

IAF to buy one more Lockheed Martin C 130J Super Hercules



New Delhi. The Indian Air Force (IAF) will buy one more Lockheed Martin C 130J Super Hercules aircraft to make up for the loss of one aircraft in an accident on March 28.

Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha told *India Strategic* in an interview that the induction of C 130J and Boeing C 17 Globemaster III had "brought about a paradigm shift in our airlift capabilities." IAF had acquired six C 130Js, and over three and half years of operations so far, the aircraft have played a highly significant role in disaster relief, setting global standards. Acknowledging this, the Air Chief said that six more C 130Js were to arrive by 2016 and would be deployed in eastern India.

As for the lost aircraft, which crashed during a tactical exercise near the Indian capital, he said that a replacement aircraft was being ordered to maintain the required strength.

the Air Chief also observed: "While the Boeing C 17 Globemaster III had "enhanced out strategic footprint," the C 130J "has emerged as a significant enabler for Special Operations, besides being extensively deployed for varied tasks."

"We expect to induct more of these platforms as we gain more experience in their utilisation and expand upon their roles," he said without defining numbers and timelines. IAF does indeed require more combat and transport aircraft, but how many it orders and when would depend upon the availability of funds, and as the Chief said, also on ToT and Offsets conditions.

As for the C 17s, Boeing has already delivered six aircraft and the remaining four of the ten ordered so far are due to be delivered within the next four months by end-2014. The six C 130J already ordered are scheduled to be delivered by 2016.

IAF had projected a requirement of a second lot of eight C 17s followed by a third lot of six more aircraft. A final decision is pending. A window to order a few more of C 17s is there but the may be lost if India does not exercise it soon as the factory would be closing in the near future. Boeing though has said that it has made long-term arrangements for spares and service support to the C 17 fleets around the world.

Notably, the C 130J is designed on a platform made half a century ago, and it has earned the reputation for being sturdy and one of the safest aircraft in the world. A few years ago, Lockheed Martin had mooted a proposal to shift its manufacturing plant to India if the IAF and civil authorities would commit purchase of a minimum of 40 aircraft, saying it could be deployed economically in India's tough north-eastern and mountainous region on short, unpaved airfields by airlines.

This writer has flown a few times in the C 130 Hercules and C 130J Super Hercules aircraft of the Saudi, US and UAE air forces, including for doing TV documentaries. The flights and landings were always smooth, even on small island airfields. The aircraft is also used in VIP configuration in some countries.

Powered by four Rolls-Royce AE 2100D3 turboprop engines, the C 130J can be used as a midair refueller, gunship, medical support aircraft, and of course for tactical operations to drop and pick up troops or special forces from a smoky battle zone. The aircraft can land on unpaved strips the size of a football field.

More than 300 C 130Js have been supplied so far to some 17 countries.