

Make in India: India, Russia to jointly build 200 military choppers

By PTI | 19 Jul, 2015, 03.01PM IST

MOSCOW: In a move aimed at boosting India's defence sector, 200 helicopters will be manufactured in the country with Russian collaboration as part of intensification and diversification of their strategic ties. The agreement, reached recently, is one of the several new defence projects on which the two countries are working on, including under the ambit of 'Make in India' programme, Indian Ambassador to Russia P S Raghavan told PTI here. He underlined that the decades-old defence cooperation with Russia remains vibrant despite India purchasing military equipment from other countries, like the recent decision to buy 36 Rafale fighter aircraft from France.

"This (India-Russia ties) is a huge, broad based relationship, getting broader every day," he said. "Recently, we have agreed to joint manufacture of helicopters in India... Joint manufacture of 200 helicopters in India is big bang. If two countries decide to manufacture 200 helicopters in India with transfer of technology, and licence production, this is big bang," he said.

He said this could possibly be the first defence project under 'Make in India' initiative. Raghavan was responding when asked to comment on the perception that the defence relations between India and Russia are getting diluted as New Delhi has been looking at other countries for military purchases.

Maintaining that India-Russia defence ties remain vibrant, he said, "people notice few things we do which are non-Russian... There are newer and newer products and newer and newer projects which don't get noticed and attention gets diverted to few things that we do outside Russia."

He said a number of projects are under active discussions and "sooner or later, they will come out in the open." He, however, refused to give details about these, saying there can be no disclosure till the decisions are firmed up. While dismissing the perception that the vibrancy of India-Russia ties in defence sector are getting eroded, the Ambassador said, "some impressions get formed on the basis of inaccurate or incomplete information."

Acknowledging that India is diversifying its defence purchases "as many countries do" to take advantage of opportunities, he said, "But our armed forces are 60-70 per cent dependent on Russian supplies. That is a reality that cannot change overnight."

Quoting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Raghavan said Russia continues to remain India's primary defence supplier. "In fact, he (PM) has said that Russia has been and will remain primary defence supplier (of India)," he added. He referred to the project to develop Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) jointly by India and Russia and said it is witnessing progress.

"Preliminary design phase is over... For final design, we need to know, how soon we can induct it, how soon we need to induct it.... We are talking about early induction. That is the current talk going on," Raghavan said. When asked how early the induction can take place, he said, "I cannot say that. It will depend on technical specifications and induction time." About newer projects which are coming up, he said the two countries are talking about Russian submarines and frigates being built.

He said efforts are underway to encourage Russian OEMs (Original equipment manufactures) to set up their units in Indian through joint ventures which could cater to repair and maintenance of military hardware like Mi helicopter and Sukhoi fighters.

He said the 'Make in India' initiative has evoked great interest in Russia.

"It has been of great interest to us also to involve Russia, particularly in defence field, repair, maintenance, overhaul of the Russian defence platform, eventually getting to manufacturing of some of the critical components in defence as well as civilian side," he said. The Ambassador said the present phase of Indo-Russian relations can be said to have started in the year 2000 when President Vladimir Putin came to India and the two signed Strategic Partnership. "Since then, the relationship has moved very fast, both intensified and diversified," he added.