

‘Sitharaman’s trip a cover-up’

Deal with Reliance was ‘compensation’ for Dassault, says Congress leader

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Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday termed Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman’s four-day visit to France as a “cover-up” exercise to put pressure on Dassault Aviation over the latest revelation on the Rafale fighter deal. “Why has suddenly the Defence Minister rushed to France? What is the emergency?” he asked.

In a subsequent tweet, Mr. Gandhi said, “The #GreatRafaleCoverUp has begun. To try and show the deal is legit, Raksha Mantri will need to generate minutes of imaginary meetings held between the French & our MOD [Minister of Defence] & both sides will need to agree on a common story to be spun to the media. RM left for France last night.”



More ammunition: Rahul Gandhi addressing the media on the Rafale deal in New Delhi on Thursday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Addressing a press conference in the national capital, Mr. Gandhi said, though officially Dassault would be going to say what the government of India wanted it to, there is “enough material for the truth to come out.”

He quoted from a report

of the French publication *Mediapart* that cited an internal document of Dassault Aviation to claim that French aviation giant was ‘forced’ to sign a joint venture agreement with Anil Ambani’s Reliance Defence as a trade-off to bag the contract for 36 Ra-

fale jets. “According to an internal document from Dassault obtained by Mediapart, the alliance between the French company and Anil Ambani’s Reliance Group was a ‘compensation’ for the purchase of Rafales,” Mr. Gandhi said.

“(Dassault Aviation’s Chief Operating Officer) Segalen told representatives: ‘It was imperative and obligatory for Dassault Aviation to accept this compensation to obtain the Rafale India export contract’.... Compensation for what? What has Mr. Anil Ambani done? What is he being compensated for – that is the question,” The Congress chief said.

“Dassault is sitting on a huge contract... Dassault is going to say what the Indian Government wants it to say,” Mr. Gandhi said.