

India near to Russian AEW lease



The Indian navy has already flown the Su-27KUB from a simulated carrier deck in the Crimea

ALEXANDER VELOVICH/MOSCOW

RUSSIA and India are close to signing a deal for the lease of Beriev/MNIP A-50 airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft. The two are also near to concluding contracts for licence production of Sukhoi Su-30MK twin-seat multifunction fighters and equipment to update and equip a Russian aircraft carrier sold to the Indian navy.

A Russian delegation visited India in early October, when Col Gen Anatoly Kornukov, the Russian air force commander-in-chief, confirmed that the deals "are in the final stages of negotiations".

A member of the delegation says the Indian air force "may get an A-50 by the end of this year". Some Russian press reports also suggest that a lease of Tupolev Tu-22M3 Backfire long-range bombers to

the Indian air force may have been discussed. It is believed that Moscow is ready to offer the aircraft overseas. Purchase of Backfires would be a major escalation of the arms race in the region.

The deal for licence manufacture of the Su-30MK by Hindustan Aeronautics has been in negotiation for three years. Sukhoi announced a deal in 1996 to sell the strike aircraft to India and deliver-

ies have begun. Licence manufacture relates to a new batch.

A major contract for the modernisation of the *Admiral Gorskov* aircraft carrier and deliveries of naval fighters to the Indian navy – either MAPO MiG-29Ks or Sukhoi Su-33/27KUBs – is close to being signed. The contract is worth about \$1.5 billion.

India wants to decide this month on its carrier fighter for the *Gorskov*. Last month a high-ranking Indian air force pilot flew the Sukhoi Su-27KUB twin-seater, performing ramp-assisted take-offs and wire-arrested landings. The *Gorskov* is thought to be too small for the Su-27/33, however.

MAPO stresses that the MiG-29K has a flight-test proven multifunction weapons control system integrated with a wide variety of guided air-to-ground and anti-ship weapons, while the naval Su-33 remains a pure air defence fighter with limited attack capability. The Indian navy is reluctant to become the sole operator of the MiG-29K, however. □

EC tells tiltrotor bidders to merge

JULIAN MOXON/PARIS

THE EUROPEAN Commission's (EC) research directorate has rejected the two proposals for tiltrotor wing concepts under its Fifth Framework aeronautics research programme, demanding that Eurocopter and Agusta submissions are merged.

Eurocopter, leading a European consortium, had proposed its Eurotilt concept, while Agusta, leading a group which included merger partner GKN Westland, countered with a tilt-wing solution.

The rivals have been told by Brussels that their proposals were rejected because they competed "and the notion of added value for Europe went with the idea of a consensual solution...to have two parties fighting each other was seen as negative". An EC source says the two proposals were "niche con-

cepts" and competed with other technologies "which it was felt were more urgent to support".

The EC says member states "have given a clear signal" that the two advanced tiltrotor contenders should be given a second chance in mid-December, when industry will respond to a second call for tenders – but only on condition they submit a single proposal.

Eurocopter's head of research Philippe Galland says talks with Agusta on a common programme are "going well...we have a reasonable chance of success". He adds, however, that finding a common solution to two such different concepts is "difficult". He says several ideas for a compromise have been mooted, including one in which the outer parts of the wing are tilted.

The Europeans are struggling to catch up with US developments by Bell Boeing on the military V-22

tiltrotor and the Bell-led development of the BA609 civil tiltrotor, in which Agusta is the main partner.

The other three categories selected for funding cover an Airbus proposal on lightweight structures development, engine development work by a Rolls-Royce/Snecma team and air traffic control autonomous aircraft contenders. The names of the winners in the latter category have not been revealed as last minute negotiations are under way to merge two similar proposals. They have been given the green light for a four-year research programme, for which the EC will provide €245 million (\$256 million).

The categories for the second call for proposals for the Fifth Framework aeronautics programme, worth €200 million, are modular avionics, external noise and power-optimised aircraft. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ ROCKWELL WINS

Rockwell Collins has been selected over Honeywell to supply a new digital flight control system (DFCS), with Category IIIb automatic landing capability, for the Boeing Next Generation 737 family. Boeing's long-awaited move brings the aircraft into line with the Airbus A320 family, which already has full Cat IIIb automatic landing capability. The move may boost Boeing's efforts to market the aircraft in Europe, where sales have been disappointing. Rockwell Collins is to begin deliveries of the first DFCS to Boeing in mid-2002, with certification of the Cat IIIb capability in October 2002, and entry into service around January 2003.