

Gaganshakti 2018

“Shaking the Heavens and splitting the Earth”



Tejas LCAs were 'operationally deployed' for the first time

The IAF conducted its Exercise *Gaganshakti* from 8 to 22 April 2018 but planning for this had reportedly been set in motion almost nine months earlier. Described as the largest exercise in the past three decades, with its dimension range and lethality translated into 'shaking the heavens and splitting the earth', this was quite in contrast to the general public perception that the IAF is much in need of enhancement of its fighter squadron strength from the present 31 to 42 and more, along with drastic modernisation and substantial increase in its other assets.

“India has not witnessed anything on this scale since Exercise *Brass Tacks* in 1987”, stated Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, Chief of the Air Staff, and added that the western neighbour was apparently concerned by the sheer scale and complexity of *Gaganshakti 2018*. According to the Air Chief, the country's western neighbour had monitored the Exercise closely through their airborne warning and control systems.

Considering that this massive exercise was during peace time, in a real confrontation, vital assets and ammunition (missiles, bombs, etc) would have been used resulting in diminishing war reserves. The aim of the exercise was to surmount constraints of economy for conserving air power needed when the real challenges occurred.



Su-30MKIs on long-range missions

As enunciated by the CAS, “The intention of the Exercise was to validate our operational capabilities and concepts in a realistic war-like scenario as well as check our ability to sustain high-tempo operations. It is not aimed at any country.”

The exercise was conducted in two phases so that all Commands of the IAF got adequate opportunity to test the efficacy of their preparedness. Phase-I of the exercise involved activation of Western, South Western and Southern Air Commands, with the affiliated Army and Naval components. Phase-II of the exercise involved activation of Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Air Commands. Re-deployment for Phase-II involved relocating the forces so as to be

effective at the new locations within a short span of 48 hours. This was made possible by round the clock operations of heavy lift transport aircraft like the C-17 and Il-76 as well as by employing a large number of tactical airlift aircraft, C-130s and An-32s. The IAF also used civil chartered flights and trains for mobilisation of its resources.

During the exercise, a spectrum of combat missions, encompassing various air situations, were conducted. Fighter aircraft were involved in *surge operations*, generating maximum number of sorties in a 24-hour cycle. These included long range missions with concentrated live and simulated weapon release at various air-to-ground ranges in India, creation