Global Hawk
OK for airspace

SAN DIEGO – As Northrop Grumman’s Global Hawk UAV enters first phase commercial production, the FAA has granted a Certificate of Authorisation to USAF to fly the RQ-4 Global Hawk in national air space. The high altitude, long endurance Global Hawk has been flying in restricted air space during take-off and landing before quickly as ascending to altitudes high above commercial air traffic. The COA paves the way for it to support port home land defence missions in national air space.

Virgin gets its very own 737

BRISBANE – Virgin Blue Airlines has taken delivery of its first owned aircraft, a US$62 million Boeing 737-800 delivered from Seattle.

The aircraft arrived in Australia after a brief stop-over in New Zealand, where it received its winglets. Virgin will buy an other nine aircraft over the next 12 months.

Virgin Blue secured the financing through the Royal Bank of Scotland, with support from the US Import/Export Bank.

Chief Executive Brett Godfrey said the financed purchase “balances our fleet of leased and owned aircraft”.

Virgin Blue’s existing fleet is leased through various lessors, including Boullion, CIT, GECAS, ILFC and Tombo. The ar rival of the first owned aircraft takes the fleet to 32.

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Taipei makes sub payment

TAIPEI – Taiwan has kickstarted its plan to acquire eight conventional submarines from the United States with US$3 mil lion and will make another $7.5 pay ment shortly. The US originally wanted Tai wan to make a $333 mil lion ad vance.

The hefty down-payment de mand drew complaints from Tai pei, prompt ing re ports that the plan could be killed or Tai wan could opt for sec ond-hand sub ma rines from the inter na tional market.

In Oc to ber Wash ing ton will brief Tai pei on the avail able sub ma rines.

The US Navy has briefed four US com pan ies that have the ca pa bil ity to bid as prime con trac tors, al though only Northrop Grum man and Gen er al Dy nam ics are ex pected to bid. But the United States has not built con ventional sub marines for more than 40 years and de sign ing an en tire ly new one would be proba bly ex per i ment ally ex pen sive with out for eign par tic i pa tion.

Tai wan navy’s sub ma rine fleet con sists of two 50-year-old Guppy-class die sel-elec tric boats, which are both in very poor con di tion, and two Dutch Hai-Lung-class boats com mis sioned in 1987/88.

Fiji rebel a wanted man

SUVA – Fijian Lieu ten ant Col onel Filipo Ta rakan iki ni is fac ing the pros pect of ex tra di tion from New York to face de ser tion charges. Dur ing George Speight’s 2000 coup that bought down Prime Min is ter Mahend ra Chaudhry, Ta rakan iki ni was mar tial law spokes man.

He lost his post later in 2000 amidst vague al le ga tions that he was in vol ved in the coup and a mil i tary mu tiny in No vem ber 2000.

He took up a post with the United Na tions Peace keep ing Office in New York but last year mil itary com man der Com mo dore Vor eqe Baini mar ama or dered him home to face fur ther in ves ti gation.

Ta rakan iki ni in stead re signed and re fused to come home and last year won court ac tion say ing his re sig na tion was le gal. The mil itary ap pealed and in a rul ing the Court of Ap peal quashed the lower court ruling and ef fect ively de clared Ta rakan iki ni absent with out leave.