

ASIA PACIFIC

Pakistan signs for aircraft monitoring deal

Australian companies Structural Monitoring Systems (SMS) and Aerostructures have won a A\$830,000 (US\$632,000) contract from the Pakistan Air Force to design an airframe monitoring system for the force's Chengdu FT-5 jet trainer, Dassault Aviation Mirage III fighter and Lockheed Martin C-130 transport aircraft.

The system will be based on SMS's comparative vacuum monitoring (CVM) technology. CVM involves the placing of thin sensor pads with ultrafine vacuum galleries over flat surfaces, joints or fatigue hotspots on aircraft, including inside wing spars or fuel tanks, for occasional or continual monitoring.

SMS Chief Executive Officer Mark Vellacott said the pads are capable of detecting cracks 20,000ths of an inch wide.

The key to the technology is its ability to substantially reduce aircraft downtime, in the case of CH-53 Sea Stal-



The Pakistan Air Force wants an airframe monitoring system for its **Mirage III fighter** (pictured), FT-5 jet trainer and C-130 Hercules transport aircraft

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lion medium lift helicopters a reduction from four hours to five minutes for the structural test required every 25 flight hours, according to the company.

Included in the Pakistan Air Force contract is a proposal to equip the country's Defence Aeronautical Research Centre (DARC) with laboratory testing systems. Vellacott said the contract was only stage one and would lead to recommendations for CVM technology to be installed on aircraft and for the company to assist DARC to develop its structural testing capability as part of a larger stage two programme planned for late 2005.

"This contract is to provide a full range of structural integrity analysis, monitoring and testing services for the fleet and is another milestone in the commercialisation of CVM technology," said Vellacott.

"This is a major step forward for the company."

SMS is also in negotiation with an undisclosed air force for the adoption of a full service approach for structural monitoring.

The company began an evaluation in March of CVM technology on three Australian Army Black Hawks under an A\$125,000 contract that could eventually extend across the whole fleet.

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