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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

India Will Order Up to 345 Warplanes

By Derek Andersen

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Indian Defense Minister A.K. Antony announced on Thursday that his country would make hefty purchases of military aviation produced jointly with Russia.

India will buy 45 multipurpose transport planes and 250 to 300 fighter planes, Antony said at a news conference in New Delhi after the 10th meeting of the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation, Interfax reported.

"The next decade of military-technical cooperation between Russia and India is tied to these two joint projects," Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov said at the same news conference.

The fifth-generation fighter planes will be produced by Russia's Sukhoi and the India's National Aerospace Laboratories, it was announced. A Russian-drafted contract has already been submitted for India's approval.

"It is too early to talk about the price of the deals," said Konstantin Makiyenko, deputy director of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, because the contracts

would only be signed during President Dmitry Medvedev's planned visit to India in December.

Makiyenko suggested maximum prices of $100 million for the fighter planes and $50 million for the transport planes, which could bring the value of the deal up to $32.25 billion. Economic conditions at the time of contract signing will have an impact on the price, he said.

Design of the aircraft will cost $300 million, and the first planes should be ready by 2015, Interfax reported.

The long-range supersonic planes will use stealth technology and have the most modern communications and defense capabilities. They will use optical, infrared, laser and radar information gathering devices.

According to Makiyenko, Sukhoi is likely to do the heavy construction work on the planes, with India providing instrumentation, software and other detailing. India also may supply the engines, produced in conjunction with a third country, Makiyenko said.

In Cyprus, Russian Technologies chief Sergei Chemezov told reporters Thursday that Russia expects to sign a contract for the delivery of Su-30 fighters to India as well.

Chemezov did not provide specific information, but a source said before that announcement that a contract for 42 Su-30MKI planes was being prepared, Interfax reported. India already has a contract for the delivery of 140 of those planes, worth more than $3 billion.

Russia and India signed an agreement on military cooperation through 2020 at last year's meeting of the same intergovernmental commission. About 200 projects are included in that agreement.

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