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Russia offers cooperation to develop Sukhoi jets

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IRKUT Corp, maker of the Russian Sukhoi combat aircraft, yesterday offered Malaysian companies the possibility of a joint cooperation to develop the aircraft if the Malaysian Government decides to add the Sukhoi Su-30MK to its air defence system.

Irkutsk Aviation Industrial Association president Alexey I. Fedorov named Sapura Electronics and Dunlop Malaysia as two possible companies to carry out the development of the fighter aircraft.

"We are proposing an offset programme (to Malaysia). We are also considering the possibility of a non-traditional payment agreement like counter trade (with Malaysia)," Fedorov told a news conference at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) 2001 exhibition.

Fedorov said he believes that Malaysian companies' capability in the development of the fighter aircraft such as Sukhoi will be "efficient and promising because the high level of the electronics industry in Malaysia".

"The offset programme will also be an added advantage to Malaysia because it will create more jobs," he added.

At the opening of the LIMA 2001 on Tuesday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia will look very favourably to defence equipment suppliers who could offer programmes along with their proposal for the country's force modernisation programmes.

He added that the supplier offering the most attractive offset programmes in terms of value and types of technology with sustainable business opportunities will command substantial weightage.

Earlier this year, Irkut has proposed to the Malaysian Government its Su-30MK aircraft, which shares similar features with the Su-30MKI. The Su-30MKIs (18 aircraft in total) are currently being operated by the Indian Air Force.

Said Fedorov: "The aircraft system and engine of the Su-30MK for Malaysia will be similar to India's Su-30MKI. But the avionics of the Su-30MK will be improvised and some additional equipment will be installed based upon the requirements of the Royal Malaysian Air Force."

"And we hope in the future to name the Malaysian aircraft version the Su-30MKM to distinguish it from other versions of the Sukhoi family," he stressed.

To date, the Malaysian Government has yet to make its decision as it is also considering a full squadron of Boeing's F/A18-E/Fs Super Hornets multi-role combat jets.

Meanwhile, commenting on whether Malaysian pilots will be able to handle the Sukhoi aircraft, Sukhoi Design Bureau senior deputy director-general A. Klementiev said: "Yes, of course. We have had many meetings with the Malaysian pilots. We saw them flying in the sky and we are sure they are excellent pilots and very experienced.

"Furthermore, the Sukhoi is a simple aircraft to fly," said Klementiev.

Irkut comprises a number of development and production companies such as Irkutsk Aviation Industrial Association, Beriev Design Bureau, BETA-AIR, Russkaya Avionics Design Bureau and ITELA.

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