

LOCKHEED, TATA TO MAKE WINGS FOR F-16 JETS

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LOCKHEED Martin will build wings for its F-16 combat plane in India with its local partner, Tata Advanced Systems an executive at the US company said on Tuesday.

Lockheed is bidding for a contract — estimated at more than \$15 billion — to supply the Indian Air Force with 114 combat planes, which must be all manufactured locally under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship Make in India programme.

However, Vivek Lall, vice president of strategy and business development at Lockheed, said the proposed production of the F-16 wings would not be contingent upon the company winning the order for the planes. "Producing F-16 wings will strengthen Lockheed Martin's strategic partnership with Tata and support Make in India," the company said in a statement.

Modi has been pushing for local manufacturing that will provide jobs and also end the military's dependence on imports. Lockheed's announcement



F-16 FIGHTER JETS

■ The F-16 Block 70 features advanced avionics, a proven Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar, a modernised cockpit, advanced weapons, conformal fuel tanks, an automatic ground collision avoidance system, an advanced engine and an industry-leading extended structural service life of

12,000 hours.

■ So far, 4,604 F-16s have been procured by 28 customers around the world.

■ Approximately 3,000 operational F-16s are flying today with 25 leading air forces, including the US Air Force.

came just days ahead of top-level talks between the US and India aimed at expanding defence ties. US secretary of state Mike Pompeo and defence secretary Jim Mattis will meet with For-

eign minister Sushma Swaraj and Defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Boeing has pitched its F/A-18 Super Hornet for the Indian contract as well as Sweden's Saab with its

Gripen fighter. France's Dassault Systemes SE's Rafale, the Eurofighter Typhoon and Russian aircraft are also in the fray.

Lall said Lockheed had offered to make India its sole F-16 production facility that would supply the military but also other countries. "If India buys the F-16 then it becomes the centre of man-

ufacturing for the global market," he said. Lall said the company planned to begin production of the F-16 wings in Hyderabad from 2020.

He said these were being produced at a facility in Israel and would not impact any jobs in the US. The Israeli centre will continue to be involved in other production, he said. "All F-16 wings globally are to be built in the Hyderabad facility," he said.

—Reuters