

Rafale Deal : Loot of the Exchequer

The Rafale deal once again exposed the corruption at high places and the loot of public exchequer by the Indian big bourgeoisie. Not only that, it revealed the dependence of Indian military on few imperialist countries for its needs right from the rifles to war planes.

In 2007 the Indian Air Force claimed that it has to raise 42 squadrons with 126 fighter jets. In 2012, the then UPA government selected the French company Dassault's aircraft, Rafale and signed a memorandum of understanding for supply of 108 war planes with provision for co-production in India with HAL as partner. 18 more aircrafts would be brought in fly away condition.

When Prime Minister Modi visited Paris in 2015, this MoU was abandoned and a new contract was signed with Dassault for 36 Rafale aircraft in fly away condition at the cost of Rs. 21,000 crore. Now HAL was replaced with Anil Ambani's Reliance Defence Ltd., with 50 per cent off set clause.

The former French President Francois Hollande, who has signed the MoU in 2015, had categorically stated that the Indian partner in Rafale deal was proposed by the Indian government and said "we did not have a choice in the matter".

The Indian Defence Minister claimed that the selection of Indian partner was made by Dassault and government of India had no knowledge of it. But the Indian Finance Minister came with the clarification that negotiations for co-production had not progressed and lack of infrastructural facilities at HAL was the reason for the change in the agreement.

The Public sector HAL is assembling MiGs, Sukhoi20 fighter planes under license from Russia and Head of the HAL openly said on record that it has all the required facilities. If lack of infrastructure was the real cause to abandon MoU, how can RDL, which was registered, Just a week before the Modi's trip to Paris and has no experience in defence production, be pushed into the deal?

The price of the Rafale fighter in the new contract is twice that of what was committed in the earlier agreement. Modi's government is consistently refused to disclose the price details to the Parliament. Of late, news reports started to appear as to how the extra money was transferred on quid pro quo basis. The *Chowkidaar* selected *Bhagidaar* to loot the exchequer.

This episode raises many questions. The IAF asked for 126 fighter jets. After a decade it is yet to receive 36 of them. How many more decades it has to wait to raise 42 squadrons and how well it be able to defend from supposed enemy's attack with depleted force? What about the remaining 90 aircrafts? Would they be procured from the US imperialism? With recent military agreement with US, India could not buy military hardware from Russia as US imposed sanctions on it.

This should be seen as a part of the NDA's drive to privatise defence production. Under the much publicized "Make in India" programme, the GOI allowed foreign companies into defence production. Most of the projects that came up and/or supposed to come up are nothing but assembling plants of imported completely or partially knocked down kits. Moreover, the NDA government started the process of pushing out the ordinance factories from defence production.

This is not as simple as 'crony capitalism', the term coined by Manmohan Singh. It is part of the Indian economy. The Indian big bourgeoisie is used to and is growing by looting the public money. That is why we call it as bureaucratic capital. Take the recent examples. 14 national high way projects under Public-Private Partnership model were designed to fail and formed major chunk of Non Performing Assets in banking sector. The government has taken steps to wipe out these NPAs and to save the looters by paying through the exchequer. Then the so-called Greenfield air ports had to be dragged out of crisis. Now came the turn of power. A project in PPP mode and Modi's government is hell bent upon to save these projects in the name of national interests. The so-called scions of Indian industry – Ambanis, Adani, Tatas, JSW, Birlas- are to benefit most from this loot of public money.

The BJP government at the centre is under pressure as the elections are fast approaching as the Rafale deal is gaining the public imagination. Its attempts to spread lies and half truths were miserably failed. It has now taken to the recourse of whipping up national chauvinism. The celebration of so-called surgical strikes and incessant talk of another surgical strike to promote anti-Pakistan feelings are only a part of this nefarious game of diverting the peoples attention from the burning issues and primary questions of its performance.
