NEW DELHI: India signed a deal yesterday to buy 36 Rafale fighter jets for $7.9 billion (€5.8 billion), France's biggest ever such sale, as it seeks to bolster its military against an increasingly assertive China. Defense experts say the aircraft, manufactured by France's Dassault, will bring a much needed boost to India's air force as it struggles to renew its Soviet-era military hardware. India, the world's top defense importer, is conducting a $1 billion upgrade of its military hardware, facing border disputes with its northern and western neighbors, China and Pakistan.

"This looks like the work of a group of highwaymen," said last summer. Under Chinese regulations people who take bricks from the restored wall, the eight-kilometer Xiaohekou stretch in northeast Liaoning province was built in 1381 during the Ming Dynasty. Photos posted online showed that its uneven, crumbling steps, jagged walls and plant growth had been replaced as far as the eye could see with a white, concrete-like cap. "This looks like the work of a group of people who didn't even graduate from elementary school," said one user of China's Twitter-like Weibo platform. "If this is the result, you might as well have just blown it up." "Such brutal treatment of the monuments left behind by our ancestors! How is it that people with low levels of cultural awareness can take such a step without any checks and balances?" asked another. "Don't we just raze the Forbidden City in Beijing, too?"

Even the deputy director of Liaoning's department of culture Ding Hui admitted: "The repairs really are quite ugly," according to state broadcaster CCTV. Though the restoration was completed in 2014, photos of the work only went viral in recent days, with Chinese state media outlets quick to pile on scorn for what CCTV commentary called the "destructive repair".

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