

Lockheed Martin eyeing India as global export hub for F-16s

NAYANIMA BASU

New Delhi, March 11

US-based Lockheed Martin Corp is looking to make India one of its global export hubs for the F-16 fighter jets apart from manufacturing these aircrafts under the 'Make in India' programme.

"Lockheed Martin has a long-term plan for India. Besides, manufacturing the F-16s here, it also intends to eventually export these in the long run to some of its traditional buyers. However, talks are still at a very nascent stage," a top official told *BusinessLine*.

At present talks are on between India and the US government to expedite this plan under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS), the official said.

Talks are expected to gain momentum during the visit



Marillyn Hewson

of US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter next month. However, the final deal will get sealed during the visit of Marillyn Hewson, President and CEO, Lockheed Martin, who is expected to travel to India later this year.

Hewson had first made the proposal to manufacture the F-16s here to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to the US in September last.

There is also a possibility that the deal might get sealed

under the India-US Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) that is aimed at integrating the defence industries of both the countries. In fact, this issue was extensively discussed during both the DTTI joint working group meetings on jet engine technology and aircraft carrier, held in US last year.

Lockheed Martin is also scouting for a domestic partner in order to co-produce the F-16 jets. According to the official, some of the frontrunners are Tata Advanced Systems Ltd and Mahindra Defence Systems.

The Maryland-based firm plans to sell the latest version of F-16 to India, which will be "far more advanced" compared to what is being sold to neighbouring Pakistan, according to sources.