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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Tunguska Deal – Can India Reduce Defence Dependence on Russia?



29 March 2026

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Tunguska Deal — Can India Reduce Defence Dependence on Russia?

 The Indian Express

29 March 2026

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INTERVIEW ANGLE



"India signed a Rs 445 crore Tunguska deal with Russia despite Western sanctions. How does India balance its defence partnerships with strategic autonomy?"

WHY IN NEWS

On March 27, 2026, the Ministry of Defence signed two contracts totalling **Rs 858 crore** at Kartavya Bhawan-2, New Delhi. The first contract, worth **Rs 445 crore**, is with JSC Rosoboronexport (Russia) for the procurement of Tunguska Air Defence Missile Systems for the Indian Army. The second contract, worth **Rs 413 crore**, is with Boeing India Defense Private Limited for depot-level inspection of the Navy's P-8I maritime patrol aircraft.

The Tunguska System — What India Is Buying

The Tunguska, designated **2K22** (NATO reporting name: SA-19 Grison), is a tracked, self-propelled Short-Range Air Defence (SHORAD) system that integrates both guns and missiles on a single platform.

Technical Specifications

FEATURE	DETAIL
Full designation	2S6M Tunguska-M1
Type	Self-propelled gun-missile SHORAD system
Guns	Two 30mm twin-barrel autocannons (rate of fire: 5,000 rounds/min combined)
Missiles	Eight 9M311 surface-to-air missiles
Missile range	Up to 10 km
Gun range	4 km (anti-aircraft), 2 km (ground targets)
Radar	Target acquisition radar + tracking radar (can engage targets simultaneously)
Mobility	Tracked chassis — operates with armoured formations
Target types	Low-flying aircraft, UAVs, drones, helicopters, cruise missiles

The Tunguska fills a critical gap in India’s layered air defence architecture. While the **S-400 Triumf** handles long-range threats (400 km) and the **Akash** medium-range threats (25-30 km), the Tunguska provides close-in protection for mechanised columns and forward areas against **drones, cruise missiles, and low-flying aircraft** — threats that have become dominant in modern warfare, as demonstrated in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the West Asia theatre.

The CAATSA Shadow

Every defence deal with Russia carries the risk of US sanctions under the **Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**, enacted in 2017. CAATSA Section 231 mandates sanctions on any entity that engages in a “significant transaction” with Russia’s defence sector, including Rosoboronexport.

CAATSA and India — The Track Record

DEAL	VALUE	CAATSA STATUS
S-400 Triumf (5 units)	~\$5.43 billion	Waiver granted by US (2018-19); delivery ongoing
AK-203 assault rifles (Amethi JV)	~\$500 million	No sanctions imposed; Indo-Russian JV structure
Tunguska (March 2026)	Rs 445 crore (~\$52 million)	Risk assessment pending
Su-57 stealth fighter (proposed)	Estimated \$5-8 billion	US signals possible sanctions (February 2026)

The relatively small value of the Tunguska deal (~\$52 million) makes it unlikely to trigger CAATSA sanctions – the US has historically focused on “significant transactions” in the multi-billion-dollar range. However, cumulative Russian procurement signals matter for the broader India-US defence relationship.

India-Russia Defence Trade – A Declining but Durable Relationship

Russia was once India’s dominant defence supplier, accounting for over **70% of arms imports**. That share has declined sharply, but Russia remains a significant partner.

Share of Russia in India’s Arms Imports (SIPRI Data)

PERIOD	RUSSIA’S SHARE
2009-2013	76%
2014-2018	58%
2019-2023	36%
Trend	Consistent decline of ~15-20 percentage points per 5-year block

Why the Decline?

Several structural factors are driving diversification away from Russia:

- 1 Western sanctions on Russia** (post-2014 Crimea, intensified post-2022 Ukraine) – payment processing difficulties, spare parts delays, component shortages
- 2 India’s Make in India push** – domestic procurement share now mandated at 75% of the modernisation budget (**Rs 1,11,544 crore** earmarked for domestic sources)
- 3 Quality and delivery concerns** – INS Vikramaditya refit overruns, delayed Su-30MKI spare parts, and submarine project slippages have eroded confidence
- 4 US and Israel emerging as alternatives** – P-8I Poseidon, C-17 Globemaster, MH-60R Seahawk, Israeli SPICE bombs, and Heron drones

The P-8I Contract – Buy Indian Success Story?

The second contract signed on March 27 – **Rs 413 crore** with Boeing India Defense for depot-level inspection of P-8I aircraft – tells a parallel story. India operates **12 P-8I Poseidon** maritime patrol aircraft, arguably the most capable anti-submarine warfare platform in the Indian Ocean Region.

The fact that Boeing India Defense (not Boeing US) is executing the maintenance contract reflects progress in defence offset obligations and the Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) ecosystem being built in India.

Make in India — How Far Has Indigenisation Come?

INDICATOR	DATA
Defence production (FY 2024-25)	~Rs 1.51 lakh crore (all-time high, 18% growth YoY)
Domestic procurement allocation	75% of modernisation budget
Positive Indigenisation Lists (PILs)	5,500+ items listed; 3,000+ indigenised
iDEX startups contracted	430 contracts signed (as of February 2025)
iDEX budget (2025-26)	Rs 449.62 crore (includes ADITI sub-scheme)
Defence exports (FY 2024-25)	~Rs 21,083 crore
Defence FDI (automatic route)	Up to 74% (100% via government route)

India has made genuine progress on indigenisation. The **Tejas LCA Mark 1A** is in production, the **INS Vikrant** (India's first indigenous aircraft carrier) is operational, and the **DRDO Akash-NG** missile is nearing deployment. However, critical dependencies remain — India still imports **jet engines, submarine propulsion systems, and advanced radar components**.

Both Sides — Is Buying from Russia Still Justified?

The Case for Continued Russian Procurement

- **Legacy platforms need Russian spares** — India operates over 250 Su-30MKIs, 800+ T-72/T-90 tanks, and Kilo-class submarines, all requiring Russian maintenance
- **Russia offers favourable terms** — government-to-government pricing, technology transfer, and no end-user monitoring conditions
- **Strategic autonomy** — Diversifying away from Russia entirely would make India dependent on the US, which imposes restrictive conditions (ITAR regulations, end-use monitoring, Congressional notifications)

The Case for Accelerating Diversification

- **Sanctions risk is real** — CAATSA could be applied more aggressively under future US administrations
- **Russian supply chains are disrupted** — Post-Ukraine sanctions have degraded Russia's ability to source components (many Russian weapons use Western microchips)
- **India's own capability is growing** — The Rs 1.51 lakh crore defence production figure shows that Indian DPSUs and private sector can increasingly substitute imports
- **Geopolitical signalling** — Every Russian deal complicates India's relationship with the US, EU, Japan, and Australia — all of whom are critical for technology transfer and investment

Way Forward

- ❶ **Accelerate SHORAD indigenisation** — The DRDO's **Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QRSAM)** and **MRSAM** should be fast-tracked to reduce dependence on Russian SHORAD systems. The private sector (BEL, L&T, Bharat Forge) should be incentivised to build indigenous gun-missile integrated platforms.
- ❷ **Counter-drone priority** — Modern air defence is increasingly about defeating swarms of cheap drones, not just aircraft. India should invest in directed-energy weapons, electronic warfare counter-drone systems, and AI-enabled swarm defence — areas where iDEX startups can contribute.
- ❸ **Diversify import sources** — For systems that cannot be indigenised immediately, India should pursue acquisitions from France (Rafale family), Israel (Iron Dome derivatives), and South Korea (K9 Vajra precedent) rather than defaulting to Russia.
- ❹ **Manage CAATSA diplomatically** — India should negotiate a formal CAATSA waiver framework with the US that provides predictability. The current case-by-case waiver approach creates uncertainty for long-term procurement planning.
- ❺ **Set a 2035 target** — India should aim to reduce Russian arms import dependency to below **15%** by 2035, with indigenous production covering at least 70% of all defence procurement.

UPSC RELEVANCE

CAATSA (2017, Section 231), Tunguska system, S-400, P-8I Poseidon, iDEX, QRSAM, SIPRI.

MAINS GS-2:

India-Russia defence relations, impact of Western sanctions on India's strategic autonomy, India-US defence partnership.

MAINS GS-3:

Defence indigenisation, Make in India in defence, DPSUs, Positive Indigenisation Lists, defence exports.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

TUNGUSKA DEAL (MARCH 27, 2026):

Value: Rs 445 crore (~\$52 million)

Seller: JSC Rosoboronexport, Russia

System: 2S6M Tunguska-M1 (SHORAD gun-missile)

Missile range: Up to 10 km

Gun: Two 30mm twin-barrel autocannons

Purpose: Close-in air defence for Army against drones, cruise missiles, low-flying aircraft

P-8I CONTRACT (SAME DAY):

Value: Rs 413 crore

Contractor: Boeing India Defense Pvt Ltd

Purpose: Depot-level inspection of Navy P-8I aircraft

India operates: 12 P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft

CAATSA:

Full form: Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act

Enacted: 2017 (US Congress)

Section 231: Sanctions for significant transactions with Russian defence sector

India's S-400 deal: Waiver granted; no sanctions imposed

INDIA-RUSSIA DEFENCE TRADE DECLINE:

Russia's share in India's arms imports: 76% (2009-13) to 36% (2019-23)

Key Russian platforms in India: Su-30MKI (250+), T-90 tanks, S-400, INS Vikramaditya, Kilo-class submarines

MAKE IN INDIA DEFENCE:

Defence production FY 2024-25: ~Rs 1.51 lakh crore (all-time high)

Domestic procurement: 75% of modernisation budget

PILs: 5,500+ items listed; 3,000+ indigenised

iDEX contracts: 430 signed

Defence exports FY 2024-25: ~Rs 21,083 crore

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

India's defence budget 2026-27: Rs 6.81 lakh crore (~1.8% of GDP)

SIPRI: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

India is world's largest arms importer (SIPRI 2019-23)

INS Vikrant: India's first indigenous aircraft carrier (commissioned August 2022)

Tejas LCA: India's indigenous light combat aircraft; Mark 1A in production

Sources: [PIB](#), [Business Today](#), [Indian Defence News](#), [SIPRI](#)


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