

# Air Force places order with BEL for Akash missile

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**BANGALORE:** In a boost to the country's missile development effort, the Indian Air Force has finally placed an order with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for two squadrons of medium range, surface-to-air missile Akash.

The Rs. 1,200-crore order comes 14 months after field trials at Pokhran in Rajasthan.

Earlier, the IAF had reservations about placing the order as the missile, in its

present version, does not meet a few of its operating requirements. The IAF wanted a smaller, lighter missile that had a longer range and was more manoeuvrable. The missile also does not have a seeker. However, batch-by-batch improvements in Akash are expected.

## Of the Patriot class

Developed by Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Akash is part of India's Integrated Guided Missile Development

• Akash system comes with radars, mobile launchers and control centres

• It will counter attacks from unmanned combat aerial vehicles, aircraft and missiles

Programme and comes with radars, mobile launchers, control centres, battlefield management software and other support systems. It will be utilised by the IAF against attacks from unmanned combat aerial vehicles, aircraft and missiles.

In the same class as the U.S. Patriot, Israel's Barak and the U.K.'s SAM, the 5.78-metre long, 700-kg Akash can destroy targets as far away as 25 km and has a supersonic speed of 600 metres a second. BEL has tied up with Larsen & Toubro, Tata Power,

Walchand Industries and ECIL. It is contracted to deliver the two squadrons in 36 months. DRDL, besides transferring technology in the form of documents for production of Akash, will oversee the weapon system integration and provide support throughout the 20-year lifecycle of the missile.

Project Director R.R. Panayam told *The Hindu* that it was "for the first time that the country's armed forces had placed an order for such a sophisticated, indigenously

developed weapon system." The IAF could expect a consistent and reliable missile system, and it was expected to place more such orders.

The Army could also look to acquire Akash, but with modifications.

Calling the order an indication of the technical capabilities of indigenous defence laboratories, Prahlada, Chief Controller of the Defence Research and Development Organisation, said the missile had an 85 per cent kill prob-

ability

Akash, which can destroy multiple targets, can be fired from both trucks and tracked vehicles.

It is expected to cost the exchequer less than similar missiles, whose cost is in the range of Rs. 5-6 crore each.

The Akash missile system, according to a statement made by Defence Minister A.K. Antony in the Rajya Sabha, cost the exchequer Rs. 16.86 crore for its development, the highest for any of India's missile systems.