

India's aviation sector surpasses expectations

- A Monitor Desk Report

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New Delhi: The heat on the tarmac was intense, but the anticipation was even greater. All eyes were fixed on the skies at Yelahanka Air Force Station in Bengaluru, India, waiting for the spectacle to unfold on a February morning a couple of years ago.

Then, the silence was broken as four Mi-17 helicopters thundered into view, each proudly displaying the flag of India, the Aero India emblem, the G20 insignia, and the Indian Air Force ensign. The crowd erupted in applause as the helicopters soared overhead, signaling the official start of Aero India—a showcase that has come to symbolize India's aviation prowess and global ambitions.

Held biennially, Aero India is more than just an exhibition of cutting-edge aviation technology; it represents India's meteoric rise in the global aerospace and defense sectors. From its modest beginnings in 1996, the event has evolved into one of Asia's premier aerospace shows,

mirroring India's aspirations to emerge as a global aviation leader. It serves as a vital platform for India to engage with international aerospace players, display its capabilities, and foster valuable partnerships.

Barely a couple of years after the first aircraft was put on display, the event saw the participation of major global aerospace firms, including industry giants like Boeing and Airbus.

The bar was raised in 2001 when the latest in military technologies were put on show. Aerobatic teams like the Russian Knights appeared in the skies over Bengaluru a couple of years later, not to mention a huge rise in the number of exhibitors.

Over the years, Aero India's growth has been meteoric, paralleling India's own strides in defense manufacturing and technology. The 2023 edition alone saw over 700,000 visitors, with dignitaries from 98 countries. More than 800 exhibitors, including businesses, investors, start-ups and MSMEs were on ground while the event witnessed more than 250 partnerships, including the signing of more than 200 MoUs. Aerospace giants like Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Dassault Aviation also made their presence felt while technology transfers at the edition were valued at over Rs750 billion.

Aero India's transformation aligns seamlessly with the 'Make in India' program, launched in 2014 to bolster domestic manufacturing. The aerospace and defense sectors have been key beneficiaries of this initiative. India's defense exports have risen sharply reaching an all-time high, surging to Rs210.8 billion in FY 2023-24, reflecting a remarkable increase of over 30 times in export value over the past decade. The event provides the perfect platform to showcase this progress, with indigenous innovations like the Tejas fighter jet, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), and UAVs developed by start-ups.

The event has catalyzed the growth of India's private aerospace industry. Companies like Tata Advanced Systems, Mahindra Aerospace, and Larsen & Toubro are now major players, not only meeting domestic needs but also catering to global markets.

The collaboration between Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and General Electric to produce jet engines in India is a testament to this synergy.

Aero India's impact extends beyond aviation and defense. The event is a significant economic driver, generating revenue for Bengaluru's hospitality, transport, and services sectors.

India's ambition to become a global aerospace hub is further evidenced by its focus on Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) services. The global MRO market is projected to reach \$95 billion in 2025, and India aims to capture a significant share. Aero India serves as a launchpad for such initiatives, highlighting India's readiness to offer world-class MRO facilities.

With India set to become the third-largest aviation market this year, the platform is crucial for shaping the nation's aerospace narrative. From showcasing indigenous innovations to fostering global partnerships, Aero India embodies India's aspirations to lead in aviation and defense.

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