CABINET CLEARS PROPOSAL TO BUY MILITARY HELICOPTERS FROM BOEING

News /

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India will buy military helicopters from the US costing about $3 billion after the **cabinet** committee on security (CCS) **cleared** the plan on Tuesday.

The proposal to buy **Boeing** Co.-manufactured 22 Apache attack and 15 Chinook heavy-lift helicopters comes days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US.

The deal has been under negotiations for past couple of years, said a senior government official who asked not to be identified.

The Apache AH-64E will provide India with advanced attack and reconnaissance capabilities.

The Indian Air Force is the 14th nation to select the Apache.

The CH-47F Chinook helicopter will help in moving heavy payloads in extreme conditions, including in tough terrain such as the Himalayas.

India may buy more of these in the coming years.

"There will be provision for a follow-on order for 11 more Apache and seven Chinook helicopters in future. But a decision on this will also have to be taken by the CCS depending on the performance of the first consignment," the same government official quoted above said.

Boeing declined to comment on the matter though in the past it has said it was keen to see the order go through.

A defence analyst said the helicopter order with add-ons like the Hellfire missiles will give India an edge in any conflict.

"These weapon systems are force multipliers," said Rumel Dahiya, deputy director general with New Delhi-based think tank Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA). "When the two sides have the same weapons these are add on, which leads to victory."

To avoid delay in decision making when acquiring defence equipment, India has been closing deals under what is called the foreign military sales (FMS).

This means there are no tender issued but military sales are done directly between two governments after the armed forces have zeroed in on an equipment.

This deal too has been signed under the FMS.

India has been leaning on the US for several defence related equipment for the past couple of years, shifting away from the historically Russian dominated military.

American companies have, over the last decade, won defence contracts from India worth around $10 billion, including for aircraft such as P-8I maritime surveillance planes, C-130J Super Hercules and C-17 Globemaster-III in the transport category.

Dhaiya said while the deal will improve the atmospherics during Prime Minister's US visit starting Wednesday, it will also help in moving the conversation to other "important" subjects like the economy, innovation and green technology instead of being stuck on deals that have been in the making for a long time.

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