

Tejas Far Behind Competitors, Not Enough to Protect Indian Skies: IAF

Defense-aerospace.com

Sudhi Ranjan Sen

NEW DELHI -Tejas - the indigenously made Light-Combat single engine fighter - isn't enough to protect Indian skies, the India Air Force (IAF) has told the government. The response came after the South Block asked the IAF to scrap its plans of acquiring single-engine fighters from global, top sources told India Today.

The IAF said the Tejas is far behind its competitors like the JAS 39 Gripen manufactured by the Swedish aerospace company Saab and the US made F-16 manufactured by Lockheed Martin, sources said.

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval is understood to have raised the issue following which the government asked the IAF to scrap its plans to acquire foreign made single engine fighters and go for the Indian made fighters only. Recently, the IAF made a presentation to the government to explain why Tejas alone can't meet India's requirements.

Documents accessed by India Today reveal that the IAF has told the government that the "endurance" of Tejas in combat is just about 59 minutes as against 3 hours of Gripen and nearly 4 hours for the F-16. Also, Tejas can carry a pay-load of about three tons against nearly six tons and seven tons by the Gripen and F-16 respectively.

"In other words, for target that needs about 36 bombs to be destroyed, one will have to deploy six Tejas as against just three Gripen or F-16," the IAF has told the government.

The IAF has also said Tejas needs 20 hours of serving for every hour of flying as against six hours for Gripen and 3.5 hours for F-16.

The cost of maintaining the Tejas is much higher than the other fighters. Also, both the F-16 and Gripen has a life-span of 40 years against just 20 of Tejas. And, in some areas the vintage Russian made Mig-21 is better than Tejas, the IAF is understood to have told the government.

India is desperate for single-engine fighters to replace aging MiG-21s. The country needs at least 42 fighter squadrons to fight a two-front war, but currently has only 33 squadrons. And, at least another 11 fighter squadrons of the IAF will have to be retired in the next two years.

So far, the IAF has ordered 123 Tejas fighters but wants a better single-engine fighter to make up for the huge-shortfall in the fighter strength. Of the 123 Tejas fighters, only 40 will be Tejas Mark-1 and the rest 83 will be an upgraded version.