

The Tribune, 4 February 2006

Belarus to buy 18 Sukhois from India (PTI)

Moscow, February 3: In an estimated \$ 300 million deal, Belarus is to buy 18 second-hand Sukhoi Su-30K fighters from India for the modernisation of the aging air force of this former Soviet Republic. According to influential financial daily "Vedomosti", 18 Su-30K fighters with limited capabilities were supplied to the Indian Air Force in 1997-98 at the initial stage of \$ 4.9 billion Sukhoi deal for the development of a multi-role war bird Su-30MKI specially tailored for its specific requirements. Cash-strapped Belarus will modernise the Su-30K jets to the Su-30KN at its facilities with the help of "Russkaya Avionika" (Russian avionics) company, a subsidiary of original manufacturer "Irkut" Corporation. Sources in the aviation industry and Russian air force have confirmed the report, according to "Vedomosti".

The Tribune, 10 February 2006

Preparing to buy combat aircraft (Abhijit Bhattacharyya)

OPED: One is not on technical specifications or the superiority thereof in the choice of 126 combat aircraft (i.e. multirole fighter) of the Indian Air Force. As is well known, the four bidders for the modernisation of the IAF fleet are French Mirage2000; Russian MIG-29; US F-16 and Sweden's SAAB JAS 39 Gripen. India's use of Mirage 2000 in the IAF 1 and 7 squadrons goes back to October 1982 with 40 aircraft, with operational induction in June, 1985. Twenty-one years have gone by and the Mirage 2000 continues to be a 'darling fighter' for the fliers of the IAF. Interestingly, Mirage is also in use with three Asian (Abu Dhabi/UAE, Qatar and Taiwan), one European (Greece) and one Latin American (Peru) air force apart from the 285 serving the French Air Force. The Russian-Indian umbilical cord in defence hardware stands amply demonstrated by the extensive knowledge of the IAF men and the intensive use of the Russian flying machines by New Delhi. Thus, although the 'production of the land-based MiG 29s ended in the mid 1990s leaving a substantial stock of semi-complete airframes available to meet export orders, activity currently centres on upgrades for existing aircraft.' India will be hard pressed to ignore in case of a clarion call by Moscow to continue using MiG-29 for the modernisation plan of its ageing air arm. So much for the Russian interest and the Indian choice. Be that as it may, perhaps it is time to have a wider choice by the consumer IAF from amongst the producers of defence hardware. That leads to the prospective sellers like Sweden's SAAB JAS 39 Gripen into the fray. Of all the bidders for the Indian sky, the most aggressive appears to be that of the US Lockheed Martin F-16, which had entered service on January 6, 1979, with the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing at the Hill Air Force Base, Utah. With a huge total of 4,417 production aircraft ordered or requested to date by 21 countries, including the planned US Air Force procurement of 2,230 and 28 embargoed Pakistan Air Force, a total of 64 F-16 was delivered in 2003, leaving a backlog of about 300 at the start of 2004 against a backlog which had fallen to 265 on May 01, 2004.

The Indian Express, 11 February 2006

Snag: IAF chopper lands in Damli field (D.N. Divakar)

Ambala, February 10: An Indian Air Force helicopter bound for Sarsawa Air Force station in Uttar Pradesh made an emergency landing near Damli village, about 30 km from here, on Friday evening following a technical snag. According to reports, the chopper, steered by Captain Rajesh Sharma, took off from Halwara air field in Punjab and was carrying 24 technicians to work at the Sarsawa station. All 25, including the pilot, Captain Sharma, were reported safe, but for some minor injuries during the forced landing. According to Captain Sharma, the chopper developed the snag after its hydrolic system stopped working, which jammed the steering. It landed at an agricultural farm close to the Markanda river away from the populated areas.

The Hindu, 15 February 2006

Air show in Guwahati

Guwahati: Mirage 2000s, MiG 21s and Kiran MkII trainer aircraft of the Suryakiran aerobatic teams will be seen in action here on February 19 morning, when the Air Force's largest ever air display in the

region gets under way. AOC-in-C Eastern Command Air Marshal F.H. Major told reporters at the IAF base at Borjhar on Tuesday that the show was being organised to increase the general awareness about the Air Force and to motivate local youth to join the "Men in Blue."

The Indian Express, 16 February 2006

France may offer Rafale for Mirage (Shiv Aroor)

New Delhi, February 15: When French President Jacques Chirac arrives in New Delhi on February 19 he will make it a point to tell Indian authorities about the formal withdrawal of the Mirage-2000-5 fighter from the bid for 126 combat aircraft that the IAF is looking at. In its place, he will formally offer the Rafale multirole fighter. In what has taken the IAF completely by surprise, considering it has unofficially been gunning for the Mirage, the French government has conveyed its intention to shortly pull the Mirage family of fighters off all production lines at contractor Dassault's facilities to make way for the full-rate production of the new-generation Rafale. Considering it would take at least three-four years for a contract to actually be signed with India, Paris thinks it would be too expensive to keep the Mirage factories humming. The Rafale, it feels, would be a more a suitable contender: it is much more capable, though considerably costlier.

The Tribune, 16 February 2006

Indian Air Force to look for more advanced fighters

New Delhi, February 15: The Indian Air Force (IAF) plans to acquire more advanced fighters, sophisticated defence systems and smart long-range weapons as the country's 'strategic boundaries have been redefined' by its growing energy needs and participation in disaster management operations, the air chief has said. The IAF is looking for more top of the line fighters, airborne warning and control aircraft (AWAC) and mid-air refuellers as well as smart long-range weapons 'to maximise effect and minimise the force required', Air Chief Marshal S.P. Tyagi said in an interview published in the inaugural issue of India Strategic magazine. The air chief said the current scenario 'necessitated a strategic reach to safeguard our national interests'. The IAF has 'plans to acquire more AWACs and multi-mission combat jets as well as other futuristic machines and equipment' to build up a surgical strike capability to neutralise a threat without collateral damage. The IAF currently has six refuellers and has ordered three AWACs from Israel. Air Chief Marshal Tyagi was asked if the IAF's combat squadrons had come down to 29 from the publicly acknowledged figure of 39 a few years ago. He gave no figures but acknowledged that IAF's combat strength was progressively depleting and by 2007, a large number of MiG-21, MiG-23 and MiG-27 jets would be phased out.

The Hindu, 17 February 2006

Three services to have BrahMos missiles (Arunkumar Bhatt)

Mumbai: While the Navy has started inducting multi-role, supersonic cruise missile, BrahMos, in a big way, the Army and the Air Force are poised to follow suit to be able to 'destabilise' critical targets with pinpoint accuracy. "Army is very keen to have the missile and we are working on the 'land to land' version of it for the Army," said Dr. A. Sivathanu Pillai, chief controller of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Dr. Pillai is also the managing director of BrahMos Aerospace, an Indo-Russian joint venture that designed and developed the world's only supersonic cruise missile and is now engaged in its production and marketing. He was here to ceremoniously receive the first airframe section of BrahMos from the Chairman of Godrej and Boyce Mfg. Company, J.N. Godrej. About 20 Indian and seven Russian companies are making critical systems for the missile. He said that the missile was undergoing critical tests to meet the Army's specific requirements to be able to take on different types of targets. The army version would have features like position updating, terrain-hugging, homing image analysis and higher degree of data processing. The Army is raising a special BrahMos Regiment of three batteries comprising a mobile launcher, mobile and fixed command centres besides other supporting facilities.

The Indian Express, 17 February 2006

IAF chief Tyagi to leave on Singapore, Malaysia tour

New Delhi, February 16: Indian Air Force (IAF) chief Air Chief Marshal SP Tyagi will kick off a five-day tour of Singapore and Malaysia on Saturday to whet their interest in strategic military partnership with India. Tyagi will meet Singapore Air Force chief Major General Lim Kim Choon and his Malaysian counterpart General Dato Mohamed. The visit aims to take South East Asian nations into confidence so that depend on India more for immediate strategic needs, including training, exercises and military equipment, than other powers. A senior IAF officer told The Indian Express today that it was time to consolidate the general confidence in Indian capability of hosting joint exercises and training, and offering quality equipment demonstrated effectively in the last two years in the region. The IAF flight is being dove-tailed with South Block's nod to upgradation of several facilities to match international training and exercise. Navy chief Admiral Arun Prakash had visited the South East in June 2005, and Army Chief General JJ Singh is expected to visit the region this year. Singapore, which sent F-16s for training in Kalaikunda last December, is interested in using the Mahajan Ranges for bombing and missile fire practice with the government inclined too.

The Telegraph, 22 February 2006

Push for Rafale, not Mirage

New Delhi, Feb. 21: A French offer to supply Rafale fighter aircraft is likely to queer the pitch for an Indian Air Force global tender to acquire 126 multi-role combat aircraft in bulk. The IAF order of about \$8 billion is one of the biggest military purchases in the world but so far it was known that India will buy 126 fighter aircraft of a single type. However, France, which was a strong contender with its Mirage 2000-V aircraft, has now informed the Indian defence establishment that it was keener to sell its Rafale fighter aircraft. The chief executive officer of manufacturers Dassault Aviation, Chacks Edelstenne, who is accompanying French President Jacques Chirac on his visit to India, made the offer to minister of state for defence Rao Inderjit Singh. The IAF is yet to issue the request for proposals to companies wanting to bid. Dassault is also the manufacturer of the Mirage series of aircraft, preferred by an influential section in the IAF because India already has two operational squadrons of the fighter aircraft. But Dassault has said it cannot keep its assembly production lines for the Mirage 2000-V aircraft idle and waiting for the Indian order that is in the making and for which contracting could take more than a year. Instead, Dassault is pushing the Rafale because it is already in production for the French Air Force. But Dassault has offered 40 Rafale aircraft. This means that the company is expecting that the IAF will alter its terms and might split its order for multi-role combat aircraft and actually tender for more than one type of fighter aircraft.

The Telegraph, 23 February 2006

India adds to Congo force (Sujan Dutta)

New Delhi, Feb. 22: Adding more Indian muscle to UN forces in Africa's little wars, an Indian Air Force contingent with helicopter gunships was today sent to the Democratic Republic of Congo for the second time in two years on peace enforcement duties. The mission of the Indian forces is now more complicated because they will be supporting an election process the UN is overseeing but one that is opposed by local militias. The vice-chief of air staff, Air Marshal Ajit Bhavnani, who flagged off the contingent, said the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo was changing because of the air element in the UN peace enforcement mission of 17,500 troops from many countries. More than 3,500 Indian Army troops and IAF warriors are in Congo and defence headquarters in India are earmarking more troops for UN duties in Africa and elsewhere. The deployments are under the UN Chapter VII mandate that authorises 'peace enforcement' and is distinct from 'peacekeeping'. Air force sources said the contingent has been tasked with two objectives: to transport UN staff and forces and to deter 'belligerent groups who may try to destabilise the peace process'.

The Tribune, 23 February 2006

IAF accidents: Pranab sees flaw in training

New Delhi, February 22: Stating that lack of proper training was found to be the major reason for the

large number of fighter plane accidents, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee today told the Rajya Sabha that the Indian Air Force had to keep pace with technical changes for which various committees had been set up. The minister, however, asserted that fighter aircraft accidents in the country had declined. The IAF jet accidents had come down from 370 during 1985-86 and 1994-95 to 276 during 1995-96 and 2004-05, he said replying to supplementaries during question hour. He said the defence aircraft industry was undergoing massive technical changes and 'we have to keep pace with it.' At present, the manpower of engineers and airmen is adequate for the IAF's commitments, the Defence Minister said. He said four committees had been constituted to look into various aspects of the IAF. Mr Mukherjee said an expert committee was constituted by the government on December 30, 2004, to identify causes of aircraft accidents in the IAF and to recommend remedial measures. The committee, in its analysis, did not attribute any aircraft accident to poor maintenance though a number of accidents were attributed to technical defects like failure of components or systems, material failure, system malfunction and design deficiency, he said.

The Tribune, 24 February 2006

IAF to buy next generation fighters

Mumbai, February 23: India is in the market for next generation fighter aircraft for the air force and the navy, according to a report in the latest issue of Flight International. The publication reported that India is shopping for ASW helicopters and long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft. The government is expected to issue a tender for the aircraft in April this year. According to Flight International, the navy rejected a proposal to lease two Lockheed Martin P-3 Orions as a stop-gap measure even though it needs to quickly induct eight reconnaissance aircraft. The navy has also set a March deadline to receive bids for 16 ASW helicopters, plus eight options, but the manufacturers that were handed the tender AgustaWestland, Eurocopter, Kamov and Sikorsky ? are asking for an extension, the magazine said. The companies in the race to sell maritime reconnaissance aircraft include BAE Systems, Boeing, EADS, Ilyushin and Lockheed. According to the publication, Lockheed which supplies the P-3 Orions is still the best placed to bag the order since Boeing's 737-based P-8A Multi-mission Maritime Aircraft would not be ready until 2012. It also noted that US suppliers interested in offering refurbished P-3s ? including L-3 Communications could be blocked from competing.