

‘Rafale charges do not match facts’

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NEW DELHI: The Indian Air Force mounted a strong defence of the controversial ₹59,000-crore deal Rafale deal, with a top officer on Thursday saying that the overall cost of the 36 fighters was 40% less than what was on offer in 2008.

“The price we have realised in 2016 is substantially lower than the price that was ever on offer (in 2008),” IAF’s deputy chief Air Marshal R Nambiar said on the sidelines of a seminar.

While the Opposition, led by the Congress, has alleged that India paid ₹351 crore more for each jet than other Rafale customers under the deal, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has asserted that the basic aircraft price is cheaper under the NDA than it was under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

Responding to a question on allegations that India had paid a higher price, Nambiar said people were misinformed and were not aware of the facts.

“All these allegations are baseless and do not hold water,” he said.

He added that hard-nosed bargaining with France had resulted in a better price, with the IAF

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R NAMBIAR,
IAF deputy chief Air Marshal

leading the price negotiation talks.

Last month, finance minister Arun Jaitley had told news agency ANI that the NDA government negotiated hard to keep the price of Rafale jets down by at least 20% per aircraft in its 2016 deal, as compared to the UPA deal of 2007. The NDA has said that it cannot disclose the exact price on two counts: a confidentiality agreement with France, and the strategic reason of not showing its hand to India’s enemies. The opposition has claimed the confidentiality agreement doesn’t apply to this deal.

India and France signed the deal for two Rafale squadrons in September 2016 as an emergency purchase to arrest the worrying slide in the IAF’s capabilities.

All 36 fighter planes will arrive by September 2022.