

The Times of India, 2 April 2005

IAF claims accident rate has declined

NEW DELHI: Under constant fire for an unusually high number of aircraft crashes, the IAF came out in full force on Friday to affirm that the accident rate had in fact decreased over the years. While the IAF's flight safety record may not be enviable yet, there has been a continuous decline in accident rates, proclaimed director-general (inspection and safety) Air Marshal P S Ahluwalia on Friday, armed with a plethora of statistics. From a high of 2.04 accidents per 10,000 hours of flying in the 1970s, the rate has been reduced to 0.87 in the current decade. "And the IAF certainly does not blame pilots killed in the accidents. There have been 174 fatalities since 1970-71 but not a single court of inquiry has held any pilot blameworthy," he said. This, incidentally, comes soon after IAF chief Air Chief Marshal S P Tyagi wrote to Kavita Gadgil that her son, who was killed in a MiG-21 crash in 2001, was not to be blamed for the mishap. Though Air Marshal Ahluwalia did not disclose actual figures due to "security reasons", calculations show there have been at least 600 crashes in the IAF since 1970-71. These include a staggering loss of 325 MiG-21s in the period.

The Times of India, 2 April 2005

MiG-21s will fly till 2016: IAF (JOSY JOSEPH)

One of world's most-built jet, MiG-21 was born in mid-50s out of Russia's post-World war II ambitions in a divided world. The small, agile, stylish fighter soon crowded skies of Europe, Africa, Asia and Central America. In 1963 the first batch of MiG-21s entered Indian Air Force, as part of a strategy to take on Pakistan's Starfighters from the United States and to meet the challenges from China. Till date some 13,000 of them have built in Russia and in many countries like India under licence, and in countries like China without it. Over the past few years, the MiG-21 has been in the news for crashes rather than its combat ability. Even though India has been looking for a replacement, the IAF reiterated that the aircraft will continue to fly with the force till at least 2016.

The Indian Express, 2 April 2005

Do F-16s have an edge over French Mirages? (SHIV AROOR)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 1: Does the American F-16 fighter have a better safety track record than the French Mirage-2000? The Indian Air Force certainly doesn't think so. In a presentation on military flight safety this morning, a senior IAF officer displayed data which indicated that the Mirage-2000H fighters operated by the IAF were the least prone to crashes by human error compared to Mirage-2000s in other countries and US Air Force F-16 jets. The Mirage-2000 and F-16 are among four fighters that will bid for a 126 aircraft tender later this year. A lower frequency of crashes due to human error would broadly, though not always, indicate a fighter that is simpler to operate in the air.

The Times of India, 3 April 2005

F-16s: India vies for bigger pie (RAJAT PANDIT & INDRANI BAGCHI)

NEW DELHI: Hard-nosed geo-political considerations will determine whether India will go for the US offer of F-16 fighter aircraft to augment its combat fleet. This has been decided in the highest circles of the Indian government, say top-level sources. The guiding principle, incidentally, was enunciated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh himself when he addressed the top brass of the armed forces at their last joint conference. "As our defence purchases are large and substantial, we must leverage them to serve the largest political and diplomatic ends," he had said. This was then quantified by defence minister Pranab Mukherjee when he promised to look into the US offer of F-16s and F/A-18s, provided they served India's strategic interests. This, despite the strong signals from the IAF, which has made its preference for the French Mirage-2000-V fighters quite apparent. The IAF, of course, is in the market for 126 multi-role combat aircraft in a deal which could be worth a whopping \$5 billion.

The Indian Express, 4 April 2005

IAF finds faults in MiG, but says safe for pilots (SHIV AROOR)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 3: With engine component problems behind it, the Air Force has now found another major flaw in the MiG-27M ground attack fighter, and gone back to its Russian contractors RAC-MiG for help. However, it has debunked fears that the fault puts pilots' lives in danger. The Russian firm recently assisted the IAF in resolving design flaws which had led to cracks on the engine's 'fourth stage disc', a component of the turbine engine. Now, the IAF has found flaws in the more critical 'first stage disc' of the MiG-27s R-29B-300 engine, though it said it was completely safe for the aircraft's pilots to fly while the fault was being looked into. Interestingly, R-29 engine's first stage compressor disc appears as one of the main causes of MiG engine failures in the report submitted by the A.P.J. Abdul Kalam committee on flight safety in 1997. Hence, resolving faults with the R-29's first stage disc appear to be in consonance with Kalam's recommendations. The IAF currently has seven operational MiG-27 squadrons, including one each in Kalaikunda and Hashimara in West Bengal. A deal was signed with the Soviet government in the early 1980s for 165 MiG-27s. In 2003, a major upgrade programme was chalked out, which would beef up the MiG-27s with systems that included an upgraded electronic warfare

suite, a mid-air refuelling probe and advanced counter-measures capabilities. Since 1998, 27 MiG-27s have crashed, the last one on November 5 last year.

The Times of India, 4 April 2005

F-16: Air Force to be heard (RAJAT PANDIT & INDRANI BAGCHI)

NEW DELHI: The Indian government has decided that only geo-political considerations as well as the Indian Air Force's views would determine whether the country will go for the US offer of F-16 fighter aircraft. As a matter of fact, it has, heeding the assessment of Air Headquarters, virtually decided against buying F-18s. The Air Force brass found the aircraft to be on the heavier side and not quite in step with their requirements. The sensitivity towards Air Headquarters' viewpoint came across clearly when Pranab Mukherjee discussed the American offer with US ambassador David Mulford in what marked a significant high-level engagement between the two sides since F-16s were put on the table. Sources say that the defence minister had sought a specific response to the Air Force's concerns about availability of spares, as well as servicing and overhauling of F-16s if India were to show interest in these.

The News, 5 April 2005

The F-16 jet syndrome (Tariq Butt)

ISLAMABAD: The F-16 jet fighters that Pakistan would get from the United States would considerably beef up its air power. The number of these F-16s is yet to be firmed up. Pakistani officials have not explained the quid pro quo, if any, for the US announcement to sell F-16s to Pakistan, which was undoubtedly music to Pakistanis' ears. However, its timing was significant. It came a couple of days after President General Pervez Musharraf declared in an interview to a newly launched satellite television channel that Pakistan was sending centrifuges to Vienna for inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as part of the latter's continuing probe into Iran's nuclear issue. The president made the important announcement days after US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice paid a visit to Pakistan. After her departure from Islamabad, US Ambassador to Islamabad Crocker said the F-16 issue was not discussed during her talks with Pakistani leaders and that the United States was not supplying these aircraft to Pakistan.

The Daily Times, 5 April 2005

IAF says it's not interested in US F-16s or F-18s (Iftikhar Gilani)

NEW DELHI: The Indian Air Force (IAF) is not interested in American F-16 or F-18 aircraft as they are prone to human error-related accidents, said sources citing Air Marshal PS Ahluwalia. Sources said that Ahluwalia, director general of Inspection and Air Safety, gave a presentation to the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), where he showed that human error-related accidents in the F-16s had occurred more frequently than in Mirage 2000s. It was this presentation that clinched the committee's decision to clear purchase of 12 Mirage-2000-Vs. The committee was also told that the IAF was finding difficulties in managing the 20 different types of aircraft and would not like to add new makes of aircraft that would complicate the inventory further. However, Ahluwalia also said the IAF would not like to depend on a single supplier. "It may not be prudent to put all our eggs in one basket, but it would reduce the efforts in terms of maintenance practices by opting for a familiar supplier," said the air marshal hinting that not only the US firm Lockheed Martin's F-16s and F-18s are not in the reckoning but even Sweden's SAAB would not be able to sell its Gripen to India.

The Tribune, 5 April 2005

IAF pilots to be inducted in US Hall of Fame

New Delhi, April 4: The number of joint exercises which the Indian Air Force (IAF) has had with the US Air Force seems to have finally brought recognition for the capabilities of force's pilots. For the first time in the history of the country's flying arm, two of its pilots have been chosen for an award celebrating lasting contributions to the advancement of aerospace and applying aviation to the betterment of humankind. A press note issued by the IAF here today said Wing Commander S.K. Sharma and Flt Lieut A.B. Dhanake will receive the Laureates Trophy at the Smithsonian National Air Space Museum in Washington tomorrow and be inducted in the Smithsonian's Hall of Fame. Wing Commander Sharma and Flying Lieutenant Dhanake rescued three critically injured mountaineers from a world record height of 23,260 feet in May last year for which they were awarded the peacetime gallantry award 'Kirti Chakra' on the Republic Day this year.

The Tribune, 5 April 2005

Masand gets rank of Air Marshal

New Delhi, April 4: Air Vice-Marshal Harish Masand, who was denied promotion allegedly due to his differences with former Air chief S. Krishnaswamy in 2003, today finally got justice as the Supreme Court put its seal of approval on his promotion to the rank of Air Marshal against a specially created post after the court's intervention. After Solicitor General G.E. Vahanvati told a Bench of Mr Justice Y.K. Sabharwal and Mr Justice P.P. Naolekar

that the Prime Minister had given his approval to a specially-created "supernumerary" post to accommodate Air Marshal Masand, the court put its seal of approval in an interim order on his reinduction in the Air Force for a period of two years that would expire on January 31, 2006. Air Marshal Masand had retired on January 31 last year after his promotion claim was rejected by a Special Promotion Board, headed by the then Air chief Krishnaswamy in February 2003 by reducing his board assessment marks after making a change of the marking scheme. On being promoted, he was entitled to two years more service.

The Hindu, 5 April 2005

Bill to prohibit sale of F-16s to Pakistan (Sridhar Krishnaswami)

WASHINGTON, APRIL 4: The Democratic Co-Chair of the Congressional caucus on India and Indian Americans, Gary Ackerman, has announced legislation that would prohibit the sale of F-16 jets to Pakistan and all other military assistance unless Islamabad provided the United States Government access to nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan. "It is incomprehensible that we would provide sophisticated military equipment to Pakistan when its President, Pervez Musharraf, refuses to let us interview A.Q. Khan," Mr. Ackerman said. "After all, Khan is only the world's biggest individual proliferator of nuclear technology to two countries of President Bush's evil axis and he tried to sell to the third," the law maker from New York said. "If they couldn't control their own nuke programme, how would you expect them to safeguard our `stuff?'" Mr. Ackerman asked. The Ackerman Bill does allow for assistance to Pakistan to encourage continued cooperation on counter-narcotics, anti-terrorism as well as peacekeeping. The measure also allows military to military contact programmes. The senior Democrat in the House of Representatives expects to introduce the legislation this week when Congress reconvenes from its Easter recess.

The Indian Express, 7 April 2005

IAF pilots to fly F16s in joint air exercise (SHIV AROOR)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 6: The IAF's chance to reconfigure itself for Pakistan's impending acquisition of F-16s is at hand. In November, the US Air Force will fly a dozen F-16 fighters from the latest Block 50 - the same being sold to Islamabad - for a progressive joint air exercise with IAF fighters over a refurbished Kalaikunda (West Bengal) air base. In the Indo-US air exercises held in February last year in Gwalior, USAF had brought F-15 Eagles, though IAF was keen on F-16s. This time, with F-16s formally on offer to India, Pentagon has decided it's no longer strategically necessary to keep IAF pilots away from USAF F-16s. The USAF will also bring a pair of Boeing KC-135 Stratotankers for mid-flight refuelling, though IAF is understood to have communicated its interest in manoeuvring with American AWACS aircraft, most likely the Boeing-Northrop E-3 AWACS. The rationale: IAF wants to clock as many flying hours as it can possibly get with AWACS before the three Phalcon AWACS planes begin arriving from Israel in 2007. The Force will field Su-30MKIs, Mirage-2000Hs, MiG-21 Bisons and MiG-27M ground strike jets for the November Cope India exercises. Sources said Pentagon's confirmation that F-16s will be participating and the IAF's keenness on flying with American AWACS were communicated between March 7-10 in Hawaii at a meeting of the Executive Steering Group under the Indo-US Defence Policy Group (DPG), attended by the IAF's vice-chief Air Marshal S.K. Malik.

The Tribune, 7 April 2005

Who is afraid of F-16s?: India can strike a bargain with US (G. Parthasarathy)

The efficacy and lethality of F-16 aircraft seem to have assumed larger than life and even mythical dimensions in public thinking both in India and Pakistan. To put matters in perspective, it needs to be pointed out that there are some 4000 F-16 aircraft deployed by the United States and its partners across the world, with roughly half of these deployed by the USAF. The F-16 is regarded as highly potent primarily because it has been used by the Americans and Israelis against their adversaries who are far weaker and lack modern day early warning systems and effective air defence and electronic warfare capabilities. There was naturally concern in India when the Reagan Administration announced in 1981 that it would be supplying 40 F-16s to Pakistan in order to enhance Pakistani capabilities and "confidence", following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Our concern then was understandable. Neither did we have any comparable aircraft, nor was the Soviet Union then in a position to supply us an aircraft with matching capabilities. In these circumstances Indira Gandhi decided to acquire 40 Mirage 2000 aircraft from France. These aircraft were seen as being comparable in some ways to the F-16. But before the end of the decade the IAF was in a position to meet any challenge posed by the F-16s with the acquisition of MIG-29 interceptors from the Soviet Union.

The Tribune, 7 April 2005

Indo-US Air Force exercises in November

New Delhi, April 6: The second series of the joint fighter aircraft exercises with the US Air Force will be held in November with the frontline Sukhoi, Mirage 2000 and upgraded MiG Bisons participating from the Indian Air Force. This time again, pilots of the two air forces would match their skills in close range as well as beyond visual

range combats over the Kalikunda airbase in West Bengal. In their first test of wits, the Indian pilots had got the better of their US counterparts in Gwalior last year. According to reports received here, eight to 12 US F-16s would be taking part in the exercise.

The Daily Times, 8 April 2005

US nowhere near selling F-16s to India, says Rice

LAHORE: The US is "nowhere near selling" or even co-producing F-16 fighter aircraft with India, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told journalists. Asked about possible co-production of fighter jets in India, she said, "No, at this point all we're talking about is tendering. The Indians have asked for information about our high-performance aircraft." She added that negotiations did not include types of arrangements for kinds of production. Rice said, "All that's been asked for, so far, is a request for information on can we supply, are we willing to bid. It's really even, are we willing to bid on high-performance aircraft to India."

The Daily Times, 8 April 2005

IAF to analyse F-16s before Pakistan acquires aircraft (Iftikhar Gilani)

NEW DELHI: In a rare opportunity, the Indian Air Force (IAF) will be able to analyse and learn everything about the US F-16 fighter aircraft even before Pakistan acquires them. Sources in the Defence Ministry said the United States had decided to field its F-16s fleet in the next joint exercises with India to be held in Kalaikunda in West Bengal in November. Sources said the IAF would also get a chance to examine the upgraded Mirage-2000-V aircrafts when it holds exercises with the French Air Force in June. France has already offered to transfer Mirage-2000-V technology to India. However, sources added that India was pressing France to hold the exercises in India as it would enable the IAF to closely study the Mirage's efficiency in Indian conditions. Unlike with F-16s, India already has substantial experience with Mirages that are part of its warplanes fleet.

The Hindu, 9 April 2005

U.S. to bring F-16s for joint exercise

NEW DELHI, APRIL 8: The U.S. Air Force will display, for the first time in India, its frontline assets, including F-16 fighters and airborne warning and control systems (AWACS), which give deep insight into enemy territory. "This will be the largest of the 20 joint military exercises carried out by the three services and is more graduated and complex," said a U.S. Embassy official. The F-16s are being brought following a request by the Indian Air Force to upgrade the complement of fighters. The first-ever India-U.S. fighter exercises last year had seen the deployment of F-15-C fighters. The U.S. fighters will be matched by the IAF's frontline fighters, including Sukhoi-30, Mirage-2000, MiG-27 and the indigenously upgraded MiG-21 Bison, said a senior IAF officer. The exercises will be held at Kalaikunda in West Bengal.

The Hindu, 9 April 2005

Car Nicobar base is combat-worthy: Air Chief

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 8: The Car Nicobar air base of the Indian Air Force has been made combat-worthy within the shortest time possible, after the tsunami onslaught, according to Air Chief Marshal S.P.Tyagi, Chief of the Air Staff. Talking to mediapersons during his visit to the headquarters of the Southern Air Command (SAC) at Akkulam in the city today, he said combat aircraft, including Sukhoi and Jaguar, would resume operations from this air base from April 14. The IAF had no plans for expanding its base in the Andaman islands. There was an acute housing problem in the islands in the post-tsunami period. The earthquake has resulted in the island sinking a bit, thereby causing inundation as never before, he said. Of late, during the 'white tsunami' in Kashmir, the IAF airlifted around 40,000 people, who were affected by snowfall of an unimaginable magnitude, in two weeks, he said referring to the services rendered by the force in times of need. The Air Chief also addressed the Commanders' Conference at the SAC. Air Marshal S.Y.Savur, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, SAC, and other senior officers were present.

The Hindu, 9 April 2005

Bill against F-16 sale expected next week (Sridhar Krishnaswami)

WASHINGTON, APRIL 8: The Ackerman Bill, blocking the sale of F-16s to Pakistan, is expected to be introduced next week in the House of Representatives and the draft of the Bill by the Democratic Congressman, Gary Ackerman of New York, makes it sufficiently clear that Congress would have to be satisfied that a number of stipulations have been met with before military assistance to Islamabad begins. The draft bill speaks of a Presidential certification to appropriate Congressional committees on a number of fronts: that Islamabad has provided Washington with "unrestricted opportunities" to interview the Pakistan nuclear scientist, A.Q.Khan, with respect to his illegal nuclear proliferation network; that Pakistan has complied with requests for assistance from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the proliferation network, including provision of documents, materials, equipment and access to individuals. The President has also to certify to the House International

Relations and the Appropriations Committees and the Senate Foreign Relations and Appropriations Committees that the Government has determined the full scope of the activities and participants of the illegal nuclear proliferation network; the extent of this network's connection with the al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden; and in conjunction with the IAEA has confirmed that the illegal nuclear proliferation network has been completely dismantled.

The News, 11 April 2005

The new warplanes are welcome, but (Farhatullah Babar)

Air power has played a decisive role in modern conflicts, as was demonstrated dramatically during the two Gulf wars. In the Subcontinent the critical role of air power has been demonstrated more than once. India was able to rescue the remaining Kashmir from marauding tribesmen because its air force was able to airlift troops to Srinagar well in time. The role of the air force was indispensable in the 1965 war and also in the defence of the strategic nuclear assets at Kahuta. If the tables were turned on Pakistan during Kargil the major reason was Indian air power. A strategic lesson from Kargil has been that obsession with limited tactical advantage can turn into a strategic disaster. A tactical lesson from Kargil is that our air power has progressively declined in relation to India's over the decades.

The News, 11 April 2005

F-16s before butter (Farooq Sulehria)

Hard to say who wooed who in the first place, but the Pak-US affair is as old as Pakistan itself. The rulers in Pakistan have always been ready to pay any price for this relationship. Pakistan's writers and poets, often proving more visionary than its leaders, however have had serious reservations about these relations. The year Pakistan formalised its relationship by joining SEATO, Sadaat Hassan Manto wrote his 'Third letter to Uncle Sam'. In this letter, penned on March 15 1954, Manto tells Uncle Sam (excerpts): "As for your military pact with us, it is remarkable and should be maintained. You should sign something similar with India. Sell all your old condemned arms to the two of us, the ones you used in the last war. This junk will thus be off your hands and your armament factories will no longer remain idle."

The Indian Express, 11 April 11, 2005

The flight of the falcon (JASJIT SINGH)

The decision of the United States to open the arms pipeline to Pakistan with the F-16 Falcon multi-role combat aircraft supplies, anticipated for a long time by every observer in India, raises a number of questions especially since promises have been made by the US government indicating that it was willing to enter into arms trade with India as a "reliable partner". The gut reaction of many here is that the Americans cannot be trusted in a key area like weapons and equipment, where unhindered supply of spares and product support for the next two decades would need to be assured. Our experience with British armaments, which had some US parts coming under the US sanctions regime, is much too recent for complacency on this account. It had resulted in the Navy's Sea Harrier aircraft and Sea King helicopters being withheld during overhaul in the UK.

The Tribune, 11 April 2005

IAF exercise in Andamans from tomorrow

New Delhi, April 10: To prove that the tsunami-hit Indian Air Force station at Andaman and Nicobar islands was back to full operational level, top fighter aircraft of the force, including the Sukhoi-30s, will begin an exercise over the islands from tomorrow. According to reports here, at least four Jaguar deep penetration strike fighter aircraft and two Su-30 multi-role fighters would be in Car Nicobar base in the Andamans and Nicobar Islands for the exercises. The Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal S.P. Tyagi recently said the operation of fighter aircraft from the Car Nicobar base, battered by the killer tsunami waves on December 26, would amply prove that the base was now fully functional. The Air Traffic Control (ATC) is functional as well as the other operational infrastructure. A new radar has been installed, while power and water connections have been restored.

The Tribune, 12 April 2005

Fighter aircraft 'Mirage' tested

Balasore, April 11: The Indian Air Force today successfully tested the weapon delivery system of fighter aircraft "Mirage" at the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur-on-Sea. ITR sources said the Pilotless Target Aircraft (PTA) was test flown at 1325 hours along with an object attached to it. Minutes later, the fighter aircraft having a weapon delivery system was seen in the sky that successfully bombed the object attached. The sources said the mission had fulfilled its objective.

The Daily Times, 13 April 2005

COMMENT: Sale of F-16s in retrospect (Ijaz Hussain)

The Government of Pakistan is elated with the American decision to sell it F-16 planes. The Government of India, meanwhile, has reacted sharply by calling it a "great disappointment". The latter has opposed it on a number of grounds including possible negative impact on the ongoing peace process, threat to its security environment, invitation to an arms race in South Asia and enhancement of Pakistan's nuclear weapons delivery capability. To mollify India, the US has offered it an extremely attractive package, which includes, among other things, not only the co-production of F-16s and F-18s, but also supply of nuclear reactors. Above all, it has given a commitment to help "India become a major power in the twenty first century". This is in addition to the Patriot anti-missile system, and cooperation in space technology already promised to India by the US and the Phalcon AWAC system by Israel.

The News, 13 April 2005

US working out modalities of F-16s sale to Pakistan (Muhammad Saleh Zaafir)

ISLAMABAD: The US administration has notified the Congress about its plan to sell F-16 fighter planes to Pakistan. Pakistan has been informed about the visit of the technical mission comprising US authorities and the aircraft manufacturer, Lockheed Martin Corporation, representatives early next month to work out details of the deal. Pakistan will get new Block 52 F-16s while currently it has Block 15 F-16s. The US administration has also intimated Islamabad about its agreement to give the current PAF Block 15 F-16s the Mid-Life Update (MLU) and the process would be initiated early next year. Sources within the government revealed to The News on Monday that the Javitts Report pertaining to the US intention to sell the aircraft to Pakistan has paved way for specific formal notification of the Congress that would come about immediately after technical mission's report. With this the wheel for provision of the planes has gone into swing. In first phase Pakistan is buying 24 F-16s of Block 52. The company currently has back orders for about 200 aircraft and the last should come off the line in 2008, the sources added. The US government has also informed Islamabad that the supply of the F-16s would be without cap on the figure. Pakistan has complete system for maintenance of the F-16s and expected to purchase another squadron of the planes after acquiring 24 planes, the sources added.

The Nation, 13 April 2005

US offers Pakistan F-16s upgradation (Umer Farooq)

ISLAMABAD: United States has offered to include existing inventory of Pakistani F-16s in the Mid-Life Update (MLU) programme for upgradation of fighter aircraft in order to maintain operational capabilities and effectiveness over the next 10 to 20 years. The MLU programme is expected to commence in the middle of year 2006 and the United States defence department has offered to include Pakistani F-16s in the MLU, which will enhance the operational capabilities of the fighter aircraft and will also increase the life of the aircraft. The programme is expected to commence by the middle of next year and is designed to bring the F-16 A/B block 15 to the latest level of operational capabilities. Most of the European allies of the US, who have F-16s in service, are participating in the programme. The F-16s inventories of five European nations have undergone upgradation under the Mid-Life Update programme. The offer to include Pakistan F-16s into the MLU programme was made at the Pak-US Defence consultative meetings.

The Indian Express, 15 April 2005

Govt, Qatar's Emir to hold Mirage talks (SHIV AROOR)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 14: The Centre and visiting Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani will begin on Friday negotiations on Qatar's proposed sale of 12 Mirage-2000-5 fighters to the IAF. On March 29, the Cabinet Committee on Security cleared the path for price negotiations. The 12 fighters will make up for the six IAF Mirage crashes since 1987 and the IAF's requirements for its new 9 Squadron at Gwalior. The deal for the 12 new Qatari Mirage-2000s - nine single seaters and three trainers - is likely to be concluded in the next three months, sources said, and add to the IAF's acquisition of 10 Mirage-2000s directly from Dassault, six of which have already arrived. Qatar offered to sell the 12 Mirages to New Delhi - they were previously also on offer to Pakistan - during the NDA regime. Qatar, which has put on the block the twelve aircraft in line with its interest in acquiring American fighters, including the F-15 Eagle and F-16 Falcon, is apparently prepared to sell the seven-year-old jets for an "extremely competitive" price, said sources.

The Indian Express, 16 April 2005

Technical talks with Qatar on Mirage deal likely soon

NEW DELHI, APRIL 15: A high-level team from Qatar will visit India soon to hold technical talks on the proposed sale of a dozen Mirage 2000-5 fighters. "A decision has been taken by the two countries (to sell the mirages to India). We are working on this. There will be a meeting to discuss technical issues," Deputy Prime Minister of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor al-Thani, also in-charge of the Foreign Ministry, said on Friday. According to al-Thani, there is a forward movement. Qatar was also keen to have defence cooperation with India. The issue was discussed between Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh. Both sides also exchanged views on entering into a strategic partnership. For this, another committee is likely to visit India next month to study all elements of partnership. Al-Thani said the committee's visit will lay the ground for subsequent meetings between foreign ministers of the two countries.

The Hindu, 16 April 2005

A testimony to military's resilience (Sandeep Dikshit)

CAR NICOBAR: The boom of Jaguar fighters tearing across the runway and disappearing into the clear blue sky beyond the palm groves signals the coming back to business of India's farthest military outpost in the Bay of Bengal. The Carnic air base had been overwhelmed by the December 26 tsunami. The take-offs proved that the military had the resilience to overcome a great natural disaster. The repaired runway can host any fighter since the 'Shamshers' (the Indian name for Jaguars) occupy the maximum length of the runway during take-offs. The Defence Secretary, Ajay Vikram Singh, and the Chief of the Air Staff, S. P. Tyagi, were at hand to underline the importance of this air base to Indian security interests and ambitions.

The Hindu, 19 April 2005

IAF meet to discuss stagnation

NEW DELHI: The Indian Air Force (IAF) commander's conference, which began here on Monday, is expected to discuss measures to make career prospects for both permanent service and short commission officers more attractive. The meet will discuss phase II of the A.V. Singh committee report which suggests steps to remove stagnation among officers in all the three services. Phase II has already been implemented with faster promotions up to the equivalent rank of Colonel.

The Hindu, 22 April 2005

IAF holds talks on F-16s with U.S. Agency (Sandeep Dikshit)

NEW DELHI: The Indian Air Force (IAF) on Thursday held its first discussions on the F-16 and F-18 planes with the head of the U.S. Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the organisation that oversees U.S. military sales and financing programmes to foreign countries. The U.S. team will be back to explain the main features of the aircraft to a joint delegation of the Army and the Navy, both of whom are honing their joint fighting capabilities with the IAF. The talks spanned two hours and saw the U.S. side explaining the basic capabilities and the upgrade cycle of both aircraft, one made by Lockheed Martin and the other by a Boeing subsidiary, McDonnell Douglas, said the DSCA Director and highly experienced F-16 pilot, Jeffrey B. Kohler. The IAF team was led by the IAF Deputy Chief of Staff, J. S. Gujral, himself a fighter pilot.

The Hindu, 23 April 2005

IAF opens talks with U.S. (Sandeep Dikshit)

NEW DELHI: The United States has offered India joint production in military equipment and detailed discussions would take place during two high-level meetings planned in Washington. Talks on joint production of F-16s and F-18s would be held during the meeting of the India-U.S. Defence Planning Group (co-chaired by the Defence Secretaries of both countries) and the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Washington, said Jeffrey Kohler who heads the Defence Security Cooperation Agency, the organisation that oversees U.S. military sales and financing programmes to foreign countries. Lt. Gen Kohler was here to hold the first discussions between the Indian Air Force and the U.S. Government on the possibility of sale and joint production of F-16 and F-18 planes. The U.S. team will return later to explain the main features of the aircraft to a joint delegation of the army and the navy.

The Tribune, 25 April 2005

IAF asked to probe airspace violation by BDR

New Delhi, April 24: The Border Security Force (BSF) today asked the Indian Air Force (IAF) to probe airspace violation by a Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) helicopter in Tripura. BSF Director General R.S. Mooshahary said the BDR helicopter "was seen a few hundred metres inside the Indian airspace". "We have passed on this information to the IAF for investigation," Mr Mooshahary said. The BSF said the BDR helicopter was seen flying over Chotakhil in Sabroom sub-division of Tripura and also in Magrum and Beltoli areas along the international border on Friday. The BSF Director General said the BDR had dug trenches on the Bangladesh side of the international border in Tripura and had been carrying out patrolling on their side.

The Indian Express, 25 April 2005

IAF to retire Foxbat spy planes next yr (SHIV AROOR)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 24: The Indian Air Force can soon breathe easy on an aircraft it had worked hard to keep off the radar since a small fleet was acquired from Russia in the early 1980s. Its squadron of five MiG-25 Foxbat spy planes, based in Bareilly, will be retired next year. But the Force will continue to guard the legacy of its quarter

century of service - thousands of highly-sensitive black and white photographs of foreign war assets and border territories, taken from each plane's two high-powered spy cameras. The IAF's proposed Aerospace Command, when approved, will take over the Foxbats' job, using satellites and high-altitude surveillance platforms. The Foxbat is the only IAF jet that operates in the stratosphere at speed exceeding three Mach, making it the fastest aircraft in the Force. Its mission profile, however, has been scaled down drastically. Operating out of Bakshi-ka-Talab by the 102 Squadron, codenamed Trisonics, the Foxbats are now used for training sorties.

The Tribune, 26 April 2005

IAF looking into charges of sexual misconduct

Bangalore, April 25: The Indian Air Force today said it was studying sexual harassment charges against its three officers levelled by a woman IAF officer who is facing a court martial on grounds of indiscipline, insubordination and financial irregularities. "Our judicial branch will study and if they find any truth in the allegations a fresh court martial will be ordered against those persons against whom she has made the allegations," IAF Training Command Senior Personnel Staff Officer Grp Capt Ajay Masson told reporters here. Masson said the officer, Anjali Gupta, had made sexual harassment charges in her April 7 letter to the Chief of Air Staff and the Ministry of Defence but in none of the "25 odd" applications had she made similar charges in the past one and a half years after being posted as the education officer at the Aircraft Systems and Testing Establishment (ASTE) here. "The Chief Air Marshal (S.P. Tyagi) is monitoring it (the case) on a day-to-day basis," Masson said. He said the IAF conducted an inquiry by a senior officer in March on her February 11 complaint with the police regarding sexual harassment but it was "clearly brought out that the allegations were false".

The Times of India, 26 April 2005

IAF to retire space-edge fighter? (PERCY FERNANDEZ)

NEW DELHI: In the theater of high altitude military operations, no other plane is as cunning, swift and exotic as the MiG-25, codenamed Foxbat by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The MiG-25, capable of reaching Mach 3 or three times the speed of sound and flying at the edge of outspace, is basically a spy plane. The Indian Air Force (IAF) has kept the Foxbat's operations and exploits a closely-guarded secret and seldom displayed it in public for strategic purposes. The wily reconnaissance-cum-interceptor has flown many a sorties into the enemy territory without being noticed. The only other aircraft that equalled its exoticness was the SR-71, named Blackbird and built by the Lockheed-Martin Skunkworks. In fact, Foxbat was built to counter the Blackbird. The No 102 Squadron operates the MiG-25, Foxbat KP-351, the single-seat version in IAF's service. Nicknamed the Trisonics, the Squadron is located in Bakshi-ka-Talab in Bareilly. Established under the Central Air Command, it has an estimated number of six combat planes and 2 MiG-25U, a two-seat plane solely used for training. India acquired the MiG-25s from then USSR during the early 80s and at the height of the Cold War.

The Times of India, 26 April 2005

First IAF woman faces axe

NEW DELHI: The first court martial proceeding by Indian Air Force against a woman officer, charged with indiscipline and insubordination, began on Monday and has been adjourned till April 27. A three-member tribunal opened proceedings against Flying Officer Anjali Gupta in Bangalore where she has been held in custody since February. Anjali, working in the administrative wing of the Aircraft Systems and Training Establishment (ASTE) here, is also facing charges of delinquency and fraud. She has been charged with claiming rail fare from the IAF after she flew free of cost on a military aircraft from Bangalore to New Delhi. Anjali has refuted the charges and accused two male superiors of sexual harassment. Her family says the court martial was a result of a complaint Anjali registered with the police in Bangalore. Anjali has approached the Karnataka State Commission for Women and also the Karnataka High Court. IAF has rejected Karnataka State Commission for Women's calls for an independent inquiry into the sexual harassment charges.

The Indian Express, 27 April 2005

Air Chief eyes aerospace command for future wars

NEW DELHI, APRIL 26: Air Chief Marshal S.P. Tyagi today said his force has suggested to the Government the setting up of a strategic aerospace command to prepare for future wars in space. With several countries beginning to think of using space to park stand-off weapon systems, Tyagi said, it is time India started laying the groundwork to develop capability to degrade space weapons and this is where the need for an aerospace command arises. He added that such a command has to be developed with the help and guidance of the country's own space agency, ISRO. The IAF Chief said the recent arms deal controversy would not affect the acquisition of force multipliers like the multi-role combat aircraft, airborne early warning and control system (AWACS) and the advanced jet trainers.