue to receive the allowance until her re-marriage or death. The payment of the allowance will, however, be continued to a widow who re-marries the late husband's brother and lives a communal life with the living heir eligible for family pension. A gallantry medal recipient gets monetary allowance from the Army besides the State from which he hails. This allowance, however, varies from State to State.



Wed, 22 Nov, 2017

Navy's pilotless jet crashes during take off

A remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) of the Indian Navy crashed during takeoff just outside the Naval base here today, a Defence spokesman said. No casualties were reported.

The incident occurred Tuesday morning when the Israeli-made pilotless aircraft took off from the Naval airport here for a routine sortie, the spokesman said. The crash occurred due to technical reasons, he said.

A remotely piloted aircraft 'Searcher' on a routine surveillance mission crashed north of the naval airfield INS Garuda after takeoff at 10.25 am," a Defence release said.

"However, there has been no casualty or damage to property. A Board of Inquiry as been constituted to investigate the cause of the accident," it said. The spokesman said the crash has not caused any damage to the runway. — PTI



Wed, 22 Nov, 2017

Russia confirms 'high' toxic particles near N-plant

Since October, spikes in radioactive particles have been detected across Europe — the source of which remained unclear. Now, Russia's meteorological service has confirmed 'extremely high' concentrations of the radioactive isotope ruthenium-106 in the country in late September.

The news appears to confirm European reports that the spikes across Europe came from a nuclear accident in Russia, but the country is yet to confirm this. The Rosgidromet service said: “Probes of radioactive aerosols from monitoring stations Argayash and Novogorny were found to contain radioisotope Ru-106 between September 25 and October 1.” The highest concentration was registered at the station in Argayash, a village in the Chelyabinsk region in the southern Urals, which had ‘extremely high pollution’ of Ru-106, exceeding natural background pollution by 986 times, the service said.

The isotope was then detected in Tatarstan and then in southern Russia, eventually reaching ‘all European countries starting in Italy and toward the north of Europe’ from September 29, Rosgidromet said. While the source of the pollution remains unclear, the Argayash station is about 18.6 miles (30 kilometres) from the Mayak nuclear facility, which in 1957 was the site of one of the worst nuclear disasters in history. Today Mayak is a reprocessing site for spent nuclear fuel.

The news follows a report published by France's Institute for Radioprotection and Nuclear Safety (IRSN) on November 9, saying that ruthenium-106 had been detected in France from September 27 to October 13. The report suggested that the source of the pollution was likely to be an accident somewhere between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains.



Wed, 22 Nov, 2017

India calls for stronger treaties to protect space assets

Foreign Secretary calls for international cooperation

Stressing international cooperation in space as in all domains of global commons, Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar on Tuesday called for strengthening global treaties to protect space-based assets and prevent militarisation of outer space.

“International cooperation is critical in the space domain as in other global commons. Our approach therefore goes beyond national considerations. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to state that international cooperation is today hard-wired into India’s space programme,” Dr. Jaishankar said addressing a conference on the space programme jointly organised by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Over 200 treaties

In line with this, Dr. Jaishankar said India had more than 200 international cooperation agreements with more than 40 countries and international organisations, and called the maiden moon mission, Chandrayaan-I, a “successful example of international cooperation with international payloads”.

“The South Asia satellite is a matter of particular pride as it literally raises the heights to which we had taken our ‘neighbourhood first’ policy,” the Foreign Secretary said.

In May, ISRO launched the communications satellite GSAT-9, also called SAARC satellite, meant to provide connectivity and disaster support to countries in South Asia.

The satellite cost around ₹235 crore and had a life span of 12 years.

Saying India is party to all the legally binding instruments on outer space, Dr. Jaishankar said, “India has also noted with concern the growing diverse threats in this frontier and is sensitive to these challenges.”

Draft space law gives private firms a grip on rocket, satellite making

Isro sees a sweet spot in a revival of space activities by private players globally

By Raghu Krishnan & T E Narasimhan

India has come out with a draft space activities Bill focused on allowing private players to build satellites, rockets and space vehicles for domestic and global needs.

So far, most space activities has been government driven — developing satellites and launching these on homegrown rockets to create capacity for the country's needs. The lack of a space law was being seen as a hindrance to exploit the country's potential as a hub for global space activities by private firms, say experts.

"The enabling law gives confidence to private companies to take risks and invest in space activities in India," says K R Sridhara Murthi, a space policy expert and a former managing director of Antrix Corp, the commercial arm of India's space agency.

The draft law is open for public comments for a month, following which it will go to Parliament for approval. India is a signatory of all space agreements, except one on moon, under the United Nations.

Another legal expert says the draft law does not have clarity on use of space objects, has clauses that give arbitrary power to the government to look into research activities and lacks clarity on a regulator for penal provisions. These could hurt business.

"The fact that India has drafted this law is welcome. However, some of the provisions in the draft Bill needs scrutiny, as these could scare away international investors," says Rishabh Sinha, a counsel at TRA, a law firm based in Delhi that advises technology firms. "Space requires high investments and long gestation for returns. Any serious investor will look twice before putting money in space tech, if these are not amended."

A law would help global space players to use India as a hub for commercial space activity, including making satellites and using Indian rockets to launch satellites. The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) is also looking at this to build a base for private players to exploit this opportunity and generate jobs in the country.

It has already begun transferring its technology for satellites and rockets to private players. A consortium led by Alpha Design has already built a navigation satellite for Isro, while it has floated a tender to outsource manufacturing of 35 satellites to private players. Isro is forming a consortium of players, including Larson and Toubro, Godrej and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, who can build its workhorse Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) by 2020.

Isro Chairman A S Kiran Kumar told *Business Standard* in an interview: "We are enabling industries working for Isro and new companies to not only provide solutions and systems to us, but also provide to global space systems. Now, there is an opportunity because some things can happen at a significantly lower cost in India compared with others. So, these companies can become a part of the global supply chain."

Isro sees a sweet spot in a revival of space activities by private players globally.

Over 6,200 small satellites (of less than 50 kg) are expected to be launched by 2026 — 70 per cent from commercial operators who are planning large constellations, according to Euroconsult, a global space researcher. The total market value of these small satellites could triple to \$30.1 billion in the next 10 years, up from \$8.9 billion over the previous decade, it said in a July 2017 report.

Isro eyes small rockets

The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) is working on a smaller rocket that could potentially be a designated vehicle to carry small and micro satellites and to cement the country as a global hub for small satellite launches.

"Globally, demand for small rockets are growing and we want to capture this market by offering cost-effective solutions," said K Sivan, director, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Isro. He said the development of the newer rocket would cost only one-tenth of PSLV but declined to specify. Sivan made these comments here on Tuesday on the sidelines of a Isro-Ficci conference.

Isro is betting on a smaller rocket as it sees a global shortage of small launchers and a growing demand for vehicles to take small satellites into space. Over

6,200 small satellites (of less than 50 kg) are expected to be launched by 2026, 70 per cent from commercial operators, according to global space researcher Euroconsult. The market value of these small satellites could triple to \$30.1 billion in 10 years, up from \$8.9 billion over the previous decade, it said in a July 2017 report.

So far, Isro has launched small and micro satellites on its workhorse Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), piggybacking on heavier earth observation satellites into space.

In February, PSLV launched 104 satellites in one mission, including 88 nano satellites of US satellite-maker Planet Labs, creating a world record for hurling the maximum satellites in one launch.

Isro had smaller rockets in its fleet — the SLV 3 and the

ASLV, with payloads of 44 kg and 150 kg, respectively — but it is not known if these launchers will be revived.

Over the last three decades, it has built PSLV to launch earth observation satellites of up to 1,200 kg and Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) to launch communication satellites into higher orbits.

Isro will allow private companies to make small rockets after one or two years.

Glavkosmos, which specialises in rocket and satellite solutions, has said it would be ready for global launch before the end of next year. "It will also find its way to India soon," said Vitaly Safonov, general director deputy, Glavkosmos.

TE NARASIMHAN

NASA successfully tests supersonic parachute

NASA has successfully tested a supersonic landing parachute that will be deployed in its Mars rover mission set for launch in 2020. The mission will rely on a special parachute to slow the spacecraft as it enters the Martian atmosphere at over 5.4 km/s. Preparations for this mission have provided, for the first time, dramatic video of the parachute opening at supersonic speed.

The Mars 2020 mission will seek signs of ancient Martian life by investigating evidence and caching samples of Martian rocks for potential return to Earth. "The imagery of our first parachute inflation is almost as breathtaking to behold as it is scientifically significant," said Ian Clark, the test's technical lead from Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.