

Freighter funding due soon

THE US EXIM bank is expected to release by the end of the year long-awaited funding for an initial batch of three Ilyushin Il-96T widebody freighters being acquired by Aeroflot.

The Pratt & Whitney PW2000-powered aircraft received US Federal Aviation Administration certification in June, but the aircraft have not been delivered as final details of the financing conditions are still being thrashed out. The Exim bank recently wrote to the Russian Government outlining its remaining concerns, say officials close to the project.

The Russian flag carrier is due to receive an additional 17 Il-96M passenger aircraft in batches once the funding package has been agreed.

The aircraft will probably be registered in Bermuda, alongside

10 Boeing 737-400s also being acquired by Aeroflot and financed by the Exim bank, according to Ilyushin head of foreign economic relations Valery Smirnov.

The Exim bank is financing the US content of the Il-96M/T, which includes Rockwell Collins avionics in addition to the P&W engines.

Smirnov claims that Ilyushin also has a "valid preliminary contract" with cargo carrier Volga-Dnepr, which is interested in ordering four Il-96Ts, to operate alongside its Antonov An-124s.

Meanwhile, flight testing of the Pratt & Whitney Canada PW127-powered Il-114-100 turboprop regional airliner continues, with Russian certification of the aircraft set for September, according to Smirnov. Several Russian airlines – including Aeroflot – intend to

operate the aircraft, he says, and South East Asian carriers are also being targeted as potential customers.

Russian manufacturer Tupolev, meanwhile, continues to attempt to find takers for the Tu-204 narrowbody twinjet among the cash-strapped airlines of Russia and the CIS. Moscow-based TransEuropean is operating two Perm PS-90-powered Tu-204-100s, while Vnukovo Airlines is taking five. Transaero has expressed interest in acquiring 10 aircraft, but has yet to make a firm commitment, according to Tupolev chief designer Yury Vorobjev.

Three Rolls-Royce RB211-535-powered Tu-204-120s, marketed by Sirocco Aerospace, have been delivered to Air Cairo in Egypt, but no additional customers have been signed. □

Mil, Kazan and Eurocopter sign Mi-38 deal

THE MVZ MIL design bureau, Kazan Helicopter Plant, Eurocopter and Euromil (a joint venture between Mil and Eurocopter) have signed two memoranda covering the development and production of the Mil Mi-38 multipurpose helicopter. Eurocopter will act as avionics integrator.

Kazan general manager Alexander Lavrentyev says the first Mi-38 fuselage has been shipped to Mil for structural load testing. The second fuselage will be tested in Kazan, and the third will become the first flying prototype.

Lavrentyev says Kazan, one of the most successful Russian aircraft industry enterprises, has invested about \$100 million of its own money in Mi-38 prototype development and parts manufacturing. The Mi-38's first flight is scheduled for late 2000.

The Mi-38 makes use of technology tested on the Mil Mi-28 attack helicopter, inheriting the latter's main rotor and transmission. The first composite main rotor blade produced by the Kazan plant using production manufacturing processes is being tested at Mil, and "the first results are successful", says Mil. By the end of this year, a flying testbed to evaluate the Mi-38's rotor system will be flown.

The Mil Mi-38 is intended to replace the large in-service fleet of Mi-8/Mi-17 medium helicopters, and to take over some of the tasks which are now carried out by ageing Mil Mi-6s. □

MiG 1.44 now scheduled to fly in September

UNLIKE ITS Sukhoi forward-swept wing counterpart the S-37 Berkut, the MAPO MiG 1.44 advanced fighter prototype failed to appear at the Moscow air show. After its first public appearance in January, the 1.44 remains in MAPO's hangar at the edge of the Zhukovsky airfield where it has been stored for four years, and shown only to occasional VIPs.

MAPO chief executive Nikolay Nikitin says: "Everybody understands that it [the 1.44] will never enter series production. We see it as an experimental aircraft to research some of the fifth-generation fighter technologies." Nikitin

says that the aircraft, conceived in 1983, cannot become a basis for a next generation Russian air force fighter to rival the Lockheed Martin/Boeing F-22 Raptor. The Russian equivalent to the F-22 may appear "somewhere around 2015", according to Nikitin.

The 1.44 technology demonstrator is scheduled to begin its experimental flight test programme of 27 or 28 flights in September.

The results of the test programme will determine whether the development of this particular prototype will continue, according to Nikitin. □



S-37 was on show in Moscow

Cessna and Dassault expect slow CIS sales

BUSINESS jet manufacturers Cessna Aircraft and Dassault Aviation expect the current trickle of sales to customers in Russia and the CIS to continue, but rule out any significant pick-up until the region's economies improve. The two were the only Western firms to exhibit aircraft at MAKS '99.

Cessna says it has sold six aircraft to "Russian interests" during the past six years, five of them Citation business jets, and predicts sales to continue at the rate of "one or two a year over the next couple of years".

The Wichita, Kansas-based company predicts, however, that the market's long-term potential is

"huge", particularly for its Caravan single-turboprop utility aircraft.

Dassault says that Russian and CIS customers have purchased around 15 pre-owned examples of its business jets, and that it has delivered four new Falcon 900Bs and one Falcon 50, as well as one Falcon 2000. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ MIG-31 UPGRADES

MAPO is to develop a prototype of an upgraded MiG-31 interceptor. Nikolay Nikitin, MAPO general director and general designer, says the decision to retrofit the upgrades to existing MiG-31s will be taken after a review of flight test results.