

HAL Eyes HJT-36 Yashas Conversion for Cost-Effective Export Attack Jet



Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is reportedly exploring the conversion of its HJT-36 Yashas intermediate jet trainer into a light attack aircraft, primarily targeting the burgeoning global export market for cost-effective combat solutions. This strategic initiative, gaining momentum as of Saturday, July 19, 2025, aims to leverage Yashas' existing design and capabilities to meet the growing demand from nations seeking versatile and economical platforms for counter-terrorism and border patrol missions in less contested airspaces.

The HJT-36 Yashas, originally developed as a Stage-II trainer to replace the Indian Air Force's (IAF) aging Kiran MkII jets, has undergone significant modifications to address earlier developmental challenges, including spin characteristics, leading to its renaming at Aero India 2025. The aircraft now features an upgraded glass cockpit, modern avionics, and improved pilot visibility. Crucially for a potential combat role, the Yashas possesses five external hardpoints, one under the fuselage and two under each wing, capable of carrying up to 1,000 kilograms (2,200 pounds) of ordnance.

This inherent capacity makes the Yashas a viable candidate for adaptation into a light attack role. HAL is considering arming the modified jet with short-range air-to-air missiles, such as the European ASRAAM or Russian-origin R-73, along with rocket pods and gun pods. This configuration would enable the aircraft to perform close-range combat and ground attack missions, catering to countries that may not require, or cannot afford, more advanced and expensive multirole fighter jets.

However, the conversion is not without its technical hurdles. The current design of the HJT-36's nose cone is reportedly too compact to accommodate a large, long-range fire-control radar. This limitation would restrict the aircraft's ability to employ beyond-visual-range, radar-guided missiles, requiring innovative engineering solutions if such capabilities were to be integrated.

Despite the promising export potential, HAL's immediate priority remains the successful induction of the HJT-36 Yashas into the IAF as a trainer. The company is focused on completing all necessary trials and securing certification to begin replacing the Indian Air Force's older trainer fleet. Analysts suggest that the commercial success of an armed Yashas variant on the international stage will largely depend on the trainer's proven performance and HAL's ability to establish a reliable and scalable production line. Successfully fulfilling domestic requirements is seen as a critical step in building confidence among potential international buyers in a competitive global market