

Mistral for Malaysia?
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Malaysia may be looking into purchasing a Mistral-class helicopter carrier from France. The possible deal was to be negotiated when the French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian arrived yesterday, according to Reuters.

However, this contradicts the statement by Defence Minister Hishammudin Hussein that Le Drian was here to discuss a financial package for France-based Dassault Aviation's Rafale multi-role combat aircraft, which was one of the shortlisted options to replace the Royal Malaysian Air Force's Mig-29Ns.

The Mistral-class carrier, which was originally intended for Russia along with its sister ship, is currently sitting in French docks following completion, as the deal between Russia and France had been cancelled due to the Ukraine crisis.

According to French daily La Tribune, Malaysia has been looking to acquire a vessel like the Mistral-class for the past 10 years.

As for the cost, the two Mistral-class vessels were commissioned in 2010 by then-Russian president Dmitry Medvedev at the price of about 685 million euro per vessel, which would translate to about RM2.78 billion (with the conversion rate of RM4.06 to 1 euro, the exchange rate when the deal was made on December 24, 2010).

As of 2013, the cost of one Mistral-class vessel, according to the French Defence Ministry, was 451.6 million euro, which, using the 2013 average exchange rate of RM4.17 to 1 euro, marks the cost of a single vessel at RM1.88 billion, at cost price.

However, assuming the current exchange rate of RM4.69 to 1 euro, this marks the cost price of one vessel at RM2.11 billion.

Pandan member of parliament (MP) Rafizi Ramli has questioned the decision to purchase the helicopter carrier, with the MP estimating the price tag of a Mistral-class at about RM3 billion, not including the helicopter complement for the carrier.

The MP raised the question of the rationale behind the purchase of the vessel, which he claims differed from Malaysia's doctrine, and asked for the government to reveal the actual figures concerning the deal.

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