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India Moves Ahead on Rafale Fighter Jet Deal

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New Delhi: The Indian Air Force (IAF) is moving forward with plans to acquire 114 Rafale multirole fighter jets from France to bolster its combat capabilities amid the ongoing retirement of older aircraft and delays in indigenous programs. The deal, centred on Dassault Aviation's Rafale jets, will also include domestic production components under the government's "Make in India" initiative.

Officials confirmed that the IAF will present its case for the program within the coming month to secure the Initial Acceptance of Necessity (AoN). Once approved by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, the formal

procurement process will begin. Defence authorities have the urgency of the acquisition, citing the need to maintain operational readiness and regional air superiority.

The drive to acquire additional Rafale jets is influenced by the phasing out of the MiG-21 fleet and delays in the delivery of the indigenous LCA Tejas Mk1A fighter, which has faced supply chain constraints for critical engines. Following the retirement of aging aircraft, the IAF's operational squadrons are projected to fall below optimal levels, underscoring the requirement for modern fighter jets.

The IAF is advocating for a government-to-government procurement deal with France to streamline the process, similar to the 2016 acquisition of 36 Rafale jets. These earlier aircraft were inducted into the Ambala and Hasimara air bases, which are equipped to support additional squadrons, making them central hubs for the expanded fleet.

In parallel, the Indian Navy has opted for the Rafale-M variant to replace its MiG-29K fighters on aircraft carriers INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya. That deal, finalised earlier this year and valued at over ₹63 billion, includes 22 single-seat and 4 twin-seat Rafale-M aircraft, with deliveries expected between 2028 and 2030. The acquisition decision followed a detailed assessment of operational requirements and aligned with long-term modernisation plans.

Defence officials note that the Rafale program is critical not only for expanding India's fighter fleet but also for maintaining technological advantages in the region. The jets are expected to enhance air combat readiness, support strategic deterrence, and strengthen India's defence industrial base through localised production.

With DAC approval, the Rafale acquisition will represent a key step in India's broader modernisation effort, ensuring that the IAF and Navy remain equipped to meet evolving security challenges while supporting domestic defence capabilities.