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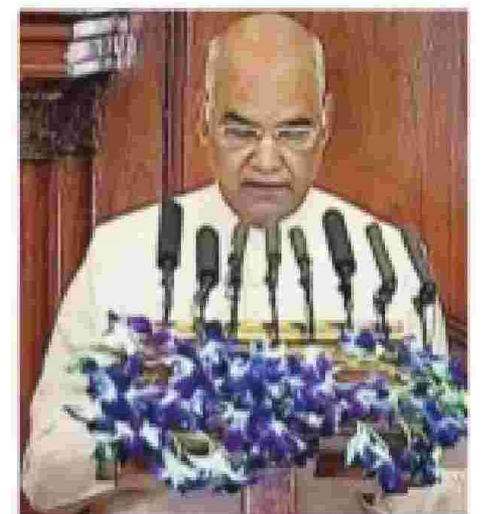Width: 46.31 cms; Height: 49.85 cms; a3; ID: 5.2019-02-01.7

Rafale jets to soon join IAF: President

Cong: Prez address a summary of lame excuses for non-performance

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 31 JANUARY

The Indian Air Force is preparing to welcome the new generation ultra-modern Rafale fighter aircraft in its fleet to strengthen its strike capabilities, President Ram Nath Kovind on Thursday said. The government has been facing attack from the opposition over the multi-crore aircraft deal. Addressing the joint sitting of Parliament at the start of the Budget Session, he said neglecting the country's defence needs, even for a moment, will prove detrimental to the present and future of the country.

He said the new agreements relating to the defence sector signed last year, the purchase of new defence equipment and indigenous production under the 'Make in India' initiative have all helped in boosting the morale of defence forces and in increasing the country's military self-reliance.

"After a gap of many decades, the Indian Air Force is preparing to welcome, in the coming months, its new generation ultra-modern fighter aircraft Rafale and strengthen its strike capability," he said.

The Congress and other Opposition parties have been attacking the government over the Rafale deal, alleging corruption and accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of favouritism. The President also referred to the 2016 'surgical strikes' carried out on terror launch pads across the border and said, "Through the surgical strike on cross border terror posts, India has shown its new policy and strategy."

Noting that India has been a staunch supporter of friendly ties with all countries, the President said there is need to constantly strengthen the country's capabilities to tackle any challenges. The Congress described the President's address as "a summary of lame excuses for non performance".