

India Not Considering S. Korean KF-21 Fighter for MRFA Tender



The Indian Air Force (IAF) is not currently considering the South Korean KF-21 Boramae fighter jet for its Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) tender, according to Indian defense officials. The KF-21 has not been formally offered to India, nor has the IAF expressed interest in acquiring the platform, which does not align with the force's current requirements. This clarification comes in response to speculative reports in some media outlets suggesting the KF-21 could be a candidate for the MRFA program.

The KF-21, a 4.5-generation multirole fighter developed by Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI), has drawn international attention for its modern design and cost-effective production. However, Indian officials have confirmed that there have been no formal discussions with Korean defense authorities or KAI regarding a potential sale. An official stated, "There has been no communication with Korean defense authorities or KAI regarding the KF-21, nor is it on the IAF's shortlist of evaluated platforms."

The IAF's MRFA program, which seeks to procure 114 fighters from global vendors, remains a critical component of India's long-term defense strategy. The program's goal is to replace aging fleets of aircraft, such as the MiG-21 and Jaguar, and to address a significant shortfall in the IAF's squadron strength. The tender is expected to attract competition from established aerospace giants, with aircraft like the Dassault Rafale, Boeing F-15EX, and Saab Gripen E seen as more likely contenders. The KF-21 is not part of this competition.

The IAF's decision to exclude the KF-21 is rooted in its focus on proven platforms and its "Make in India" defense manufacturing initiative. While the KF-21 is a promising platform, Indian defense officials are prioritizing aircraft that offer deeper technology transfer and have a track record of operational service. The MRFA program has been a protracted process, and the IAF is now aiming for a swift and efficient acquisition to bridge critical capability gaps. The force is unlikely to consider a new, untested platform like the KF-21 at this stage of the procurement cycle.

India continues to focus on its indigenous fighter development projects, such as the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) and the Tejas Mark-2, while simultaneously pursuing the MRFA tender to meet immediate operational needs. The procurement process for the 114 fighter jets is a major strategic decision, and the IAF is proceeding with a clear set of requirements to ensure the chosen platform enhances its combat capabilities and fits within its broader defense modernization goals.