

20/05/2003

Malaysia to buy Sukhoi fighter jets in RM3.4b deal

Adrian David

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Government has agreed to buy 18 Russian-made Sukhoi Su-30MKM Flanker fighter jets for the Royal Malaysian Air Force under a package deal worth US\$900 million (RM3.42 billion).

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the deal proper would be made later this year, possibly during the proposed visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We have thus far agreed in principle on the technical specifications of the aircraft and the financial aspects of the purchase," Najib said at a Press conference at his ministry in Jalan Padang Tembak.

Also present was Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Ivanov, who is on a three-day visit here as part of a bilateral meeting centred on talks on defence industry co-operation.

"There are other formalities, including the direct and indirect offset packages, to be settled."

Najib said the 18 multi-role combat air-craft (MRCA), specially customised to Malaysian specifications (thus the "MKM"), would be delivered in early 2006.

"We decided to select the Su-30MKM as it is the most suitable MRCA to fulfil the requirements of the RMAF, which needs advanced fighters to enhance its capabilities.

"The purchase is also part of the modernisation of the RMAF, which is moving into a new dimension."

Najib also said that Russia would look into the possibility of assisting the RMAF in upgrading its two squadrons of 18 MiG-29N, purchased in 1994.

"At the same time, we will also seek technical support for both the MiGs and Sukhois from India, another major operator of the Russian jets."

Najib said Malaysia welcomed Russia's co-operation to develop the country's defence and anti-terrorism capabilities.

"There is an avenue for us to exchange intelligence and information on these matters," said Najib.

Malaysia is also expected to purchase a similar number of F/A-18E/F Super Hornets from Boeing of the United States.

Should both the Su-30MKM and Super Hornet deals be realised, it would make the RMAF one of the most modern outfits in the region.

The Su-30MKM, an upgraded version of the Su-27, is powered by two AL-31F turbofan engines, designed by the Lyulka Engine Design Bureau (NPO Saturn).

It could also be fitted with the AL-31FP engine with thrust-vectoring nozzles, just like those fitted to the MKI variants currently operated by the Indian Air Force.

The aircraft could be equipped with a 30mm GSh-301 gun with 150 rounds of ammunition and a range of missiles, rockets and bombs mounted externally on 14 hardpoints.

These include air-to-air missiles carried by the aircraft, such as the R-27R1 (Nato designation AA-10A Alamo-A), all-aspect medium-range missile with semi-active radar homing and R-27T1 (AA-10B Alamo-B) with infrared homing and a range from 0.5 to 60km; and R-73E (AA-11 Archer) all-aspect, close-combat air-to-air missile with infra-red homing and a range from 0.3 to 20km.

Its systems include infra-red search and tracker, laser range-finder, radar, and helmet-mounted target designator that provides detection,

tracking and attack capability.

Ivanov said his deputy, Mikhail Dmitriev, who accompanied him, was leading a high-level military and technical delegation to iron out the finer details in the Sukhoi purchase programme for Malaysia during the on-going talks here.

"These include the legalities, and terms and conditions on after-sales and support services to ensure the continued serviceability of the aircraft," he said.

"Also to be discussed are the research and development, and transfer of technology facilities."

He added that the major purchase conditions were agreed upon by both parties.

"The aircraft purchase is a culmination of the visit by your Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) to Moscow several years ago.

"The aircraft purchase package, although not large, is very significant for a long-term business partnership and other bilateral deals between both countries, including that of space technology.

"For Malaysia, I believe the purchase will attach great promise to develop the country's economy now that Malaysian-Russian trade is on the increase."

On Russia's perception of the terrorist threat in Malaysia, Ivanov said Malaysia had a sound security and stable political climate that encouraged countries like Russia to do business with.

"I am satisfied with the current situation and convinced of the counter-terrorism efforts undertaken by your Government.

"On our part, we are prepared to assist Malaysia in this aspect, including providing training and conducting joint military exercises."

One of the proposals was for the Royal Malaysian Navy to participate in joint exercises in the Indian Ocean, where Russia has a large fleet presence.