

IAF helicopters lack secure communication system: CAG

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NEW DELHI: Most of the Cheetah and Chetak helicopters in the Indian Air Force (IAF) fleet are still "operating without secure communication systems", says the latest Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report on defence. The state of these light helicopters in the army is no better.

The report deals with the delay in inducting a sophisticated and secure communication system for the Cheetah and Chetak helicopters in the IAF fleet, which fly extensive operations through the country in remote hilly areas, across deserts and seas, and even patrol the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, often in inclement weather.

The helicopters, says the CAG

report, do not have suitable communication systems to provide "prompt" information to the agencies concerned from remote areas at the time of emergency.

This despite the fact that 45 sets of communication systems were procured for Rs 7.15 crore from a foreign firm for installation on these helicopters, with the delivery being completed as far back as in August 1997.

The Aircraft System and Testing Establishment, after flight evaluating these systems, however, found that they "did not meet the qualitative requirements in the areas of frequency range, speech secrecy and anti-jamming". Consequently, it said, they could not be recommended as "secure communication systems" for induction in their present

state.

The CAG report criticised the Air Headquarters for waiving off the deficiencies and recommending their acceptance. "Only ten of the 45 sets had been modified as of December 2000, and the remaining 35 sets were awaiting installation...their warranty expired in December 2000," says the CAG report. The defence ministry now says the modification of the remaining sets will be completed during 2001-2003.

The CAG has also criticised the "tardy execution" of the project for repair and overhaul facilities for the aero-engines of the superior MI-17 helicopters of the IAF. This has resulted in repair and overhaul of the aero-engines abroad at a cost of Rs 86.36 crore so far.