

The Indian Express, 3 June 2006

Defence Ministry finds chinks in IAF ground defence armour

In its latest submissions to Parliament, the Ministry pointed out "acute shortages" that have led to "critical voids" in the IAF's ground-based air defence capability. Currently equipped with three kinds of Russia-made air defence missile systems, all decades old and demanding either replacement or upgradation, the IAF has been compelled to explore expensive French and Israeli weapon imports. When contacted, Air Headquarters indicated that the current shortage had been compounded by a variety of factors, including slow sanction for fresh upgrades and an indigenous missile programme that is "nowhere near ready for operational clearance". The force now operates three kinds of surface-to-air (SAM) missile systems, the mainstay S-125M Pechora, OSA-AK and Igla 1-M. Of the 60 Pechora systems purchased from Russia between 1974-90 and deployed at frontier stations of the IAF, only 50 are operational. The number will be down by more than half by the end of this year to just 24 operational units. The Defence Ministry says the system is "suffering from ageing and lack of support".

The Pioneer, 7 June 2006

IAF succeeds in reducing accident rate to all-time low

The Indian Air Force has managed to bring down its accident rate of aircraft to all time low of 50 per cent in 2005 as compared to the average rate during the last decade -1994-95 to 2003-2004. This was achieved through proactive flight safety procedures, director general of flight safety and inspection Air Marshal PS Ahluwalia said here on Tuesday. The IAF hoped to reduce the accident rate to the minimum through systematic trend analyses, quality audits, risk management and networking with international air forces to keep abreast with modern safety initiatives, he said. Elaborating upon the measures taken by the IAF to address the issue of flight safety, Ahluwalia told the mediapersons that an expert committee on aircraft accidents(EXCOM) was constituted by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee following a series of accidents in 2004. This laid the groundwork for a comprehensive action plan to reduce aircraft losses to the IAF to a minimum, he said, adding the Defence Ministry, in order to maintain the momentum, constituted a task team for time-bound implementation of the recommendations of the EXCOM.

The Tribune, 7 June 2006

IAF receives three of grounded Dhruvs (Girja Shankar Kaura)

New Delhi, June 6: More than six months after the entire lot of the indigenously manufactured advanced light helicopter (ALH) Dhruv was grounded, the Indian Air Force (IAF) yesterday received the first three of its grounded inventory, cleared by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for active flying. The Tribune had first reported the grounding of Dhruv by the IAF, which was done following the crash on November 25 last of a civilian variant ordered by the Jharkhand Government due to a defect in tail rotors. The three arms of the Indian armed forces, which had more than 45 helicopters in their inventory, then grounded Dhruv due to safety reason after initial investigations revealed a defect in its tail rotor. Later, it was discovered during detailed investigation that there was also a problem in its tail rotor gear. Its grounding had also adversely affected the bids being made by India to sell it to other countries that had shown interest in it. IAF's safety chief Air Marshal P.S. Ahluwalia said three Dhruv machines had been received by the force yesterday after being cleared for flying by the relevant certification agencies after rigorous tests. However, reports suggested that the IAF would also carry out further stringent flying tests before it was finally brought back into service.

The Tribune, 10 June 2006

First advanced light gunship soon: HAL

New Delhi, June 9: Country's indigenously produced advanced light helicopter, Dhruv, is back in the skies sporting new tail rotors, Hindustan Aeronautics Chairman A.K. Baweja said here today. He said the company was poised to roll out country's first advanced light gunship. Dhruv, which had been grounded for more than six months following the crash of a new helicopter bought by the Jharkhand Government, would be taking to skies at a rate of 12 per month, Mr Baweja said. The helicopter was on way to Jharkhand from Bangalore when it crashed at Hyderabad. Later, defects were found in its tail rotor which had led to the crash. Further investigations had also brought out defects in the rotor gear box. Mr Baweja said all choppers being declared fit for flying were now sporting "new tail rotors".

The Hindu, 11 June 2006

IAF to acquire 126 new fighter aircraft (PTI)

Dehra Dun: Indian Air Force would soon float international tenders for acquisition of 126 new fighter aircrafts and also buy off the shelf 18 SU-30 MKI jets as replacements for the first lot purchased by India, Air Chief Marshal

S.P. Tyagi said here today. A contract for the purchase of new Sukhoi jets would be signed shortly with Russia, which would replace the first batch of aircrafts, he told reporters on the sidelines of the Passing out Parade at the Indian Military Academy here. Originally, the first batch of Su-30s were to be sent back to Russia for upgrading to MKI standard, but the Russians had insisted that India would be better off buying upgraded new fighters off the shelf. Indicating that the Request for Proposals for the 126 new fighters would be sent out soon, Tyagi said the choice of the new aircraft would be done after a thorough scrutiny and negotiations with competing bidders.

The Tribune, 12 June 2006

CAG unveils flaws in MiG-29 maintenance (Vijay Mohan)

Chandigarh, June 11: Serious shortcomings in the MiG-29 maintenance and overhaul process resulted in low serviceability of aircraft in squadrons and consequent shortfalls in operational tasks. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has held the Air Force and the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) responsible for inordinate delays, poor performance and escalated costs in setting up and executing maintenance works. This affected repair tasks over the period 1998-2005, leading to cannibalisation at all levels, the report said. Sub-optimal maintenance of the aircraft led to low serviceability of all aircraft, affecting flying tasks of the operational squadrons. The report added. Serviceability status fluctuated between 43 and 62 per cent and there was a shortfall of flying task between 87.48 and 42.52 per cent between 1997-98 and 2004-05.

The Tribune, 14 June 2006

IAF for aeronautics commission

New Delhi, June 13: The Indian Air Force (IAF) yesterday suggested the setting up of a national aeronautics commission as a coordinating body between civil and military aviation for better management of the Indian airspace. A national aeronautics commission should be set up with representatives from the government, civil aviation agencies and the military aviation wings for airspace management, Vice-Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal Ajit Bhavnani said at an international conference on helicopter safety issues here. Besides airspace management, this body should also set up guidelines and maintenance procedures for the entire aviation sector in order to optimise resources in face of tremendous growth in the Indian aviation sector, he said. Observing that the IAF has been operating helicopters in extreme weather conditions and differing terrain, he elaborated on several steps taken by the force in regard to flight safety and procedures.

The Hindu, 18 June 2006

Russian firm to overhaul Indian copters

NEW DELHI: The Defence Ministry has approved the overhauling of the armed forces' Russian origin helicopter fleet by a Russian Government-controlled company, which has already completed a couple of projects for naval ships. Initially, overhauling of helicopter navigation and radar systems, engine control mechanisms and other electronic controls will be taken up. Engines will be overhauled in future. The company, Rosoboronservice (India), has been especially created to service Indian military assets through a special decree issued by President Vladimir Putin. Sources said that after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Indian armed forces were put to difficulty in procuring spares as companies were located in different countries. Some firms stopped manufacturing spares for older military platforms, leading to the Indian armed forces cannibalising spares from grounded planes. The issue was raised several times at the annual meetings between the Russian President and the Indian Prime Minister. Since then, the situation has improved but uncertainty remains.

The Tribune, 19 June 2006

IAF to acquire 126 aircraft

Hyderabad, June 18: The Indian Air Force (IAF) will acquire 126 new fighter aircraft and 80 helicopters as part of its efforts to strengthen its air power, Chief of Air Staff S.P. Tyagi said. Talking to newsmen here, he said the IAF was also acquiring three Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS). "There Hawk trainers will arrive this year, besides more air-to-air refuelling systems," he said. Stating that the sharing of information among countries would solve many problems, he said "They seek information on designs sometimes from other countries and other countries will also depend on us for their requirement". ACM Tyagi said rapid technological advances, which had ushered in dramatic changes in air power had, in turn, altered the mechanics and the very nature of warfare.

The Tribune, 22 June 2006

Lockheed keen on tie-ups with Indian firms

New Delhi, June 21: Lockheed Martin, in the race to sell 126 F-16 jets to the IAF, is in talks with Indian firms like

HAL and the Tata group for the outsourcing of aircraft components. The firm's advanced development programmes division, which works on research in cutting edge areas like stealth and surveillance technologies, is also keen on forging ties with Indian information technology and research firms, said Lockheed's Director of Communications Joseph Stout...