



INDIA CALLS OFF AIRBUS MRTT AIRCRAFT DEAL, MIGHT CONSIDER RUSSIAN IL-78 TANKER

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The Indian government has cancelled the much awaited multi-role tanker transport (MRTT) aircraft deal worth \$1 billion on the grounds of planes' high operational cost.

"We have [recently] cancelled the MRTT deal with Airbus Defence and Space because platforms are too expensive and not economically viable to operate", an MoD official who declined to be identified told Defence News. The deal was to buy six MRTTs.

This is the second MRTT aircraft global tender to be cancelled by the ministry of defense since 2006.

"We have examined this deal very carefully and the [budgetary] approval has been rejected thrice by the Indian finance ministry," the MoD official said.

"This is indeed a setback to us, as we want the MRTT aircraft desperately, and a fresh [global] procurement will take at least five more years", said a senior air force official said who requested anonymity.

Meanwhile, TASS quoted a source as saying: "We are planning to consider the option of Il-78M-90A or Il-78M2 acquisition. These planes are supposed to have the best cost-effectiveness ratio. The Indian Air Force (IAF) operates several Il-78MKI tankers delivered in 2003-2006 that could be upgraded to the Il-78M2 level".

However, the Russian option will be reviewed on a regular basis. "The MoD is re-launching the tender in order to supply the IAF with the state-of-the-art aerial tankers, not to acquire Russian aircraft," he said.

The defense ministry selected the Airbus A330 platforms over the Russian Ilyushin IL-78 aircraft in July 2012 to be operated by the Indian air force for the next 25 years.

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