



LOCKHEED SIKORSKY SKYTRUCK PASSENGER PLANE TARGETS INDIA'S START-UP AIRLINES

News / Manufacturer



Sikorsky Aircraft, a unit of Lockheed Martin, is in talks with start-up airlines in India to sell its small, twin-turboprop M28 planes as the prime minister Narendra Modi seeks to boost air travel in remote parts of the country with subsidies.

The company, better known for its helicopters, has offered to build the passenger planes in India if it gets enough scale, said Sikorsky's regional executive for India and South Asia AJS Walia. The PZL M28 Skytruck is currently built in Poland and is in commercial operations only in Guam.

"We are looking at India to be our introduction to the commercial market," Mr Walia said in the southern Indian city of Bengaluru. "We are talking to customers – and these customers, if I put all together – it's a substantial number of aircraft requirement," he said, declining to elaborate.

Sikorsky is pitching the 19-seat aircraft for short-haul routes amid attempts by the Indian government to encourage airlines to link towns lacking infrastructure, and in some cases even proper runways.

As an incentive, Mr Modi has pledged to absorb part of the losses incurred from plying unserved, unprofitable routes. Mr Walia said the M28 may fit in the plan as it can handle grassy and unpaved surfaces with short take-off and landing.

Only about 75 out of India's 450 airports or airstrips have regular commercial operations. The government has already got bids from airlines to connect 55 airports under Mr Modi's programme, said the civil aviation minister Ashok Gajapathi Raju.

If India can open 50 unserved or underserved airports within the next two to three years and retain the current world-beating pace of passenger growth, the nation will become the world's third-largest aviation market after the United States and China by 2022, Mr Raju said.

Mr Modi is also trying to lure the world's biggest manufacturers to make their products in India to help create jobs in the us\$2.1 trillion economy. Sikorsky's parent, the world's biggest defence contractor, has offered to make its F-16 fighter jets in India if it wins an order, while Boeing has said it is looking to sell locally made F/A-18 planes.

Sikorsky has made a presentation to the the Indian government, showing its willingness to produce the aircraft in India if it gets enough scale, Mr Walia said.

"What we conveyed was that numbers will dictate 'Make in India,'" Walia said. "It has to be commercially, economically viable for us to start the production in India," he said, declining to say how big an order it needs.

Separately, Lockheed is being awarded a \$541 million modification to a previously awarded US defence contract for submarine-launched Trident II missiles and deployed support, the Pentagon said in a statement on Tuesday.

15 FEBRUARY 2017

SOURCE: THE NATIONAL

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