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# 114 Rafale Jets — India's Largest Ever Defence Deal Gets DAC Approval

16 February 2026

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# 114 Rafale Jets — India's Largest Ever Defence Deal Gets DAC Approval

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## WHY IN NEWS

The **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)**, chaired by Defence Minister **Rajnath Singh**, approved the procurement of **114 Rafale fighter jets** from France at a cost of **Rs 3.25 lakh crore (~USD 40 billion)** — the largest single defence procurement deal in India's history, involving both direct delivery jets and a significant Make in India manufacturing component.

## THE DEAL — KEY PARAMETERS

Parameter	Detail
Aircraft	Rafale (multi-role 4.5-generation fighter)
Quantity	114 jets
Value	Rs 3.25 lakh crore (~USD 40 billion)
Fly-away (direct delivery)	18 jets
Made in India	96 jets (HAL–Dassault Aviation partnership)
Procurement route	Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with France
Approving body	Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Rajnath Singh

## INDIA'S TOTAL RAFALE FLEET — AFTER THIS DEAL

Batch	Service	Quantity	Status
2016 deal	Indian Air Force	36	Inducted (2020–21)
Rafale-Marine (Navy)	Indian Navy (INS Vikrant)	26	Approved
This deal (Feb 2026)	Indian Air Force	114	DAC approved
<b>Total</b>		<b>176</b>	

## WHY INDIA NEEDS MORE FIGHTER JETS

India's Air Force has a sanctioned strength of **42 squadrons** — the minimum considered necessary for a two-front war scenario (China + Pakistan simultaneously). As of early 2026, the IAF operates approximately **31 squadrons**, below the critical minimum:

**Ageing fleet:** MiG-21 phaseout (originally 1970s Soviet aircraft, upgraded multiple times) is accelerating the squadron deficit. The last MiG-21 squadrons were being retired by 2025–26.

**Limited induction:** Light Combat Aircraft (LCA Tejas) Mk1A production has been slow; the Mk2 and AMCA (Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft) remain in development.

**China factor:** The PLA Air Force has inducted J-20 stealth fighters, H-6K strategic bombers, and advanced air defence systems (HQ-9) in Tibet — increasing pressure on IAF's northern front.

## ABOUT THE RAFALE

The **Dassault Rafale** is a French twin-engine, canard delta wing, multi-role combat aircraft manufactured by **Dassault Aviation**. Classified as a **4.5-generation fighter** (near-peer to F-35), it features:

**SPECTRA** electronic warfare suite (active jamming, missile warning, decoy ejection)

**RBE2-AA** Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar

**METEOR** beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (Ramjet-powered, 100+ km range — among the best in class)

**SCALP/Storm Shadow** air-to-ground cruise missile (300+ km range)

**HAMMER** precision-guided munition

Combat radius: ~1,800 km; Max speed: Mach 1.8

**India-Specific Enhancements (India Specific Enhancements — ISE):** The IAF's Rafales carry 13 India-specific modifications including:

Cold start capability (for high-altitude Himalayan bases)

Israeli helmet-mounted display sight

Enhanced radar altimeter for mountain flying

Towed Decoy System (DRDO-developed)

## MAKE IN INDIA — HAL PARTNERSHIP

The **96 Make in India jets** will be manufactured by **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)** in partnership with Dassault Aviation. This is the most ambitious foreign OEM transfer-of-technology (ToT) agreement India has pursued:

**Technology transfer:** Dassault commits to transferring manufacturing, maintenance, and overhaul technology

**HAL facility:** Likely Nasik (Aircraft Division) and Bengaluru (for AESA radar components and avionics)

**Offset requirements:** Under the **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020**, offset obligations for deals above Rs 2,000 crore require investment back into India’s defence or aerospace sector (minimum 30%)

**DRDO integration:** Some weapons and sensors (ASTRA Mk2, DRDO-developed decoys) will be integrated into India-built variants

## PROCUREMENT ROUTE — IGA VS OPEN TENDER

The **Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)** route was chosen — the same route used for the 2016 deal:

Route	Process	Used when
Open global tender	International competitive bidding	For standardised equipment
IGA (Government-to-Government)	Direct government deal	Strategic partnerships, unique capability
Single vendor	Direct procurement from one vendor	Emergency/critical needs

**Why IGA:** The Rafale is not available through open-market competitive bidding for India’s specific combination of IGA pricing, ToT, and strategic partnership terms. The France–India **Special Global Strategic Partnership** provides a framework for IGA defence procurements.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

*Rafale (manufacturer Dassault Aviation, France), DAC (composition: Defence Minister chairs; includes Service Chiefs, Defence Secretary, R&D head), IGA route, METEOR missile, IAF squadron strength (42 sanctioned), HAL (Nasik Aircraft Division), Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, India-France Special Global Strategic Partnership. **Mains GS-3:** Defence indigenisation vs. strategic imports; Make in India in defence; India-France bilateral relations and defence cooperation; IAF modernisation challenge.*

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### RAFALE 114 JETS DEAL:

Value: **Rs 3.25 lakh crore (~USD 40 billion)** — India's largest ever defence deal

Composition: 18 fly-away + 96 Made in India (HAL–Dassault)

Route: **IGA (Inter-Governmental Agreement)** with France

DAC chaired by: **Rajnath Singh** (Defence Minister)

Total Rafale fleet post-deal: **176 jets** (36 IAF + 26 Navy + 114 new)

### IAF STRENGTH:

Sanctioned strength: **42 squadrons**

Current: ~31 squadrons

Deficit: ~11 squadrons (being addressed by Rafale, Tejas Mk1A, eventual AMCA)

### RAFALE — TECHNICAL:

Generation: **4.5-generation multi-role fighter**

Manufacturer: **Dassault Aviation**, France

Radar: **RBE2-AA** (AESA)

EW Suite: **SPECTRA**

Key missile: **METEOR** (BVR, ramjet, 100+ km range)

Air-to-ground: **SCALP/Storm Shadow** (300+ km cruise missile)

Max speed: **Mach 1.8**

### INDIA-FRANCE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP:

Established: **1998** (Strategic Partnership)

Upgraded: **Special Global Strategic Partnership** (2023)

Defence cooperation: Rafale jets (2016 deal + 2026 deal), Scorpene submarines (Mazagon Dock), Safran engines (HAL), DRDO cooperation

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

2016 Rafale deal: 36 jets, Rs 59,000 crore, fly-away only; first inducted 2020 at **Ambala Air Base**

MiG-21 retirement: India's last MiG-21 squadron being retired ~2025–26; aircraft originally inducted 1963

LCA Tejas Mk1A: 83 aircraft ordered from HAL; delivery behind schedule

AMCA (Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft): 5th-generation indigenous; under development by ADA (Aeronautical Development Agency); expected entry ~2035

HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited): Founded 1940; HQ Bengaluru; India's largest defence PSU

Sources: Drishti IAS, AffairsCloud

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