The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Optimistic About Concluding Fighter Jet Deal With India in 2015

By The Moscow Times

February 19, 2015



Bangalore, INDIA — Russia is confident it can sign a long-delayed final agreement with India this year to jointly produce a new generation stealth fighter jet, the aircraft manufacturer's president said on Thursday.

Russia and India have been haggling over the terms of the Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) program since the two countries first signed an initial contract in 2010.

New Delhi has raised concerns about how its fighter jet will differ from the Russian model, the T-50, and about the amount of technology Russia was willing to transfer to India.

"We are in the final stage of negotiations for the FGFA contract," United Aircraft Corporation's (UAC) Yuri Slyusar told a press briefing at the Aero India air show in Bangalore.

"We think there is a possibility to sign the agreement within 2015. At least the Russian side

think it will be done in 2015," he said.

India is keen to get its hands on state of the art fighter jets and modernize an air force which relies on a disparate fleet of aging Russian-made MiG and French Mirage fighters, along with more modern Russian Sukhoi Su-30s.

"FGFA planes are important in terms of future capability," Air Force Chief Arup Raha said at the air show on Thursday.

Raha said it was difficult to give a firm timeline for signing a final agreement with Russia, whose arms supply relationship with India reached its peak during the Soviet era.

The Sukhoi T-50, which the Russians are still testing, is one of only a handful of fifth-generation fighters.

Lockheed Martin's F-22 Raptor and F-35 Lightning II are the only combat-proven jets with stealth capability that enables them to avoid radar detection. China is also testing its own fifth-generation fighters, the J-11 and J-20.

India and Russia are still working on the detailed design for the T-50 after completing an initial design in 2013.

In December, during a visit by President Vladimir Putin to Delhi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Russia would remain India's top defense partner.

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