

Lawmakers pass F-16 procurement act

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Deputy Legislative Speaker Tsai Chi-chang bangs the gavel at the Legislative Yuan in Taipei yesterday as the legislature passes a bill authorizing funding for the procurement of 66 advanced F-16V jets from the US.

Photo: Peter Lo, Taipei Times

Lawmakers yesterday passed the Special Act on the Procurement of Updated Fighter Jets (特別法), which caps the budget for the purchase of 66 F-16Vs at NT\$250 billion (US\$8.19 billion).

The act aims to respond to enemy threats and urgent national defense needs by gradually acquiring updated high-performance jets, to strengthen the air force's combat abilities, improve the nation's preparedness for joint operations, and ensure national and regional security, the act states.

It also seeks to enable the nation to attain autonomy regarding defense and drive domestic economic growth, it says.

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The procurement plan covers the acquisition of the jets and their equipment, as well as the acquisition, maintenance, development and manufacture of ancillary systems, the act says.

The cost is to be covered by a special budget of up to NT\$250 billion, which would come from loans and surplus revenue from the previous fiscal year, it says.

The budget may be tapped to cover the central government's running expenses, the act says.

If the expenditure exceeds the approved budget due to currency fluctuations, an item should be proposed in the general budget to cover the shortfall, it says.

The act has a Dec. 31, 2026, deadline.

Also passed were supplementary resolutions sponsored by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), the New Power Party (NPP) and the People First Party (PFP).

The KMT's motion says that as the National Defense Industry Development Act (國防產業發展法) was passed in June, the Ministry of National Defense should ask the US to transfer technologies used to make F-16V parts and components, and lobby for US approval to allow Taiwan to manufacture key F-16V components.

The nation should also establish an "F-16 Asian maintenance center" after the jets have been delivered, it says.

The NPP's motion says the ministry should report annually to the legislature's Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee about the delivery progress of the jets, technological collaborations with the US and logistics to receive the jets.

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The PFP's motion says the government should ask the foreign manufacturer of the jets — Lockheed Martin Corp — to invest in industrial collaborations with Taiwan, including component manufacturing, technological transfers and industrial upgrade initiatives.

The defense ministry and the Ministry of Economic Affairs should work together to secure private-sector resources for the national defense industry, the motion says.

The F-16Vs are expected to be deployed at Chihhang Air Base (池港機場) in Taitung County, while the air force plans to set up a combat squad of up to 1,000 personnel, military sources said.

Minister of National Defense Yen De-fa (嚴德發) said that the nation should receive the first batch of F-16Vs in 2023 and all 66 jets before the end of 2026.

Additional reporting by CNA

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