

'Draft note' on Sukhoi upgrade project all set to head for PM-led panel's nod

Plan To Make 84 Jets More Lethal To Cost ₹63K Cr

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New Delhi: India has now put finishing touches on the mega indigenous plan to make its existing Russian-origin Sukhoi-30MKI fighter jets much more lethal with advanced radars, avionics, longer-range weapons and multi-sensor fusion to ensure they are capable of air combat for another 30 years.

The defence ministry has more or less finalised the 'draft note' for the approval of the PM-led cabinet committee on security (CCS) for the upgrade of the first lot of 84 Sukhoi jets at an overall cost of around Rs 63,000 crore, which includes the design and development phase, sources told TOI.

The upgraded 'Super' Suk-



The Sukhoi upgrade is critical since IAF is currently grappling with just 30 fighter squadrons (16-18 jets in each) when its 'authorised' strength is 42 to deter both China and Pakistan

hois will be close to fifth-generation fighters in terms of capabilities except for stealth. "They will also have manned- unmanned teaming capability (to operate in concert with advanced autonomous drones using AI and data links) to boost mission effectiveness. IAF aims to fly these Sukhois till 2055," a source said.

The Sukhoi upgrade is critical since IAF is currently

grappling with just 30 fighter squadrons (16-18 jets in each) when its "authorised" strength is 42 to deter both China and Pakistan.

All the 84 twin-engine Sukhois will be upgraded by Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) in around 15 years. After the CCS sanction, it will take seven years for development work and flight-testing, which will then be followed by the progressive upgrade and induc-

tion of jets in batches.

IAF currently has 259 Sukhois, the bulk of them licensed produced by HAL for over \$12 billion from Russia, which constitute the backbone of its combat fleet. Another 12 new Sukhois along with associated equipment are now being ordered for around Rs 11,500 crore to replace the ones that crashed over the years.

"In another 15 years, India will have its own 5th-Gen fighter AMCA (advanced medium combat aircraft) with futuristic technologies. Those technologies would be incorporated in the next tranche of Sukhois to be upgraded after the first 84 jets," another source said.

The present upgrade project will include equipping Sukhois with indigenous 'Vikramaksha' advanced electronically scanned array (AESA) radars, which will increase the detection range by "1.5 to 1.7 times" over existing Russian radars.

This, in turn, will allow Sukhois with longer-range weapons like Astra-3 air-to-air missiles, with a beyond visual range of 350-km. While IAF is currently inducting Astra-1 missiles (100-km), DRDO is developing Astra-2 (160-km) and Astra-3 (with solid fuel ducted ramjet propulsion) variants.

"Apart from the fly-by-wire system, all other electronics in the upgraded Sukhois will be indigenous. This will include all three mission computers with better algorithms. Overall, of the 51 systems to be upgraded, 30 are by HAL, 13 by DRDO and eight by the private sector," the source said.

At present, 40 Sukhoi fighters have also been modified to carry the air-to-ground precision-strike BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles. The BrahMos range has already been extended from 290 to 450-km, and will go up further with a 800-km variant, as reported by TOI earlier.

Airbus shortlists 8 sites for H125 helicopter final assembly line in India

MARIGNANE (France), July 21 (PTI)

EUROPEAN major Airbus has shortlisted eight sites in India for setting up its final assembly line for H125 helicopters and the ground-breaking ceremony for the facility is expected later this year.

The facility, which will be the fourth Final Assembly Line (FAL) for the single engine H125, will initially produce up to 10 helicopters annually and the capacity will be ramped up depending on the market demand, Airbus officials said.

"India is the market of the future for helicopters... At present, the market is extremely embryonic, it is very small compared to what the potential could be," Olivier Michalon, Executive Vice President Global Business of Airbus Helicopters, said.

The ground breaking ceremony for the FAL is expected in October or November this year and the facility will be operational in 2026 and the delivery is anticipated to start towards the end of 2026.

"We have identified eight sites which we are currently assessing. We are still in the final assessment stage. We will announce it shortly."

"We want to be attractive and in an ecosystem that is best suited for industrial activities, logistics, employees and of course, regulations," Michalon said at a briefing at Marignane earlier this week.

Marignane is the headquarters of Airbus Helicopters. For Airbus, H125 is the most-sold helicopter in India as well as the South Asia region.

Airbus has projected the demand for H125 helicopters in India and neighbouring countries at 500 over the next 20 years.



"We are targeting 10 helicopters per year and as the demand picks up we can ramp up," Head of Airbus Helicopters in India and South

Asia Sunny Guglani said at the briefing.

Michalon stressed that 10 might not sound like a lot and it could be 20, 30, or 50 in some years, depending on the

market demand. "We manufacture, sell and support helicopters. Also, we manufacture, sell and support solutions. This is what we can provide. Make In India

solutions," he said. Highlighting the success story of its narrow-body A320 aircraft, Michalon said, "H125 is our A320", H125 can carry up to six people.

Airbus is also setting up the FAL for the C295 aircraft in Vadodra, Gujarat.

There are around 350 civil and parapublic helicopters in India and South Asia (India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives). Out of them, less than 250 helicopters are in service in India, as per Airbus.

In India, there are about 100 Airbus helicopters, with the majority of them being H125 and 130s. There are more than 7,200 H125 helicopters flying around the world.

"The FAL in India will not only make us competitive in terms of lead time, delivery time, it will also help us address the growth of the Indian market and possibly

the demand from neighbouring nations.

"This is an important, strategic decision and it will have an impact on our global footprint," Michalon said.

A basic model of a H125 helicopter could cost around 3.2 million euros, according to a company official.

In India, helicopters are used for tourism, pilgrimage, medical services as well as by the energy sector and private entities.

Once set up in India, the FAL for H125 helicopters will undertake the integration of the major component assemblies, avionics and mission systems, installation of electrical harnesses, hydraulic circuits, flight controls, dynamic components, fuel system and the engine.

Besides, the FAL will do testing, qualification, and delivery of the H125 to customers in India and the region.

Elderly population in India expected to double by 2050: UNFPA India chief

■ By Uzmi Athar

NEW DELHI, July 21 (PTI)

INDIA'S elderly population is expected to double by 2050, UNFPA India chief Andrea Wojnar said, stressing that more investment in healthcare, housing and pensions is needed, especially for older women who are "more likely to live alone and face poverty".

In an interview with PTI given days after the World Population Day on July 11, Resident Representative for UNFPA India, Wojnar, outlined key population trends that India is prioritising to accelerate sustainable development.

These trends include the youthful population, ageing population, urbanisation, migration, and climate resilience, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities for the nation.

She said as the number of individuals, aged 60 and above, is projected to double to 346 million by 2050, there is a pressing need for increased investment in healthcare, housing and pension schemes.

"...Especially for older women who are more likely to live alone and face poverty," she said.

India boasts a substantial youthful population, with 252 million people aged between 10 and 19 years, the UNFPA India head said.

She highlighted that investing in health, education, job

training, and job creation, alongside promoting gender equality, can unlock the potential of this demographic, driving the nation toward sustainable progress.

"With India projected to be 50 per cent urban by 2050, building smart cities, strong infrastructure, and affordable housing is crucial to manage slum growth, air pollution, and



environmental issues," Wojnar said.

"Urban plans should also consider women's needs for safety and security, and access to health care and education and jobs to promote gender equality and improve overall quality of life," she said.

She also noted that managing internal and external migration requires meticulous planning, skills development, and economic opportunity distribution.

“Approx 1 lakh Agniveers enrolled in Army, 70,000 already posted in units”: AG Lt Gen CB Ponappa

NEW DELHI, July 21 (ANI)

INDIAN Army's Adjutant General Lt Gen C B Ponnappa on Sunday said that one lakh Agniveers have been enrolled in the force till now and around 70,000 of them have been posted to the units.

General Ponappa also mentioned that in the year 2024-25, around 50,000 vacancies have been released and the recruitment process is ongoing. “Since June 2022, the scheme was launched and then we had the first batch that was recruited and enrolled, in December 2022-January 2023. Approximately, 1 lakh Agniveers have been enrolled in the Army. This also includes around 200 women, approximately 70,000 have already been dispatched to the units

and are performing extremely well in the battalions. This includes around 100 women police also,” he said.

Around 50,000 vacancies have been released, in this year 2024-25. The recruitment process is ongoing. They are undertaking all the actions-operational and other professional duties just like any other sepoy or sepoy recruits on the ground. They are completely integrated and assimilated into the units. They wear the same uniform and perform the same duty,” General Channira Bansi Ponnappa added. Earlier, in a significant move aimed at empowering Ex-Agniveers, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and Border Security Force (BSF) announced special recruitment benefits for them.

CISF Director General, Neena Singh stated that the CISF has made all arrangements to recruit Ex-Agniveers.

“CISF has made all arrangements to recruit Ex-Agniveers. Ten percent of constable posts have been reserved for them and they will also be given relaxation in the Physical Efficiency Test,” CISF Director General, Neena Singh said. “There is also relaxation in age, there is a five-year relaxation in age for the first batch and three years of age relaxation afterward. Recruitment of Ex-Agniveers will benefit CISF as it will get the capable, dedicated and disciplined workforce, which will further enhance the efficiency of its operations, while Ex-Agniveers will also get an opportunity to serve in CISF,” Neena Singh said.

Pakistan faces severe energy crisis

ISLAMABAD, July 21 (ANI)

PAKISTAN is struggling with a severe energy crisis as energy demand continues to rise while the supply of conventional energy sources remains insufficient, and as the gap between energy supply and demand widens, the nation faces surging power costs and increased reliance on imports, according to Geo News. Notably, in October 2023, Pakistan had an energy deficit of 6,000 megawatts, incurring an import bill of USD 7 billion. According to the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's (Neptra) 2022 annual report, Pakistan's installed generation capacity adds up to 43,775 MW, of which merely 7% comes from renewable energy sources, according to Geo News. Addressing this crisis demands strategic investments in renewable energy infrastructure and comprehensive policy reforms to secure a sustainable energy supply for the country's future.

The roots of Pakistan's energy crisis date back to the 1970s when the country avoided a major energy crisis by launching the Mangla and Tarbela dams. These projects were initiated during a brief period of robust hydro-driven energy generation, which met the nation's demands at the time.

China, Philippines reach deal in effort to stop clashes at fiercely disputed shoal

MANILA, July 21 (AP)

CHINA and the Philippines reached a deal they hope will end confrontations at the most fiercely disputed shoal in the South China Sea, two Philippine officials said on Sunday. The Philippines occupies Second Thomas Shoal but China also claims it, and increasingly hostile clashes at sea have sparked fears of larger conflicts that could involve the United States.

The crucial deal was reached on Sunday, after a series of



meetings between Philippine and Chinese diplomats in Manila and exchanges of diplomatic notes that aimed to establish a mutually acceptable arrangement at the shoal without conceding either side's territorial claims. The Philippine officials, who have knowledge of the negotiations, confirmed the deal to The

Associated Press on condition of anonymity ahead of a public announcement.

China has disputes with several governments over land and sea borders, many of them in the South China Sea, and the rare deal with the Philippines could spark hope that similar arrangements could be forged by Beijing with other rival countries to avoid clashes while thorny territorial issues remain unresolved. It remains to be seen, however, if the deal could be implemented successfully and how long it will last.

Joe Biden quits US Presidential race

Offers his “full support and endorsement” to V-P Kamala Harris as the nominee for Democrats

■ By Lalit K Jha

WASHINGTON, July 21 (PTI)

EMBATTLED US President Joe Biden on Sunday announced that he will end his candidacy for re-election in 2024, saying “it is in the best interest of my party and the country”. Biden offered his “full support and endorsement” to Kamala Harris as the nominee for Democrats.

Biden’s decision follows weeks of intense pressure from fellow Democrats after his disastrous presidential debate performance against his Republican rival and for-



mer US President Donald Trump last month.

The 81-year-old President’s decision comes four months before Americans go to the polls on November 5.

In a letter posted to his social media account, Biden, currently isolating at his home in Delaware because of COVID, said it had been the greatest honour of his life to serve as President.

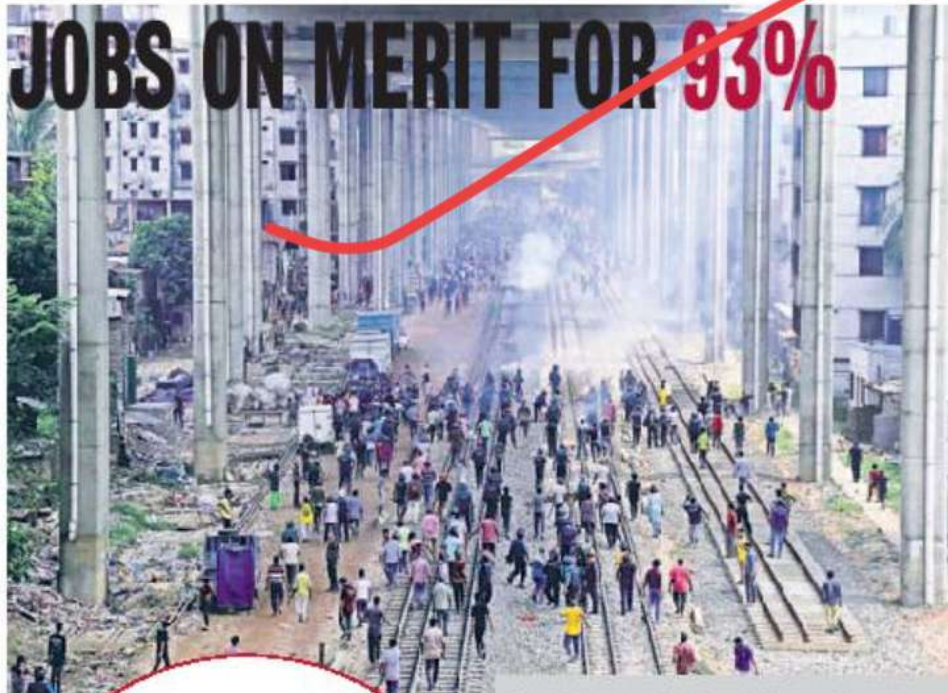
“And while it has been my intention to seek reelection, I believe it is in the best interest of my party and the country for me to stand down and to focus solely on fulfilling the duties as President for the remainder of my term”.

Biden said in his statement he would address the nation on the matter next week.

President Biden thanked his Vice President Kamala Harris, saying she was an “extraordinary partner”. “It has been the greatest honour of my life to serve as your President,” he wrote.

BANGLADESH SC REDUCES Veterans' job quota to 5%,

JOBS ON MERIT FOR 95%



Earlier, 30%
of Government
jobs were reserved
for relatives of
veterans who fought
in Bangladesh's war
of independence
in 1971

Students clash with police during a protest over the quota system in public service in Dhaka. (AP/PTI)

DHAKA, July 21 (AP)

BANGLADESH'S top court on Sunday scaled back a controversial quota system for Government job applicants, in a partial victory for student protesters after days of nationwide unrest and deadly clashes between police and demonstrators that have killed scores of people.

Students, frustrated by shortages of good jobs, have been demanding an end to a quota that reserved 30% of Government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. The

Government previously halted it in 2018 following mass student protests, but in June, Bangladesh's High Court reinstated the quotas and set off a new round of protests.

Ruling on an appeal, the Supreme Court ordered that the veterans' quota be cut to
(Contd on page 5)

'Shoot-on-sight' imposed in Desh

DHAKA, July 21 (IANS)

THE Bangladesh Government has imposed a curfew and a shoot-on-sight order after students-led anti-quota protests claimed 133 lives. The Bangladeshi Supreme Court
(Contd on page 5)

7th Budget: Striking a balance key challenge for Sitharaman

To-Do & Wishlist: Social Sector Needs, Allies' Demands, I-T Relief

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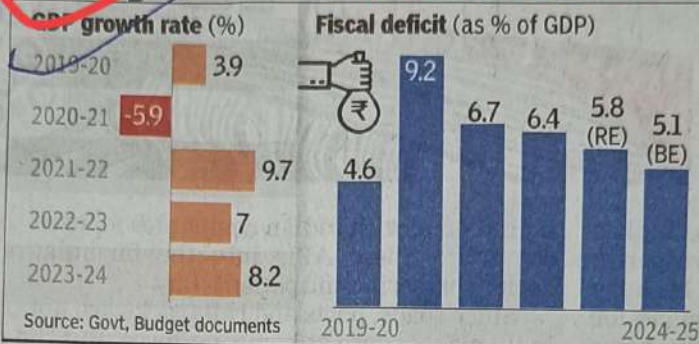
New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's seventh Budget will do a tight rope walk as she looks to strike a balance between the need to spend more on social sector



schemes amid calls from allies for additional assistance to states, while seeking to address demands for a reduction in personal income tax and yet ensuring that she sticks to the fiscal glide path.

Much of the discussion has focused on RBI's higher dividend of over Rs 2 lakh crore coming to govt's aid, but the additional money has already been used for the solar rooftop scheme. Sitharaman will need more funds to roll out PM Narendra Modi's other pre-poll announcement of a new housing subsidy scheme for the poor, while honouring poll promises such as increasing the cover-

Looking to Maintain Fiscal Glide Path



age of Aayushman Bharat to include seniors. There are already demands to enhance the insurance cover to Rs 10 lakh, which requires a political call given that there are complaints of hospitals coming up just to cater to this segment of population.

Her Budget arithmetic will be based on revenue, tax revenue and capital receipts (disinvestment) collections being higher than what she had budgeted for in the interim Budget, which was bereft of any announcements.

Since then the political si-

tuation has changed with BJP now dependent on allies to run govt at the Centre although it still has 240 MPs in the Lok Sabha. But the noise of lack of jobs, persistent weakness in private investment, income disparity and regional imbalance has grown, generating expectations of issues being addressed in the Budget with youth, women and farmers being major thrust areas.

For a govt that has so far stayed away from freebies or revdis, checking leakages from schemes has been a key priority -- be it tax breaks or be-

nefits under schemes. While that will remain leitmotif, Sitharaman may be constricted to lower the fiscal deficit significantly below the budgeted 5.1% of GDP due to higher expenditure requirements, especially as she presents the first Budget of Modi 3.0, laying out the road map for the period up to 2030, with 2047 being the ultimate target.

There have been demands for employment-linked incentives from some industry groups, but the focus of govt is on production linked sops, where incremental output and investments in creating capacity, which in turn generates employment, has remained the focus. Sitharaman is expected to once again count on the private sector to create jobs through higher investment in creating and adding to capacity.

Overall growth and the sentiment on India has been positive but the focus may be on addressing the requirements of sectors that need hand holding.