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# India Issues Letter of Request for 114 Rafale Jets — Largest Defence Deal in History

4 June 2026

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CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# India Issues Letter of Request for 114 Rafale Jets — Largest Defence Deal in History

4 June 2026 · 4 min read · ·

Source: [ujjyari.com](http://ujjyari.com) — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

## WHY IN NEWS

India's Ministry of Defence formally issued a **Letter of Request (LoR)** to France on June 1, 2026 for the procurement of **114 Rafale Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft** manufactured by Dassault Aviation — in what would be the largest defence procurement deal in Indian history, estimated at approximately **₹3.25 lakh crore (~\$39 billion)**. Of the 114 aircraft, **94 will be manufactured in India** through a Dassault–Indian partner joint venture, marking the first time Rafale jets will be produced outside France. The remaining 20 will be delivered in fly-away condition directly from France.

## WHAT IS A LETTER OF REQUEST (LOR)?

A Letter of Request is the **first formal step** in India's defence procurement process under the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP). It is sent by India's Ministry of Defence to a foreign government, formally requesting a Government-to-Government (G2G) offer for a specified military platform. The recipient government (France, in this case) responds with a Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LoA) — typically within 2–3 months — containing pricing, delivery timelines, technology transfer terms, and logistics. An LoR does not constitute a signed contract; it initiates the formal negotiation phase.

## BACKGROUND: INDIA'S FIGHTER SQUADRON CRISIS

YEAR	IAF AUTHORISED SQUADRONS	IAF OPERATIONAL SQUADRONS
2000	42	38
2010	42	34
2020	42	30
2026	42	~29

The Indian Air Force is mandated to maintain **42 fighter squadrons** for a two-front war scenario. As of 2026, it operates only approximately **29 squadrons** — a critical gap of 13. The existing MiG-21 fleet is being phased out; the Tejas Mk-1A production is delayed; and the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) is still years away from production. This “fighter gap” has been flagged by multiple parliamentary committees and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) as a national security **vulnerability**.

India already operates **36 Rafale jets** (in two squadrons — 17 Squadron ‘Golden Arrows’ at Ambala and 101 Squadron ‘Falcons’ at Hashimara) procured under a 2016 Government-to-Government deal with France for ₹59,000 crore.

## KEY FEATURES OF THE 114 RAFALE DEAL

FEATURE	DETAIL
Total jets	114
India-manufactured	94 (Dassault + Indian partner JV)
Fly-away	20 (directly from France)
Estimated cost	~₹3.25 lakh crore
Significance	First Rafale production outside France
Technology transfer	Yes — including weapon integration rights
Indigenous weapons to be integrated	Astra BVR missile, BrahMos-NG
LoR sent	June 1, 2026
Expected LoA (France response)	~2–3 months

## WHY 94 JETS TO BE MADE IN INDIA?

The 94 India-manufactured aircraft are the centrepiece of the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** dimension of this deal. Dassault Aviation will establish a **joint venture with an Indian partner** (expected to be one of HAL, Adani Defence, or TATA Advanced Systems) to produce the airframes, avionics, and systems in India. This creates:

- **Aerospace manufacturing ecosystem** — supply chains, precision manufacturing, composites
- **MRO (Maintenance, Repair, Overhaul) capability** — reducing dependency on French technicians

- **Technology absorption** — Indian engineers gain know-how applicable to future domestic platforms like AMCA
- **Jobs and industrial output** — expected to create ~10,000+ direct jobs

## UPSC RELEVANCE

### Prelims

- **LoR sent:** June 1, 2026
- **Total aircraft:** 114 (94 India-made + 20 fly-away)
- **Deal value:** ~₹3.25 lakh crore
- **Manufacturer:** Dassault Aviation, France
- **Existing IAF Rafales:** 36 (procured 2016 deal, inducted from 2020)
- **IAF authorised strength:** 42 squadrons; actual: ~29 squadrons
- **First time Rafale manufactured outside France**

### Mains Angles

- ① **GS3 — Defence Indigenisation:** How does the 114-Rafale deal advance Make in India in defence while bridging the immediate fighter gap? What are the risks of over-dependence on a single foreign platform?
- ② **GS2 — India-France Relations:** The Rafale deal as a strategic anchor in India's relationship with France; implications for India's Quad and Indo-Pacific posture.
- ③ **GS3 — DAP and Procurement Reform:** Evaluate India's defence acquisition process — is G2G procurement the right model for complex fighter contracts?

## INDIA'S FIGHTER FLEET — EXISTING PLATFORMS

AIRCRAFT	ROLE	STATUS
Su-30MKI	Air superiority	~240 operational; backbone of IAF
Rafale	Multi-role	36 operational (2 squadrons)
Tejas Mk-1	Light combat	~40 operational; Mk-1A delayed
MiG-29	Air defence	~60; ageing fleet
Mirage 2000	Multi-role	~50; upgrade ongoing
MiG-21 Bison	Interceptor	Being phased out (last flights 2025)
Jaguar	Strike	~100; deep strike role

## FACTS CORNER

FACT	DETAIL
LoR date	June 1, 2026
Total aircraft	114 Rafale MRFA
India-manufactured	94
Fly-away	20
Estimated deal value	~₹3.25 lakh crore (~\$39 billion)
First Rafale manufactured outside France	Yes
IAF authorised squadrons	42
IAF current squadrons	~29
Existing IAF Rafales	36 (17 Sqn, Ambala + 101 Sqn, Hashimara)
Technology transfer includes	Astra BVR + BrahMos-NG integration
Manufacturer	Dassault Aviation, France

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Source: India Issues Letter of Request for 114 Rafale Jets — Largest Defence Deal in History — Ujyari.com |  
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