

Hindustan Times, 1 August 2006

Biggies battle for IAF pie (Rahul Singh)

New Delhi/Farnborough (England), August 1, 2006: At the Farnborough International Airshow 2006, cutting edge military aircraft stunned crowds with breathtaking manoeuvres in the air. And behind the scenes, aerospace biggies tried to outmanoeuvre each other and bag the roughly \$7 billion contract being dangled by big buyer India. The Indian Air Force (IAF) is shopping for 126 multi-role combat aircraft (MRCA) --- a deal that could boost international revenues of many a firm. RSK MiG officials, for example, stressed how important the MRCA fighter tender was to the company's future.

The Indian Express, 12 August 2006

For safer skies, entire Indian airspace comes on IAF radar (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

New Delhi, August 11: For the first time in the country, all civilian aircraft, including domestic flights, operating anywhere in Indian airspace will now be monitored by Air Force radars. With the IAF upgrading its radar network to cover the entire country up to 12 nautical miles into the sea, a decision has been taken to ensure that all civilian aircraft have "air defence clearance" regardless of where they are flying in the country. The IAF conveyed this to the Civil Aviation Ministry a day before the British police announced that they had foiled an "unimaginable" air terror attack. The Ministry is now expected to notify all airlines soon of the changes. Sources told The Indian Express that the Air Force has extended radar coverage to Central India and even the Andamans & Nicobar Islands. These areas were not covered by Air Force radars until now. The important element here is that all civilian aircraft operating anywhere in Indian airspace will be allotted an "Air Defence Code" by IAF controllers which will be a kind of a mandatory password for them to access other aviation services.

The Telegraph, 12 August 2006

IAF's elephant tied to ground (Sujan Dutta)

New Delhi, Aug. 11: The Indian Air Force has grounded more than half of the King Elephants — the Ilyushin-76 heavy lift transport aircraft christened Gajraj — in its fleet, throwing schedules for both military and disaster relief operations into a tizzy. The chronic shortage of the wide-bodied Ilyushin-76 compelled the air force to give up the idea of sending the aircraft to Cyprus to fly back Indian evacuees from Lebanon, a task that was afterwards entrusted to Air-India. "Serviceability of the aircraft is low," air force sources confirmed. "But we are trying to ensure that our tasks do not suffer. The IL-78s (refueller aircraft on the IL-76 platform) have been used as freighters and the AN-32 aircraft are taking on additional tasks." There are 12 IL-76 aircraft that are in the fleet of the air force. Maintenance schedules are designed to keep 10 operational at all times. But lack of spares, end of the 20-year lifecycle term for the aircraft's engines and dismantling of the Soviet Union have combined to ground more than half the fleet of the aircraft which were inducted from 1985 when Moscow was still the capital of the USSR and not Russia alone. When it became important for the IL-76 to be deployed alongside the navy to evacuate Indians from Lebanon last month, Israel's restrictions on flying military aircraft in the region came in handy for air headquarters. That allowed the IAF to make a case to despatch civilian aircraft from Air-India.

Hindustan Times, 17 August 2006

IAF losing edge in numbers over Pak

Chandigarh, August 17, 2006: The scores are narrowing down in the sky. The Indian Air Force (IAF) has always enjoyed an edge in numbers over its principal adversary — the Pakistan Air Force. However, it seems to be on a downward spiral with the depleting number of combat squadrons. The number gap between the two forces is being reduced primarily because of the phasing-out of ageing aircraft and delay in the induction new ones in the IAF. The dwindling number of aircraft is serious enough for the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence to advise the government to look into it and maintain “an authorised aircraft count”. Senior air force officials say the IAF would be left with only 29 combat squadrons at the end of tenth plan in 2007, barely eight or nine squadrons more than Pakistan’s current strength. At present, Pakistan, which is not only in the inner ring but has far lesser assets to defend, has a total of 21 combat squadrons. China, of course has a larger air force with about 3,000 combat and support aircraft. The committee has found that even with the planned induction of aircraft during 2005-2017, there would be “serious deficiencies” in the combat squadron strength against the authorised strength at the end of tenth, 11th and 12th plan periods.

The Indian Express, 19 August 2006

IAF scrambles MiGs after Pak violates no-fly zone (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

New Delhi, August 18: The Indian Air Force today scrambled its MIG-21s after a flying object from Pakistan was noticed very close to the border in Rajasthan. While the object did not cross the border, sources said, it did violate the 10 km no-fly zone rule observed by both countries. It's learnt that the incident occurred around 10 am when a blip on the radar was noticed coming close to the border. The MIG-21s from Suratgarh base were immediately scrambled but the blip stopped short of the border leaving the Air Force worried as to what the object may have been. An inquiry is now underway. The Air Force has confirmed the incident and is likely to approach the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with Pakistan.

The Pioneer, 19 August 2006

IAF chief to hold talks with Pentagon on defence ties

Air Chief Marshal SP Tyagi will hold talks with top Pentagon officials about India-US defence ties and explore avenues to further strengthen relations between the air force of the two countries during a ten-day visit to the US starting Saturday. The Air Chief would also visit various training establishments of the US Air Force and aerospace and air defence organisation, officials said here on Friday. Tyagi would also hold talks with his counterparts about the possibility of the IAF taking part in the prestigious multi-national air exercises "Red Flag" held in the US annually. This exercise sees the air force of various countries deploying their frontline aircraft with hi-tech equipment for highly complex exercises and manoeuvre. The Air Chief was also scheduled to visit some US institutes specialising in network centric warfare and the IAF was rapidly enhancing its capabilities in this sphere and the forthcoming interaction would go a long way in India emerging as front ranking force. It may be mentioned here that the IAF and USAF have over the last few years conducted joint exercises in India and the US including transport planes, fighter jets and sophisticated systems and equipment.

The Tribune, 20 August 2006

IAF probing identity of flying object

New Delhi, August 19: The Indian Air Force (IAF) has launched investigations to determine the identity of a flying object which almost came close to the International Border in Rajasthan sector forcing a scramble of main line fighter jets MiG-21s for a possible cross over by a jet from Pakistan. A Ministry of Defence spokesman said the object which the Air Force had not been able to figure out, did not cross the international border, but did violate the 10 km no-fly zone.

The Indian Express, 23 August 2006

New threats will be on economic interests: IAF

Washington, August 23: Economics and not military power will determine future international relations and countries will have to look beyond boundaries in the emerging geo-political scenario, Air Chief Marshall S P Tyagi has said. The traditional role of military to protect geographical boundaries was changing as 'geo-economics' would play a central role in international relations, Tyagi said addressing at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Stressing that India's military will also play a diplomatic role in ensuring the march towards country's development, Tyagi said, "India's record is pretty good. We have not sold any nuclear secrets, we are into proliferation. Our international track record is very good. We have played our role very responsibly in the international community. Nobody has accused us of being the rogue state," Tyagi said. But Tyagi also noted that bilateral relations between India and the United States had changed for the better with military to-military interaction increasingly 'tremendously' in the past decade.