

# Ministry clarifies on Gorshkov deal

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 3.** Defence Ministry officials today cleared the confusion over an Indo-Russian naval deal saying that the Navy had only finalised the price for refitting the aircraft-carrier, Admiral Gorshkov, and purchasing a squadron of MiG series planes. Negotiations for other weapons systems and their fitment could take place when the ship was modernised for the Navy.

"There is enough time at hand because upgrading will take at least 52 months after signing the contract," said a senior officer.

The Indian Navy and the Russian Defence Ministry on Tuesday appeared to give different views of the Gorshkov deal.

The Navy said the aircraft-carrier's fitment had been finalised for Rs. 3,000 crores and Government approval was awaited. A few hours later, PTI reported from Moscow that the Russian Defence Ministry had

denied this contention. Three issues remained unresolved — the final amount of contract, the supply of non-Russian weapon systems for fitment and their integration with the ship's systems.

Senior officers here said the Navy was keen on acquiring the aircraft carrier. It had indicated its sincerity by agreeing on the price of Rs. 3,000 crores for refitment and modernisation.

The price for fighter jets for the carrier had also been agreed upon. But it should not be rushed into finalising prices for other systems such as missiles because the "ship will not come overnight." The Navy is currently evaluating the missiles systems for close protection for the carrier from enemy aircraft and does not want to be coerced into taking a hasty decision.

The Navy is weighing missile systems from three countries — Russia, Israel and France — and the contract for guns, besides the missile systems, should be finalised soon. "We will get the

best systems and slap them (on the ship) in one year," said a senior official.

The Chief of the Naval Staff, Madhvendra Singh, had spoken enthusiastically about the MiG-29K fighters to be housed on the aircraft-carrier and this is cited as seriousness of intent. Admiral Gorshkov will be fitted with a 14 degree ski jump and the absence of a catapult will be compensated by planes fitted with engines with a greater thrust to take off from the short runway.

The RD-33 MK engines the Russians have agreed to supply have modified air intake for greater power and strengthened turbine blades for higher overhauling time.

The Navy has also negotiated for additional fuel tanks, provision for mid-air refuelling and nine external weapon source carriers.

Despite the disappointment caused by the Russian Ministry's denial, naval officers are

enthusiastic about the ship which has been examined by four naval delegations. Officials, citing a report by the last team led by M.J. Singh, said that contrary to media reports, there was no major fire nor could the ship be described as partially gutted.

Admiral Singh had reported that a smaller boiler tube burst due to crew error and after repairs, the ship had reportedly participated in the Russia Day celebration in 1995 and served with the Russian Northern Fleet till a year later.

The hull is reported to be in good health and the rest of the systems will be new. "The ship will be 65 per cent new," he had observed.

Senior officers revealed that new boilers would be diesel fired unlike the less efficient boilers fired by furnace oil. After refurbishment, the 44,500-tonne ship will have a top speed of 30 knots per hour, it was stated.

# 20 years to buy 20-year Gorshkov

SUJANDUTTA

**New Delhi, Dec. 2:** India has clinched a deal with Russia to buy the aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov for Rs 3,000 crore, the chief of naval staff, Admiral Madhvendra Singh, said today.

The two countries have been negotiating the Gorshkov for close to two decades.

The Gorshkov would be packaged into a set of transactions that would involve the sale of at least a squadron of MiG29K fighter aircraft (to be based on the Gorshkov), four TU-22 nuclear-capable long-range maritime "backfire bombers", as well as two Akula-class nuclear submarines.

The navy chief would "neither confirm nor deny" the deal on the nuclear submarines.

"The Gorshkov would give us

a weapons platform that is far, far more capable. It is a power-projection carrier and, with the navy's increasing responsibilities, it can project power from the Gulf of Hormuz to the Straits of Malacca," the navy chief claimed.

It is likely that the navy will order two more squadrons of the MiG29K apart from one to be based on the carrier. The Russians had agreed to freeze the price of the MiG29K for India for about four years.

Official figures are not being put on the cost of all the purchases woven into the deal for the Gorshkov which would be the largest vessel in the navy.

The navy chief claimed "at less than Rs 3,000 crore we have got a very good price". Gorshkov is a 20-year-old floating airbase that was decommissioned by the

Russian navy years ago. Singh said the hull of the ship was in "excellent shape and had been built to withstand air attacks".

The ship would take four-and-a-half years to be delivered after the contract is signed, which should happen by March 2004.

"The Gorshkov with the MiG29K will put us in a totally different league. The Gorshkov is 15 to 20 years old but the life of a carrier is 40 years. It will be 60 to 70 per cent new when delivered to us with new weapons systems and there is nothing like the MiG29K today," the navy chief said.

The Russian defence minister, Sergei Ivanov, is expected in Delhi later this month and a formal agreement is likely to be signed.

Critics — and there have

been several former naval officers — have often alleged that India was negotiating "floating junk". However, the navy chief said that such criticism was unwarranted.

The MiG29K are short-take-off and arrested-recovery aircraft that will use a 14-degree ski jump on the Gorshkov to be airborne even when the carrier does its maximum speed of 30 knots.

Though the navy chief did not state it, it has been known that the sale of the Gorshkov has been conditional on India buying other major military equipment. These have not been detailed but India and Russia have been negotiating backfire bombers, nuclear submarines, Kamov-28 and Kamov-31 anti-submarine and early-warning helicopters and more warships.

# \$2-b submarine deal in offing

By Rajat Pandit  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** If you thought the \$1.77-billion (Rs 8,000-crore) British Hawk advanced jet trainer (AJT) deal cleared in September was staggering, think again. An even bigger defence contract is now on the anvil: the \$2-billion French Scorpene submarine project.

After several months of the Scorpene file being tossed between the defence and the finance ministries, with even the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) coming into the picture, the cabinet committee on security (CCS) is now likely to clear it soon.

"It was in June 2001 that India and France signed a framework agreement on the production of Scorpene submarines...but nobody wanted to take a decision because there were some allegations

against a French company involved in the project," said a top-level source.

"The cabinet note is now being reprocessed after the CVC left it to the defence ministry to take a decision...it will be submitted to the CCS soon," he added.

Mazagaon Docks Limited (MDL) is already salivating since the project involves the construction of at least six Scorpene submarines at its facilities in Mumbai.

"Only the technology and detailed submarine design will be obtained from French consortium DCN-Thales. Apart from submarine-building experience, MDL will not have to bother about any fresh order for the next 10 years," a source said.

One interesting aspect is that the design of the diesel-electric Scorpene allows for the installation of a small nuclear reactor in the hull,

which will meet the Navy's nuclear aspirations.

India, incidentally, is not too happy at DCN also being behind Pakistan's acquisition of Agosta-90B submarines armed with Harpoon and Exocet missiles. The French, however, claim the Scorpene are a generation ahead of the Agosta submarines.

Defence officials, in turn, only say the Scorpene—which can undertake anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, special and intelligence gathering operations—meet the Navy's operational requirements.

The Scorpene can launch a variety of 21-inch weapons, including wire-guided torpedoes and pop-up anti-ship missiles.

Their "Mesma air-independent propulsion system" enables them to operate under water for days without surfacing.

## POLITICS AND DEFENCE

9/11 PM breaks a barrier 5/8

**A**TAL Behari Vajpayee displayed some initiative last week when he made light of a traditional *lakshman rekha* by talking some politics — including electoral prospects — when addressing the most senior of our military officers at the Combined Commanders Conference. The breakthrough is welcome in the sense that there is a critical political underpinning to security policy and in the absence of an authentic national security doctrine document not to discuss that element with key instrument of the policy's implementation was to leave things somewhat incomplete. Of course there will always be need to guard against discussions of that nature being seen as attempts to influence the forces into supporting a specific political philosophy, or party. There is no reason to suspect any such low motives in the Prime Minister's assertion that a tough Pakistan policy was in no way essential to boosting the electoral prospects of the BJP-led NDA in the coming assembly polls, and the parliamentary election scheduled next year. Vajpayee was actually addressing more than one audience. He was re-assuring the international community of the sincerity of his recent peace initiatives, and letting it know that India would not be easily derailed by Pakistani pettiness — as seen in some counter-proposals. Speaking peace to military men is a transparent display of a commitment to it. It is tempting to take a gung-ho line when addressing those in the profession of arms.

Yet the in-house significance of those remarks to the Commanders is not to be lost. To them too the Prime Minister was doing some re-assuring. That the manner in which the government dealt with Pakistan, and military action can never be ruled out of the equation, was not linked with domestic political compulsions. For the forces must always feel confident that when ordered to "go over the top" they are doing so in furtherance of genuine national interest, not the political interests of the party that happens to be in power at that time. Why did the Prime Minister deem it necessary to clear any possible doubts? Had he received feedback about some misgivings in military circles? Or was he launching a pre-emptive strike against some of the lesser lights of the BJP-NDA who have tried to match Pakistan's hate-India campaign? After all they had exploited Kargil to the hilt in the 1999 elections. Which had not gone down too well with the uniformed community.

# Govt seals \$1-bn Phalcon deal

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 10 OCTOBER

**I**N a development which, once it reaches its logical conclusion, is certain to give the military might a quantum leap over Pakistan, the Vajpayee government signed a \$1-billion dollar deal with Israel and Russia for the manufacture of Phalcon Airborne Early Warning and Control System (Awacs) for the Indian Air Force.

The clearance of the deal earlier this year by the US, which has a veto power because it supplies major components to the Israel-built radar, had Pakistan rushing to the Bush administration, protesting against the proposed deal, which, when fulfilled, would tilt the balance of military power definitively in India's favour.

The radars would be placed atop IL-76 transport aircraft. Hence, the signing of the trilateral agreement involving Russia, Israel and India. The deal was signed here on Friday morning by defence secretary Ajay Prasad and Major General Yasi Ben Hanan, head of Sibat, the Israeli defence ministry's licensing agency for Phalcon, it was official-

ly announced on Friday.

The Russians were represented by Mikhail Denisov, the first deputy chairman of the state committee for military-technical cooperation. India will become the first country in the world after Israel to go in for IL-76 Phalcon Awacs system, with the US using the Boeing platform to mount its own Hawk-eye Airborne System.

India will purchase three Phalcon radars at an estimated cost of \$1 billion. Though no time-frame for their arrival has been set, the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal S. Krishnaswamy, had recently expressed confidence that the IAF would receive the first of the Awacs by the end of 2006.

Although defence ministry officials were tight-lipped about the deal, highly-placed government sources said the acquisition of Awacs would give India the capability of detecting aerial threats from distances ranging from 800-2,000 km. The memorandum of principles and order of cooperation broadly define the responsibilities of the three parties in the development of the Awacs aircraft for the IAF.

Military purchases come out of Tehelka-imposed freeze with a bang

# Hawk after many lives & 21 years

SUJAN DUTTA

New Delhi, Sept. 3: Twenty-one years after the proposal was made, the Centre today cleared the import of advanced jet trainers for the Indian Air Force.

The decision to acquire the British Hawk advanced jet trainer (AJT) was taken alongside another to buy five snazzy executive jets configured for very important persons.

Since 1990 — almost half the time it has taken the government to pick the Hawk — the IAF has lost 230 pilots in crashes. The majority of these crashes has been put down to errors made by pilots for whom a crucial element in their training was missing.

Today's decisions on big-ticket military acquisitions, which also include systems for the army, signal the beginning of purchases of about Rs 10,000 crore. It also signals that the ennui which had gripped the defence establishment after the Tehelka revelations of alleged kickbacks has been shaken off by George Fernandes, despite doubts if he would risk a decision in the months leading up to elections.

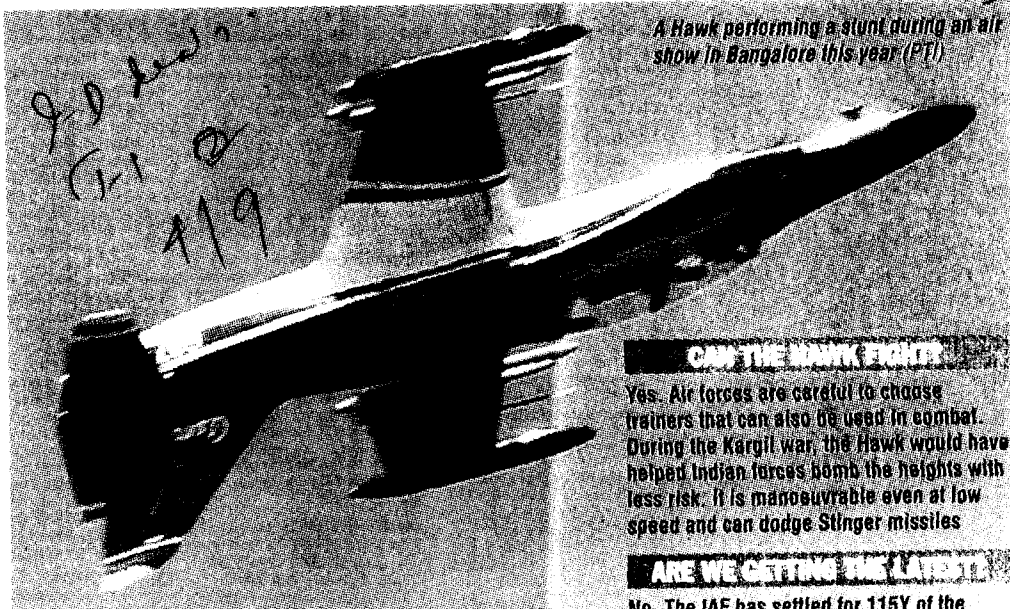
Two more large purchases are in the pipeline — the aircraft carrier *Gorshkov* (from Russia),

the *Phalcon* airborne early warning system (from Israel) and *Scorpene* submarines (Franco-Spanish).

The AJT deal, worth over Rs 6,000 crore (£794 million plus), will resuscitate British Aerospace's ailing manufacturing line. The UK firm has been in bitter competition for the order ever since the IAF shortlisted the AJT when a committee chaired by then Air Marshal Denis Anthony La Fontaine first proposed its induction in 1982.

But the credit for acquiring the Hawk will finally go to the current chief of air staff, Air Chief Marshal S. Krishnaswamy, who has been more transparent than his predecessors on the ageing MiG-21 aircraft that makes up a bulk of the fighter fleet. The AJT will fill a crucial gap in the training of pilots for many of whom the jump from the subsonic Kiran aircraft to the supersonic MiG-21s has been a tremendous test of human endurance.

The total package will cost the exchequer a little over Rs 8,000 crore, making it one of the single-largest military acquisitions in Indian military history. This includes the cost of training IAF pilots on the AJT in the UK before deliveries of the aircraft begin and the setting up



A Hawk performing a stunt during an air show in Bangalore this year (PTI)

## HOW GOOD IS THE HAWK?

The single-engined, low-winged aircraft is unremarkable in looks by modern standards, but it is time-tested

## WHY DO WE NEED IT?

India badly needs trainer jets. Pilots now go straight from a basic low-speed jet to ageing Russian MiG-21 fighters, dubbed "flying coffins"

Yes. Air forces are careful to choose trainers that can also be used in combat. During the Kargil war, the Hawk would have helped Indian forces bomb the heights with less risk. It is manoeuvrable even at low speed and can dodge Stinger missiles

## ARE WE GETTING THE BEST?

No. The IAF has settled for 115Y of the nineties. But the basic design of 1976 has not changed. Mainly, the navigational system has been altered over the years

## WHO MAKES THE HAWK?

BAe Systems, which makes the Hawk. The UK company's market was drying up and its production line faced a closure threat

of infrastructure for licensed production.

"We expect an inter-governmental agreement to be signed. We will seek a guarantee for lifetime support," defence secretary Ajay Prasad said.

"The British Hawk is in use in 17 countries, including the UK, the US Navy, Kenya, South Korea, Malaysia, Australia and South Africa."

The IAF has settled for the Hawk variant numbered 115Y which is not the latest but one it feels suits its needs.

Even the structuring and schedule of the AJT deal was worked out more than a decade ago. The IAF will buy 24 Hawks "off the shelf" or in "fly-away" condition and the balance 42 will be rolled out by the public sector

Hindustan Aeronautics under licence from British Aerospace. The deliveries of all 66 AJTs will take six years from the date on which they are contracted.

Announcing the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security, Prasad said the delivery of the aircraft will begin 35 months after the contract is signed.

The competition for the AJT deal saw British Aerospace pitted, at first, against Dassault Aviation's Alphajet. But the European manufacturer's production line was wound up. In between, the Russians with their MiG-AT on the drawing board, the Italians with the Aeromachhi and even the Brazilians fought hard.

Till the very end, the bitterest competition was between Brit-

ish Aerospace and the Czech-American Aero Vodochody's L-159B. A prototype of the L-159B was evaluated but the air force settled for the Hawk.

As one IAF officer put it: "It was about making a choice between the time-tested and the state-of-the-art." The Hawk, with a long history of service in several air forces, was selected finally because the Royal Air Force placed an order for the aircraft in July.

Having met what has been a crying need for the IAF, the Cabinet Committee on Security also moved to guarantee more luxury and greater security to the most powerful of the land. It approved a Rs 727-crore deal to acquire five executive jets for VIPs from Brazil's Embraer.

# CVC talks of two deals: Centre

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**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
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**T**WO contracts of ammunition purchase worth Rs 554 crore from Russia during Operation Vijay in Kargil figure in the classified Central Vigilance Commission's report on defence deals between 1989-1999. The procurement process in these deals was started before the 1999 limited war and the defence ministry, according to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), used Op Vijay to push the purchases.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj gave the green light when she told the Lok Sabha on Tuesday that the CVC report had in fact examined two deals that took place during Operation Vijay. The turnaround came

after the Government earlier claimed that the CVC report did not deal with Op Vijay purchases and thus there was no need for the Defence Ministry to share it with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Sushma cryptically referred to these deals as "4.2 and 4.7" but did not elaborate further.

The "4.2" deal refers to the purchase of 1,000 rounds of Krasnapol - terminally guided ammunition and 10 laser designators for the Army from KBP Tula, Russia, at the cost of Rs 151 crore. The "4.7" deal refers to purchase of various types of ammunition (12.7 mm cartridges, 125 mm and 130 mm rounds) worth Rs 402.76 crore from RVZ, Russia.

However, it is learnt that the CVC did not investigate these deals as it told the Defence Ministry to make the relevant files available only after CAG and PAC had examined the issue. Interestingly, two years ago when the Defence Ministry wanted to take action against public figures figuring in the report, it wrote to the CVC asking for evidence on record. But then Chief Vigilance Commissioner N. Vittal apparently wrote back to the

**While the Govt had earlier claimed that the CVC report didn't deal with Op Vijay purchases so there was no need for the Defence Ministry to share it with PAC, Sushma mentions 2 deals — 4.2 and 4.7**

Ministry saying that there was "pre-ponderance of probability" that pointed to hanky-panky in the arms purchases. It is another matter that Krasnapol also figured in the Tehelka controversy.

The CAG report on Krasnapol purchase indicates that the Army pushed the deal citing requirements in Kargil despite the fact that the guided shells suffered from limitations regarding range, angle and precision in high altitude areas. The shells were found to be incompatible with the 155 mm Bofors guns in respect of certain charges and the effectiveness of the laser designators were found to be restricted in certain circumstances.

Even the Army Headquarters, according to the report, stated Krasnapol shells (the deal was signed in February, 2000) would be able to

engage only 25 to 30 per cent of targets in the Kargil sector. The report says: "It appears that Op Vijay was but an excuse for pushing through procurement that otherwise may not have qualified."

In the other ammunition purchase deal, CAG found that the shelf-life of four types of ammunition worth Rs 74.59 crore had already expired at the time of contract. The deal worth Rs 402 crore was signed by the Government in August and December 1999.

The report says: "Contrary to its own guidelines regarding shelf life, the Director General of Quality Assurance (DGQA), after conducting tests in Feb 2000, declared 30,000 rounds of 130 mm serviceable upto April 2003, irrespective of the year of production ranging from 1976 to 1991."

# Indo-US defence deals indicate improved ties

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 9

EARLY next year as pilots from the Indian and US Air Force swap cockpits they will be notching a first. For this will be the first time in decades when pilots of both countries will participate in joint exercises.

As military-to-military cooperation between the two, perceived as "natural allies" progresses, it is the behind-the-scenes negotiations on transfer of sensitive military equipment that is becoming the yardstick for a definitive growth in defence and strategic relations between New Delhi and Washington.

According to sources, New Delhi has already sent across queries for the costs of the Orion maritime surveillance aircraft. Washington, which is processing the possible sale of the aircraft to the Indian Navy, is expected to get back to New Delhi on clearing the deal this summer.

Meanwhile, it is understood that discussions on a na-

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tional missile defence system is gathering ground with New Delhi projecting to Washington that a missile defence system will add stability to the region as India has a nuclear doctrine based on a No-First-Use policy.

Sources say, the visit of a senior official from the US Department of Defence in January this year helped in understanding New Delhi's viewpoint. Also, Washington has invited a high level Indian delegation to attend a conference on ballistic missile defence this month in Japan.

Observers say the invitation is significant and indicates a better understanding of New

Delhi's strategic interests. A similar invitation earlier to observe a missile defence exercise in the US also serves as a case in point, say sources.

The US has also received a request from New Delhi for the Patriot missile defence system, as reported in *The Indian Express* earlier. With the Israeli-built Phalcon radar being cleared by the US, it is unlikely that the sale of the system will face any fresh hurdles when Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf travels to Camp David to hold discussions with President George Bush.

A major area of discontent in the Indian security establishment is Washington's bifurcation of India's strategic interests. According to South Block sources, Washington tends to look at India through their Pacific Command while Pakistan and West Asia, which is India's primary strategic concern, comes under the Central Command. However, Washington has taken note of these concerns and will address the issue soon.



