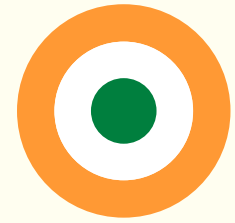


Air Marshal Harish Masand on

STEMMING THE SLIDE



The IAFs depleted strength: causes and remedies



Sukhoi Su-30MKIs at an IAF base

Despite its creditable performance in recent exercises like *Gagan Shakti* and the Air Power Display at Pokhran followed swiftly by actual operations over Balakot and its aftermath on 26 and 27 February respectively (see *Vayu Issues II and III/2019*) the Indian Air Force is undoubtedly facing a severe crisis in terms of its depleted combat numbers. Against its sanctioned strength of 42 combat squadrons, it is progressively and effectively down to about 30 squadrons while the security challenges facing the nation and its first responder, the IAF, have only continued to grow. Modernisation of the Chinese military including its air force (PLAAF) and the navy (PLAN) along with growing strength and modernisation of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) albeit with Chinese support, have made the threat of a two front confrontation, even if not a full-scale war, a realistic possibility for India. As a matter of fact, with rapid growth and unprecedented modernisation of the PLAN, there is distinct possibility that a hostile situation could easily confront the IAF with concurrent threats on three fronts, the third being in the maritime domain with increasing presence of PLAN in the Indian Ocean.



Jaguars over the Rajpath