

Thales makes formal bid to India for Mirage 2000 upgrade

A consortium of French defence and aerospace companies led by Thales has put in a formal bid for upgrading the Mirage 2000 fighters of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

A team from Thales met with defence ministry officials last week to discuss the finer points of the proposed upgrade and also submitted a formal proposal to increase the life of the aircraft, inducted by the IAF in the 1980s, by around 20-25 years, officials said.

'If we are given the go ahead today, we should be able to retrofit the first set of two aircraft in two years,' a senior Thales official, here for the Aero India show, told IANS. 'Then one can look at two-three aircraft a month.'

The IAF has 52 Mirage 2000s in three squadrons.

The French consortium for Mirage upgrade includes Dassault, which shut down the production line for Mirage 2000s some five years ago. The French company is also in the race for selling 126 multi-role combat aircraft, Renault, to the IAF for replacing the ageing MiG-21 fleet.

The other five aircraft in the race are F-16 of Lockheed Martin, F-18 of Boeing, both of which are based in the US, Gripen from Sweden, MiG-29 from Russia and Eurofighter of Britain.

'We are keen on upgrading our Mirage 2000s since it will complement our fleet of SU-30s. We realise we will not get the new fleet of multi-role combat aircraft before 2011 or 2012,' a defence ministry official said.

The IAF had approached Thales for in 2005 to upgrade the avionics of Mirage 2000 as also its fleet operational capability and the air-to-air and the air-to-ground missile superiority for taking on multiple targets.

Thales has been providing avionics and other high-technology systems to most aircraft of the IAF, including the Mirage 2000, SU-30s and MIG-29K as well as aircraft carrier Gorshkov.

At present, seven countries, including India, fly the Mirage 2000 - Egypt, France, Greece, Peru, Qatar, Taiwan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Of them, France, Greece and the UAE, have opted for Thales upgrades.

India also had a proposal to buy the Mirage 2000 from Qatar, but is said to have missed the bus, aerospace industry officials said on the margins of the Aero India show.

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