

Malaysia Considers Upgrading Sukhoi Fleet with Powerful BrahMos-A Missiles



The Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) is exploring a significant enhancement to its combat capabilities by considering the integration of the Indian-made BrahMos-A air-launched cruise missile into its fleet of Sukhoi Su-30MKM fighter jets. This move, which is still in its preliminary discussion phase, could be a game-changer for regional air power and deepen defense cooperation between Malaysia and India.

The RMAF, which operates 18 Sukhoi Su-30MKM aircraft, has initiated early talks with Indian defense companies, including Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and BrahMos Corporation. The primary focus of these discussions is to understand the technical requirements and financial costs involved in adapting the jets to carry the heavy, 2.5-ton missile. Since the Malaysian Su-30MKM is closely related to the Indian Air Force's (IAF) Su-30MKI, it would likely require similar structural modifications and strengthening of its airframe.

The BrahMos-A is the air-launched variant of the Indo-Russian supersonic cruise missile. Traveling at speeds of Mach 2.8 to 3.0, it is one of the world's fastest cruise missiles, making it extremely difficult for enemy air defenses to intercept. It can carry a 200-300 kg warhead and has a range of up to 500 km. The missile's "fire and forget" principle and its ability to fly at a low altitude for terminal guidance offer a significant tactical advantage. India has already successfully integrated the BrahMos-A onto its Su-30MKI fleet, demonstrating its effectiveness in recent operations.

Experts note that this potential upgrade is a complex and lengthy process. Integrating the missile would require not only extensive structural reinforcement of the aircraft but also comprehensive mechanical, electrical, and software updates to the jet's systems. While the RMAF already has a working relationship with HAL for the maintenance of its Su-30MKM fleet, finalizing the deal and completing the upgrades is projected to take several years.

Should the deal go through, it would mark a major step in India's ambition to become a leading defense exporter and would provide Malaysia with a formidable long-range strike capability. The BrahMos-A would allow the RMAF to engage ground and sea targets from a safe standoff distance, boosting its deterrence posture. Both nations are carefully considering the technical and financial complexities as they continue their discussions.