

INDIA URGENTLY SEEKS RUSSIAN MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEM AFTER CHINA CLASH

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India defense minister Rajnath Singh plans to seek the advanced delivery of the Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile defense system -- currently due in Dec 2021 — and the purchase of Russian-made jet fighters Su-30Mki and MiG-29

India is pushing Russia to speed up the delivery of a missile defense system and fighter jets as ties with China deteriorate following the worst military clash between the Asian nations in four decades.

The request comes as China and India's foreign ministers are due to meet Tuesday in their first face-to-face interaction since a fight along their disputed Himalayan border killed 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese troops. India and China agreed to deescalate the situation along their undemarcated boundary, Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said at a regular news briefing Tuesday in Beijing.

Last week's clashes — along with revelations that China held 10 Indian soldiers in military custody for days afterward before releasing them — came amid rising nationalism stoked by both governments as they jostle for regional influence. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is keen for an early resolution of the border dispute as he risks a drop in popularity if the army suffers more losses.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will host the virtual trilateral meeting with China's Wang Yi and India's Subrahmanyam Jaishankar after Moscow emerged as a key player in thawing relations between the two neighbors.

Yet another meeting between Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and his Russian counterpart in Moscow could prove just as important for India as it looks to increase its defense capabilities. They are expected to discuss the India-China border tensions and New Delhi's desire to ensure an unimpeded and early supply of military spares from Russia, long one of the country's top defense suppliers.

Singh plans to seek the advanced delivery of the Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile defense system -- currently due in December 2021 -- and the purchase of Russian-made jet fighters Su-30Mki and MiG-29, people familiar with the details said. India and Russia signed the S-400 deal worth than \$5 billion in 2018.

The missile system will provide heft to the country's otherwise antiquated air defenses, while the additional fighters will boost the capability of the Indian Air Force. It needs 10 more squadrons of fighters to supplement the 32 currently in operation, said the people, who asked not to be named citing rules on speaking to the media. A squadron has between 16 and 18 warplanes.

The US has cautioned India against buying the S-400 system, saying the purchase would have a serious impact on Washington-New Delhi defense ties. Defense Ministry spokesman A Bharat Bhushan Babu declined to comment before the meetings in Moscow had taken place.

The Victory Day parade in Moscow on Wednesday will see both Indian and Chinese troops marching.

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