

Soviet Selling India Advanced Arms

By CHAITANYA KALBAG

NEW DELHI — The Soviet Union has tightened its grip on the Indian arms market by offering an array of sophisticated weapons to a government worried about growing U.S. military aid to Pakistan, defense analysts said here last week.

Indian officials said that under an agreement reached during the visit of Soviet Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov last week, new sup-

plies will include advance fighter planes, helicopter gunships, tanks, missiles, submarines, and air defense and electronic surveillance equipment.

The Soviet Union already provides about 75 percent of India's arms.

But one diplomat said Moscow was concerned at Indian purchases from the West, "so they have to offer India more."

Western Diplomats assessed the

Ustinov visit as a reaffirmation of Moscow's interest in India at a time of renewed Indo-Pakistani tension.

Cancelled last month just before former Soviet leader Yuri Andropov died, the visit was rearranged with a speed that showed Moscow's desire to keep close ties with India, they said.

The military nature of the visit was confirmed by the bemedalled top brass in the 55-member Kremlin party. It included Soviet naval chief

Adm. Sergey Gorshkov and First Deputy Chief of the General Staff S.F. Akhromeyev.

Ustinov was treated like a visiting head of state. He toured Indian defense factories and held detailed talks with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Defense Minister Ramaswami Venkataraman.

In a banquet speech at the start of Ustinov's five-day visit, Venkataraman said military cooperation was an important part of the close bond between Moscow and Delhi.

Ironically, Ustinov's last Indian visit, in December 1982, coincided with a cooling of the relationship. Moscow had apparently insisted that weapons be bought off the Soviet shelf, while India wanted new technology.

India already assembles Soviet MIG-21, -23 and -27 combat planes and T-72 tanks. The Indian Army plans to build Soviet-designed

BMP-I armored fighting vehicles at a new factory in Gandhi's parliamentary constituency in southern Andhra Pradesh.

New MIG Fighters

Sources said new Soviet supplies are likely to include the latest MIG-29 swing-wing fighters.

Venkataraman told Parliament last week that India plans to ask Moscow for improved combat planes to counter U.S.-built F-16s supplied to Pakistan.

Western diplomats said Gorshkov's presence in the delegation meant Moscow wanted to bolster the Indian Navy.

"The Kremlin is concerned over the escalation of the Iran-Iraq war and probably seeks to counter the expansion of a U.S. base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia," said one embassy official.

"Ustinov and Gorshkov were particularly interested in the Indian naval dockyard at the southeastern port of Vishakhapatnam, which involves a Soviet-aided submarine repair facility," an Indian analyst said.

(Reuters)