

Mixed Message

India's hunt for a successor to its aging MiG-21 fleet just got messier. The original call was for 126 Multi-Combat Role Aircraft (MCRA), but the Indian air force says it may increase the order to 200. That's the good news for contenders from Europe, Russia and the U.S. The bad news is the air force may buy from 2-3 suppliers, adding more complexity to maintenance, support and operational activities. The air force already flies 26 different types. The MCRA competition has been intensified because the U.S.-Indian rapprochement on nuclear and defense technology means the Boeing F/A-18E/F and Lockheed Martin F-16 are contenders against India's longtime suppliers, France and Russia, as represented by the Dassault Rafale and Mirage, and the MiG-29M/M2, respectively. The Eurofighter Typhoon and the Saab JAS 39 Gripen are in the mix, as well. Meanwhile, the request for proposals has been delayed and is now expected about July, rather than in March (*AW&ST* Jan. 30, p. 18).

Blade Blend

The British Defense Ministry is testing an AgustaWestland Lynx helicopter with modified Rolls-Royce Gem Mk. 205 engines in Iraq to try to counter sand erosion on engine blades. Low-pressure compressor blades on the helicopter have been treated with an erosion-resistant, titanium nitride-based coating. The Russian-conceived coating consists of both "hard" and "soft" layers—the former provides surface protection, the latter allows particles to "bounce off." If all goes well, the modification will be implemented across the Lynx fleet, and beyond.

Mississippi Mission

EADS North America plans to expand its facilities at Golden Triangle Regional Airport, Columbus, Miss., if it wins the U.S. Army's Light Utility Helicopter competition. The expansion is expected to add up to 250 new jobs. EADS is offering the twin-engine UH-

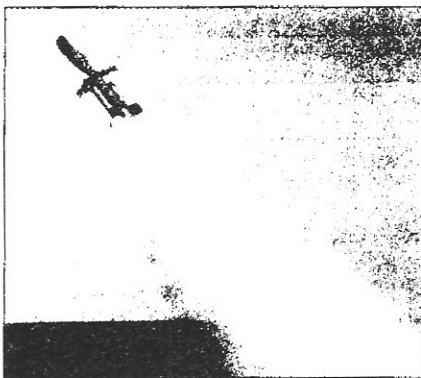
145—a modified version of the commercial EC 145—for the LUH role. American Eurocopter (an EADS subsidiary), Sikorsky and Westwind Technologies have teamed to build, modify and support the helicopter. EADS says the first two aircraft are already being built in Germany and one would be ready for delivery late this year. LUH teams led by Bell Helicopter Textron, AgustaWestland and MD Helicopters also are competing for the award. Helicopters from all four teams will be evaluated this month at Ft. Rucker, Ala., by Army aviators, with a decision expected as early as April.

Toward Production

The Australian Defense Ministry has awarded a further development contract to Canberra-based CEA Technologies to evolve its design for the phased-array radar to allow Anzac frigates to perform missile defense duties. The \$9-million award covers additional risk-reduction work and should allow the government to issue a production contract this year, according to the defense ministry.

Marte Piques Interest

European missile manufacturer MBDA is in discussions with at least two potential customers for the ship-launched ver-



sion of its Marte MK2 air-to-surface missile. Interest in the Marte MK2/N is such that MBDA has already carried out a significant amount of design work for the necessary modifications. The helicopter-

launched Marte MK2/S has a maximum range of greater than 16.2 naut. mi. It is already in operation with the Italian navy on its SH-3D helicopters, and has been qualified on the EH-101 and NH90.

U.K. Labs Under Microscope

The British government's financial watchdog, the National Audit Office (NAO), will review whether the government's privatization of most of its defense labs represented good value for money. Qinetiq, as the bulk of the labs are now known, will likely have an initial public offering later this month (*AW&ST* Jan. 23, p. 12). The NAO says it will weigh the decision to split the Defense Evaluation and Research Agency into two—Qinetiq and the Defense Science and Technology Laboratory—along with the decision to sell a stake in Qinetiq to the Carlyle Group, as well as considering the price. The IPO is valued at 1.3 billion pounds (\$2.3 billion). The report is to be published by year-end.

Conquer the Night

L-3 Cincinnati Electronics is providing its advanced NightConqueror thermal imager for use in the Vistar 350 sensor suite in the U.S. Navy's F-1 Sea Fighter. The device produces high-resolution thermal images for 24-hr. observation in poor weather. L-3 Titan is prime contractor for the Sea Fighter, an aluminum catamaran that operates at speeds of 50 kt.-plus. The ship is designed to conduct performance evaluations of high-speed vessels.

Safety by Star

Star Navigation Systems Group of Toronto has introduced an Inflight Safety Monitoring System that provides data analysis, monitoring and diagnostics. The system utilizes various databases inflight to monitor systems that exceed preset norms set by the manufacturer or aircraft operator. The data is satellite-linked to Star Navigation's ground station, which stores it for end-of-flight analysis. If a safety-of-flight issue is indicated, the ground station alerts the cockpit crew.