

No pressure on India to buy F-16 fighters from U.S.: envoy

'America is very proud of the expanding defence ties between the countries'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
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The United States is not going to put pressure on India to buy F-16 fighter jets or any other defence system, a senior U.S. diplomat has said.

United States Consul General in Mumbai Edgard Kagan said India has purchased more than \$15 billion worth of American defence materials and the U.S. is very proud of the expanding defence ties between the two countries.

Asked if there is a threat of the U.S. imposing trade sanctions on India after its multi-billion deal with Russia for the S-400 air-defence system, he did not give a direct answer. "The idea that the U.S. is going to pressure India to buy the F-16 or any other system is not true. We believe that American mili-

tary systems bring tremendous capability to India or any other country which buys them. But we recognise that India makes its decisions on its own grounds," he told PTI in an interview.

Mr. Kagan said it is important to recognise that decisions have consequences and India is very well aware where the U.S. stands on a variety of issues. There are also matters that both countries can work closely to resolve, he said.

India recently concluded a \$5 billion deal to buy the S-400 air defence missile system from Russia, which could attract U.S. sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act instituted by the U.S. Congress on arms purchases from Moscow.

American lawmakers, ho-

wever, have allowed the possibility of a presidential waiver.

Mr. Kagan said, "The fact is India has purchased over \$15 billion worth of American defence materials and there hasn't been any hint of a scandal. There hasn't been one suggestion of any impropriety and that's very significant. The American defence procurement are transparent... All details are published on the U.S. site."

This gives certainty to the people buying American products, the U.S. Consul General said. "When you compare the track record of the C-17 purchases for instance, or C-130 purchases, which were all done on budget, on time, and in a very transparent way without a single hint of impropriety with many other defence

procurement, the difference is quite striking." The C-17 and the C-130 are U.S.-made cargo aircraft.

Asked about the Indian government directing social media platforms to take concrete steps to check spread of rumours and messages inciting unrest, cyber crimes, and other activities that could jeopardise national security, he said putting restrictions is no solution.

"I would be very concerned trying to restrict speech either on social media or anywhere else. The challenge is only to make sure that you understand the consequences of their actions. The solution to me can't be to control social media because inevitably the speech that we don't like also means trying to prevent the speech that brings change," he said.