

# China ignores FC-1 doubts

PAUL LEWIS/SINGAPORE

CHINA IS LIKELY to go ahead with development of the Chengdu Aircraft (CAC) FC-1, despite growing doubts over Pakistan's support for the programme.

According to defence sources, China's People's Liberation Army air force has a requirement for around 100 new FC-1 fighters, which is viewed as sufficient to support full-scale development and flight testing of the aircraft, irrespective of Pakistan's involvement.

Pakistani defence planners are

wrestling with the problem of trying to find funding for the FC-1 and a planned purchase of 40 Dassault Mirage 2000-5 fighters from France. The Pakistani air force needs around 150 FC-1s to replace its earlier CAC F-7 fighters.

The latest revised programme schedule calls for the final selection of the FC-1s avionics and radar system by the end of the year, with a full-scale programme go-ahead in early 1997. Pakistan and China are meant to be co-ordinating the final selection process.

Foreign radar suppliers are com-

peting for the FC-1 contract, including GEC-Marconi, offering the Blue Hawk, Thomson-CSF, Phazotron, with the Super Komar, and Fiar, proposing its derivative Grifo-S7 system.

China has still to decide between an elliptical or circular radar antenna to fit into the FC-1's nose. Some Chinese officials are understood to favour an elliptical design, to conform with the fighter's nose cross-section, while others are believed to prefer a circular antenna, arguing that it offers improved track-while-scan capabilities. □

## Millon adds muddle to French helicopter number confusion

FRENCH DEFENCE minister Charles Millon has added to speculation over France's future attack- and transport-helicopter requirements by specifying a need for 215 Eurocopter Tigers for the army and a reduced purchase of "around" 160 NH Industries NH90s. Millon's comments, in an interview with the French financial daily *Les Echos* will further confuse the question of procurement of the Tiger and NH90.

The procurement numbers for both programmes were flung into doubt with publication in May of the Chirac Government's 1997-2002 *Loi de Programmation*, or defence budget, which called for a total of "around" 180 army helicopters to be in service by 2015.

This tallies with a recent French Senate defence and foreign-affairs committee report, which specified procurement of 120 Tigers and 68 army NH90s. Germany, which partners France in both programmes, has apparently still not been notified officially of any change in the original numbers.

Even if the higher figures stand, procurement of both machines will still be subject to budget constraints in future years, and is likely to be decided annually, according to industry sources.

Millon remains committed to a 30% reduction in production and procurement costs of both machines, a target which Eurocopter France says that it can meet "without difficulty".

Millon claims that agreement with Germany on production arrangements for the Tiger is "imminent". Eurocopter France says that a decision before December is "critically important", if delivery of two production helicopters to the French army by the year 2000 is to be achieved, which it says is necessary for the programme to have export credibility.

The *Loi de Programmation* calls for 25 orders for the HAP escort and fire-support version of the Tiger between 2000 and 2002, with first deliveries in 2003, while the HAC anti-tank version should, it says, be purchased "later". □



Saab intends to offer its 340 stablemate, the Saab 200, as an AEW aircraft

## Saab prepares 2000 AEW/C windtunnel tests

ANDRZEJ JEZIORSKI/LINKÖPING

SAAB AIRCRAFT is about to begin windtunnel tests of an airborne early-warning and control (AEWC) version of its high-speed Saab 2000 turboprop.

The aircraft offers better performance and superior command and control capability to that of the current Saab 340 AEW aircraft, the first of which has recently been delivered to the Swedish air force. The Saab 2000 will be equipped with the same Ericsson Erieye S-band active phased-array radar.

The Saab 2000 AEW/C can be configured to take up to five command and control workstations and, like the 340 variant, can be

quickly reconfigured to operate as a VIP/staff transport for up to 36 passengers. Saab forecasts that the aircraft will have a take-off run of 800m with a 750m landing run. Its maximum cruise speed at 25,000ft (7,600m) and 90% maximum take-off weight is expected to be 355kt (650km/h), and its endurance is predicted at 9.1h.

Pelle Otterström, Saab's vice-president for Government programmes, says that the aircraft is on the shortlist for South Korea's AEW requirement, alongside the Boeing 767 AWACS. Once an order is received, he believes that deliveries of the aircraft could begin within two years.

According to Ericsson, the Eri-

eye can be used to detect surface targets as far as the horizon, fighter-sized targets to about 350km (190nm), and missiles to about 150km. The radar's instrumented range is 450km.

The Swedish air force has ordered six Saab 340 AEWs, without the on-board command and control capability. These aircraft send radar data to a ground-based command and control station via a secure datalink, and have the military designation S 100B Argus.

The first of these aircraft was delivered by Saab for test and evaluation by the Swedish Defence Materiel Administration earlier this year. The remainder will be delivered by April 1999. □