

India and Israel to strengthen defence relations

26 Dec 2009 8ak: India and Israel have decided to reinforce their ongoing defence cooperation in areas ranging from military trade and counter-terrorism to intelligence-sharing and joint R&D projects. An announcement to this effect came after a joint working group meeting on defence, co-chaired by the director-general (DG) of Israeli defence ministry Brigadier-General (ret'd) Pinchas Buchris and defence secretary Pradeep Kumar in Delhi earlier this week.

The visit of Israeli defence ministry's DG is one among the many, which have taken place between senior officials of both the nations. Earlier this month, Israel's Chief of Staff Lt Gen Gabi Ashkenazi visited India to review and strengthen military ties with the Asian nation. This was the first official visit ever by the Chief of Israel's defence forces to India. Lt Gen Ashkenazi had met top officials in the defence ministry, including the army chief General Deepak Kapoor to discuss strategic relations between the two nations and review the security situation in the region amongst other things. General Kapoor had also visited Israel on a four-day trip in November, on the invitation of Lt Gen Ashkenazi.

India has bought military hardware and software from Israel worth about \$8 billion since the 1999 Kargil conflict with Pakistan and thus overtaken Russia as our key weapons supplier. India has purchased a wide variety of Israeli arms that includes Barak missiles, assault rifles, night fighting devices, hi-tech electronic systems etc. The IAF received the first of three AWACS radar system mounted atop the Russian manufactured IL-76 aircraft, from in May this year after an 18 month delay. The US\$ 1.1 Billion deal was signed in 2004.

India has also signed a US\$ 1.1 billion deal for buying the state- manufactured state-of-the-art Barak 8 missile system. India is also co-developing a new version of Barak8 missile system in a deal worth US\$330 million signed in 2007 after intense negotiations.

In 2004, India ordered three Phalcon Airborne Early Warning and Control Systems from Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), fitted on Russian-built Ilyushin II-76 aircraft. The first of the AWACS were inducted in the Indian Air Force in May this year. Israel has also sold IAI Malat-built Searcher MkII and IAI Heron unmanned aerial vehicles to the Indian Air Force. The IAI recently upgraded 32 Mi-24 helicopters for the Indian Army.

In 2008, Rafael won the Indian order for low-level quick reaction missile system (LLQRM), which was competing with the mobile SPYDER (Surface-to-air Python andDerby) short-range air defence system.