

BAE considers Nimrod revival

CONTINUING delays over Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) plans to replace its Lockheed Martin P-3 Orions have led BAE Systems to consider re-opening its Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) assembly line if it mounts a successful bid for the programme. As a result, the UK's Defence Export Services Agency (DESO) sponsored the appearance of a Royal Air Force Nimrod at the show.

Japan has for years been planning to replace around 100 Kawasaki-built P-3s with an indigenous MPA, although the Japan Defence Agency revealed last year that it was also reviewing off-the-shelf aircraft. Initial plans

called for deliveries to start in 2008. BAE is updating 21 Nimrod MR2s to MRA4 standard with new wings, tail and engines as well as a Boeing-developed mission system. Despite delays to the refurbishment programme, the development work has reached a stage where it can be demonstrated to potential customers.

It is believed that BAE would need to build around 25 Nimrods to make re-opening the fuselage line - which closed nearly 30 years ago - affordable.

The JMSDF requires at least 50 aircraft. Japan originally specified a multi-purpose turbofan-powered aircraft, but has broadened its specification. It has also considered

using the MPA airframe as a replacement for the Kawasaki C-1 jet transports operated by the Japanese Air Self-Defence Force.

Boeing is believed to be offering an MPA based on an airliner equipped with a system developed from its Nimrod MRA4 work.

Robert Young, Lockheed Martin president Asia Pacific, says the company continues to talk with the JMSDF and Kawasaki about updated P-3s.

Meanwhile, Lockheed Martin will begin talks with Taiwan after the show to discuss the nation's long-standing requirement for anti-submarine warfare aircraft. The Taiwanese navy operates 32 elderly Grumman S-2T Turbo-

Trackers. The US company received permission to pass P-3 Orion data to Taiwan in December. But vice-president of business development Rick Hundley says that until discussions begin it will not be clear how many P-3s Taiwan can afford. Regardless of the cost, it is unlikely the Taiwanese will replace its S-2s on a one-for-one basis.

Taiwan has expressed an interest in used airframes with mission system upgrades, possibly on similar lines to the work Raytheon is carrying out on Australian and New Zealand P-3s. Airframe availability would be an issue for Taiwan, probably requiring the US Navy to retire P-3s. □

Vertical launch Mica variant revealed

MATRA BAe Dynamics has launched a short-range air-defence (SHORAD) system based on its Mica air-to-air missile.

Pitched as a cheap, low-risk system, the vertical launch (VL) Mica uses a Seawolf missile launcher, in service with the UK's Royal Navy. Launchers can be supplied in eight or 16 round blocks.

The weapon, announced at the show, will be offered in ship- and land-based systems and does not require a dedicated control system or sensor, relying instead on equipment available on board or within an army air-defence formation. Land-based systems can operate from fixed silos or can be vehicle mounted. The European company does not yet have a customer for the weapon.

The SHORAD missiles will be the same as the air-to-air versions, allowing the VL Mica to be guided with radar or imaging infrared seekers. This allows the system to be used in all weathers and in either command line-of-sight or fire-and-forget modes. Mica uses thrust-vectoring control, which allows vertical-launch firing as the control system can manoeuvre the missile from a vertical trajectory on to an intercept path. □

Taiwan speeds up military transport aircraft plans



CASA's stretched CN295 could be in contention for Taiwan procurement

TAIWAN IS accelerating plans to procure a light military transport aircraft. The programme suffered the latest of several delays last year as funding difficulties pushed the start of the procurement back to at least 2002.

Among the contenders, Lockheed Martin, with partner Alenia, is offering the C-27J upgrade of the Italian company's G222, which has battled with the CASA/IPTN CN235 for the 18-22 aircraft order for years.

The stretched C295 version available from the Spanish compa-

ny could also be a contender.

It is not clear why the transport aircraft procurement has been accelerated but Taiwan retired its elderly Fairchild C-119 Packets in late 1997, increasing utilisation of the Lockheed Martin C-130H Hercules fleet, which in turn has reduced its remaining life and increased maintenance costs.

Lockheed Martin Aeronautical Systems vice-president business development Rick Hundley confirms the requirement has "moved back to the front burner" and is again an active programme. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ GERMAN EC155s

The interior ministry of German state Baden-Wuerttemberg has ordered two Eurocopter EC155Bs for police duties. Equipment to be fitted to the pair includes a searchlight, weather radar, night vision goggle capable glass cockpit instrumentation. Delivery is due in March next year.

■ TRANSALL RETROFIT

Sextant has won a French air force order to replace global positioning systems on 65 Transall C-160Rs with the Topstar 100-2 GPS system. Deliveries start next year.

■ STANDARD CONTRACT

Standard Aero has won contracts for work on Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules. The first, from Lockheed Martin and worth around \$45 million, is for the overhaul of Rolls-Royce AE2100 turboprops fitted to Lockheed Martin C-130Js operated by the Royal Australian Air Force and US Air Force. The second, from the Swedish air force, is for the overhaul of Hercules propellers.