

India set to seal \$500mn deal with Israel to buy 4,500 Spike missiles

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NEWDELHI: India is on the verge of finalising a \$500 million deal with Israel for the government-to-government purchase of around 4,500 Spike anti-tank guided missiles for the army ahead of Israel defence secretary Udi Adam's visit to New Delhi for the annual joint working group discussion on bilateral defence cooperation.

South Block officials and Israeli diplomats confirmed to Hindustan Times that both sides were awaiting the final seal of approval from the Modi government for the deal, which was initially conceptualised as one with a significant "Make in India" component. That component has now been reduced on grounds of commercial consideration. Major General (Retd) Udi Adams arrives in India on July 2 and leaves a day later after holding meetings with his counterpart Sanjay Mitra; he is also expected to pay a courtesy call to defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

The army's effort to purchase Spike missiles, which have a range from 800 metres to eight km, has seen several twists and turns.

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Israel

Israeli defence contractor Rafael won the contract to sell more than 8000 Spike ATGMs to India in a deal which included manufacture of 3000 of the missile systems in India through the "Make in India" route. This contract was cancelled in November last year amid furore from the

Israeli side. The procurement was changed to the government-to-government route after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited India this January. The contract has now been revised to direct purchase of 4500 weapon systems with a small quantity being manufactured in Hyderabad.

While Israeli diplomats insist that the agenda for Adam's trip is global defence and security related issues, India will also discuss the possible purchase of two more PHALCON-AWACS for the air force from Israel. This state-of-the-art radar with deep penetration capability is mounted on the Russian IL-76 platform and is expected to cost around \$1 billion. India already has three of these advance warning and early detection planes which can look deep into enemy territory. The other military hardware deal on the agenda would be manufacture of TAVOR-21 assault rifles for the Indian security forces under the "Make in India route".

Apart from reviewing the progress of ongoing bilateral defence deals, Adams and Mitra are expected to exchange views on the evolving situation in West Asia and Iran and the security environment in Asia and the Indo-Pacific.