

# ARMY INDUCTS RUSSIAN MANPADS

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The Army which has long been looking for new man portable air defence systems (MANPADS), has inducted a small number of Igla-S systems recently procured from Russia under emergency procurement, according to defence sources. However, a much larger contract for Igla-S systems under the very short-range air-defence system (VSHORAD) deal is still pending and is under review by the Defence Ministry.

“The contract was signed in December 2020 and the equipment was delivered by December 2021. This includes 24 launchers, 216 missiles and testing equipment,” one of the sources said.

The procurement was done through the Vice-Chief’s emergency financial powers given to the Services for the first time after the Balakot air strike in February 2019 and further extended after the stand-off with China in eastern Ladakh in May 2020. Under this, the Services can procure weapons systems up to Rs. 300 crore on an urgent basis without any further clearances.

Against the backdrop of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine and the Western sanctions, India and Russia are working out modalities to utilise the rupee-rouble route in a large way for trade and payments. The Ministry is also assessing the impact it would have on the timely execution of deals as well as steady supplies of spares and support.

## Last defence

The Request for Proposal for VSHORAD was issued in October 2010 for over 5,000 missiles, 258 single launchers and 258 multi-launchers. Five contenders responded and eventually three made it to the trials — MBDA of France, Rosoboronexport of Russia and SAAB of Sweden. All three companies were declared technically compliant in 2017 and Igla-S was declared the lowest bidder in November 2018.

While the benchmark price arrived at by the Army was just over \$2 billion, Rosoboronexport’s bid was much lower at around \$1.47 bn, SAAB at about \$2.6 bn, and MBDA at about \$3.68 bn. This led to much deliberation within the Ministry as the Russian bid was much lower than the benchmark price. The deal also saw several allegations of deviations in procedures with some of the vendors sending protest letters.

As per requirements, the VSHORAD should have a maximum range of 6 km, altitude of 3 km along with all-weather capability and will replace the existing Igla in service which is in urgent need of replacement. VSHORADS are the soldier’s last line of defence against enemy combat aircraft and helicopters in the multilayered air defence network.

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