



INDIA TO SPEND \$400M ON OWN STEALTH COMBAT DRONE DEVELOPMENT

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India is getting set to launch an ambitious project to develop its **own stealth combat drones or UCAVs** (unmanned combat aerial vehicles), which will be capable of firing missiles and precision-guided munitions at enemy targets and then returning to home bases to re-arm for further missions.

Sources said the government was close to approving a Rs 2,650 crore Project Ghatak to develop the futuristic "Indian Unmanned Strike Air Vehicle", which has already been cleared by the defence ministry. "The project is now being evaluated by an expert committee set up by the finance ministry. Once approved, Project Ghatak will be placed before the cabinet committee on security for the final nod," said a source.

Project Ghatak flows from the earlier AURA (autonomous unmanned research aircraft) programme, which was sanctioned in 2009 at a cost of Rs 12.50 crore to carry out a "conceptual and feasibility study" for the future Indian UCAV. "The (AURA) project was successfully completed in April 2013 within the time schedule," minister of state for defence Rao Inderjit Singh told Parliament earlier this month.

Project Ghatak, initiated by the Aeronautical Development Agency-DRDO combine in consultation with the IAF, now plans to bring in "collaborators" from the initial stage itself. Weighing less than a

fighter jet since it will be "more of a flying-wing in design", the UCAV will take at least a decade to become fully-operational.

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