

Maintaining India's fleet of more than 230 aging Cheetah and Chetak reconnaissance and surveillance helicopters is turning into a nightmare due to unavailability of spares, according to K.C. Nanda, general manager of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd's Barrackpore Division, who sounded the warning at a defence conference held in Kolkata in August. HAL built both the Cheetah and the Chetak under license from Eurocopter. The Cheetah is a version of the Eurocopter Aérospatiale SA 315B Lama, single-engine helicopter that combines the lighter Alouette II airframe with Alouette III components and powerplant. The Chetak is a license-built Alouette III. Production lines closed in France in the 1980s, and HAL is increasingly having to cannibalize parts, leading to more aircraft on ground and fewer in the air. Eurocopter has kept a production line open for blades solely for the Indian market, according to an industry official. "It is getting impossible to support the vintage fleet," an engineer with HAL told AIN. "This will lead to disastrous consequences for the Chetak and Cheetah fleet. Blades, nuts, bolts, rings... We need them all. Now HAL is looking to repair even the main gear box," he added. The helicopters were to be replaced by 197 new [light utility helicopters](#)(LUHs) purchased from abroad. Now HAL is in the process of developing its own LUH and may get the order.