

# Govt may clear purchase of two more AWACS for around \$800m

**New Delhi:** India is finally back on track to acquire two more airborne warning and control systems (AWACS), which are potent force-multipliers as “eyes in the sky”, for around \$800 million in a tripartite venture with Israel and Russia after price wrangling kept the acquisition derailed for several years.

Defence ministry sources on Monday said a fresh procurement case for the two AWACS, with Israeli Phalcon early-warning radar systems mounted on Russian Ilyushin-76 heavy-lift aircraft, is now with the cabinet committee on security for the final nod.

This project has been hanging fire since the first three such Phalcon AWACS were inducted by the IAF in 2009-2011 under a \$1.1 billion deal inked by India, Israel and Russia in 2004.



A Tejas fighter being refuelled mid-air in a trial on Monday. This is a key requirement in obtaining the final operational clearance for the light combat aircraft, which has missed several deadlines already

“The finance ministry had earlier objected to the sharp price hike being demanded by Russia. But a good deal has been achieved now,” said a source.

AWACS or AEW&C (airborne early-warning and control) aircraft are considered critical in modern warfare because they can detect and track incoming fighters, cruise mis-

siles and drones much before ground-based radars, direct friendly fighters during air combat with enemy jets, and keep tabs on enemy troop build-ups and warships.

China has close to 30 such airborne surveillance platforms, developing its own Kong Jing-2000 “Mainring”, KJ-200 “Moth” and KJ-500 aircraft. Pakistan, in turn, has eight Chinese Karakoram Eagle ZDK-03 AWACS and Swedish Saab-2000 AEW&C, and is on course to get more from China.

But the IAF is making do only with three Phalcon AWACS, with a 400-km range and 360-degree coverage, as of now. The force also now has two “Netra” AEW&C aircraft, under which indigenous 240-degree coverage radars with a 250-km range have been fitted on three smaller Brazilian Embraer-145 jets, in a Rs 2,425 crore project approved in October 2004.