



India and the **HAWK**

The Indian Air Force's requirement for an advanced jet trainer (AJT) had its genesis in the La Fontaine Committee during the mid-1980s which urged the selection and induction of a suitable Stage III or lead in fighter trainer to bridge the gap in flying training between the benign HAL Kiran basic jet trainer and frontline operational fighters. After phase out of the HAL-built de Havilland Vampire T.55s which had served well in this role, the IAF perforce sent its young pilots straight from the Stage II Kirans to Mach 2 fighters, such 'fracture' in the training process being regarded as a serious deficiency. In the event, it took a torturous two decades to formalise the contract for BAE Hawk advanced jet trainers, the type having been selected after exhaustive evaluation, flight trials and industrial-commercial negotiations.

Finally, on 3 September 2003, the Cabinet Committee for Security (CCS) cleared acquisition of 66 Hawk AJTs for the Indian Air Force, 24 of them to be procured from BAE Systems in flyaway condition, the remaining 42 aircraft produced in India by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited under licence.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Governments of India and the UK was signed at South Block in New Delhi on 19 March 2004 "for the effective and uninterrupted implementation of the contracts regarding acquisition of 66 Hawk Advance Jet Trainers (AJTs) from BAE Systems and other equipment manufacturers of UK." Indian Defence Secretary Ajay Prasad signed the MOU on behalf of the Government of India while the British High Commissioner in India Sir Michael Arthur signed on behalf of the UK Government, covering "full support and cooperation for the supply as well as licence production of Hawk AJT for IAF from BAE Systems and other associated equipment manufacturers of the UK", as also facilitating agreements concerning licence production of the products and associated equipment and weapon systems for the Hawk of UK origin.

In April 2004, a Defence Consultative Group was established to monitor of transfer of technologies for the Hawk and indicative of the speed with which the programme unfolded, the first batch of IAF pilots selected for the new flying

training programme were sent to Anglesey in Wales during July 2004 to begin advanced jet training with the Royal Air Force, which would go on till February 2008. In all, some 75 IAF pilots received training in batches at this busiest of RAF air bases.

The 'Hawk Interim Indian Flying Training', as the programme was called, comprised eight weeks of theory and simulators, 20 weeks of advanced flying, three weeks of tactical weapons simulation and 14 weeks of live tactical weapons training. The first batch of 6 IAF pilots graduated from RAF Valley on 23 May 2005 even as BAE Systems delivered the first 'made for India' Hawk Mk.132 advanced jet trainer. BAE Systems reported then that "the Indian programme is moving at a terrific pace; as well as HT001's first flight we have a number aircraft in final assembly, and have shipped the fuselages of additional aircraft that will be assembled by HAL in India. This is in addition to us managing the delivery of over 1,500 tonnes of raw material, 3,500 tools and around 15 million components to HAL in Bangalore" !