

“M-MRCA Contract by March 2011”

VAYU Interview with Air Chief Marshal Pradeep Naik PVSM AVSM ADC Chief of Air Staff, Indian Air Force



VAYU : *It has been stated that, considering the complexity and technological sophistication of armed conflicts in the times to come, it is necessary to move away from a ‘threat-based preparation’ to a ‘capability-based approach’. To what extent does this impact on the IAF’s current process of modernisation?*

CAS : The IAF approach is itself ‘capability-based’ and hence there is no reason for any impact of this approach on our process of modernisation. Transformation is, as it is, a continuous and evolutionary process. The emerging technologies definitely have a major impact on the future conflict scenario. So the Indian Air Force, just like any other Air Force, has to continuously upgrade and evolve not only in terms of hardware but also in tactics, procedure and concepts. The modernisation efforts of the Indian Air Force are aimed to possess adequate capabilities to address our security concerns and meet the envisaged challenges. The IAF has embarked on a comprehensive plan to meet our operational commitments, both qualitatively and quantitatively. ‘Capability Based Approach’ is not a paradigm shift from the established doctrines of the Air Force but an endeavour to retain the ‘Capability-Edge’, and our modernisation plan is in sync with this thought process.

VAYU : *No longer just a tactical force, the Air Force today prides itself on becoming a strategic force. Could you please elucidate by defining the transformation that has taken place and the measures taken to reach such prowess?*

CAS : The Indian Air Force is undoubtedly transforming into a potent strategic force. The IAF vision addresses not only the physical security of India but the protection of our core values and enhanced national interests based on the country’s growth and aspirations. Induction of AWACS and Air-to-Air Refuellers has increased the range and reach of the IAF. This has been amply proved by our aircraft flying as far as the USA and Alaska to participate in international exercises. The strategic airlift capability of our force can also be ascertained by relief missions undertaken to the USA and China as well as the CAR Nations. The IAF envisions itself to be a modern force with cutting edge technology which is

flexible, adaptable and has strategic reach to provide the precise application of force by shaping any air space to strike, defend and provide succor anywhere in our area of interest.

VAYU : *Apart from enhancement of assets to face challenges from our adversaries, what steps is the IAF taking to muster strategic air and space power in keeping with its present status internationally?*

CAS : The IAF today is a reckonable aerospace force, capable of facing any challenge. We are inducting modern multi role aircraft, air defence systems, force multipliers and integrating them to achieve a quantum leap in our combat capability and effectiveness.

The IAF understands the requirement to leverage the existing space assets of the country to enhance its Operational capability in terms of Surveillance, SAR, Communication and Meteorological applications. Requirements of the IAF have increased manifold; therefore, we are maintaining close liaison with ISRO and are coordinating through a joint mechanism in the IDS. Our aim is to achieve self-sufficiency in Communication and Surveillance capabilities in the immediate future. An ‘Integrated Space Cell’ (ISC) is functional under IDS to conceptualise defence strategy and doctrine for harnessing existing space assets to meet our operational requirements in the future.



First of the AWACS in IAF service seen on its induction at Palam Airport.

IAI

VAYU : *The IAF has been engaged with other leading Air Forces of the world in exercises, the latest being Air Exercise ‘Garuda’ in France. What operational advantages has the IAF derived in specific terms from these exercises which, differently viewed, seem to strain the IAF’s resources?*

CAS : The significance and operational advantages accrued by conducting joint, bilateral/multinational air exercises with friendly foreign air forces can be summarised by points enumerated as under :

- ✦ Enhancing defence co-operation and strengthening of mutual defence relationship with concerned countries.
- ✦ Enhancing mutual operational understanding, employment philosophies and tactics, in realistic and real time threat scenarios.
- ✦ Apart from enhancing operational potential it also keeps us abreast of the latest technological developments in the contemporary fields.
- ✦ Evolving operational and maintenance philosophies and imbibing the best practices, so as to improve our overall operational efficiency.
- ✦ It also helps us analyse actual performance of a weapon system/platform, prior to any acquisition and provide exposure to our personnel.
- ✦ The participation also showcases our capabilities and professionalism and is an important tool of Military Diplomacy.



IAF Su-30MKI (centre) in formation flight with UAE Air Force Mirage 2000 and F-16.

VAYU : *What of late has been the nature of IAF’s role in the Naxal-affected regions of the country? Does this new responsibility dilute the IAF’s presence in UN Support mission?*

CAS : Four Mi-17 helicopters of the Indian Air Force have been operating since December 2009 in support of Ministry of Home Affairs for anti-Naxal operations. The IAF helicopters operate under very strict Rules of Engagement (ROE) in the disturbed area and provided support in troop re-reinforcement, casualty evacuation, air maintenance, surveillance and other special tasks.

In view of the decision to support our own operational commitments, the Letter of Assist (LoA) with United Nations is not being renewed. After seven years of meritorious service, the IAF contingent deployed in UN Peacekeeping missions will be withdrawn in a phased manner by March 2011.

Hence, as of now there is no dilution of UN support missions. However, in order to meet our own operational commitments we are planning to withdraw the UN helicopter missions.



VAYU : *At what stage is the process of selection and acquisition of the M-MRCA and its time-frame for induction into front-line squadrons ? The public perception is that the process has been prolonged inordinately. May we have your views ?*

CAS : The IAF has completed the Field Evaluation Trials on all six M-MRCA aircraft and has submitted its Staff Evaluation Report to MoD for further processing.

The likely time frame for completion of various activities before the contract is signed is about 6-8 months. So, we expect the contract to be signed by March 2011. From thereon, the induction should begin by mid 2014 onwards.

The RFP for M-MRCA was issued in August 2007 to six global vendors. These vendors responded with their proposals and the TEC was completed in June 2009. By this time, the IAF was already ready to undertake Field Evaluations and these were conducted from July 2009 to May 2010. This has been a very complex and involved process. Thereafter the IAF has completed the analysis of results and compiled an exhaustive report well in time. The Staff Evaluation report was submitted on 30 July 2010. In my opinion, considering the number of vendors involved and the complex nature of evaluations, there has not been any inordinate delay. We have been able to achieve our objectives well within the stipulated time frame.

VAYU : *The country has also been waiting for service induction of the indigenous LCA into the Air Force. What is the present status of the proposed acquisition vis-à-vis HAL’s readiness to produce the required numbers?*

CAS : Status of LCA : the IAF has contracted for 20 IOC aircraft with HAL. The first Tejas aircraft in IOC standard is planned to be delivered to the IAF by May 2011. The delivery schedule involves first eight aircraft by end of the financial year 2011-12, eight aircraft by end of the financial year 2012-13 and balance four aircraft in the financial year 2013-14.

VAYU : *Upgradation of Jaguars, Mirages, An-32s and other ageing IAF assets has been in the news for a long time. Has the task been accomplished as per schedule and what is the nature of hurdles, if any?*

Gripen

CAS : » *Upgradation of Jaguars* : the IAF recently upgraded 20 Single Seater (SS) and 17 Twin seater (TS) DARIN II Jaguar aircraft. This was done as part of modernisation as well as expansion programme. In addition, all original NavWass aircraft have been upgraded to DARIN II standard. Certain additional features like HOTAS, autopilot, etc. Which were not completed at the time of system upgrade would also be incorporated with effect from November 2010. All DARIN-I aircraft are planned to be upgraded to DARIN-III standard with contemporary state-of-the-art features like an advanced avionics suite and a nav attack system, integrated fire control radar, enhanced EW capability coupled with capability to carry latest weaponry that the IAF is in the process of acquiring. This would make the entire Jaguar fleet a formidable war fighting platform.

» *Mirage 2000 Upgrade* : the IAF's M-2000 fleet was inducted into service almost 25 years back. Hence some of the technologies/ systems incorporated on the Mirage 2000 need an upgrade. Therefore, there is a need to upgrade the fleet to retain its operational effectiveness and combat potential, so that it remains a potent weapon platform over the remainder of its technical life. Highlights of the upgrade would be a new AI radar, new weapons and better avionics. Commencement of the upgrade project has been delayed due to finalisation of contract with the vendor. However, now most of the issues related to the contract have been resolved and the contract is likely to be signed soon.

» *An-32 Upgrade* : the An-32 aircraft is undergoing upgrade and TTLE (Total Technical Life Extension) overhaul in the Ukraine. 40 aircraft will be upgraded at Ukraine and the rest 61 aircraft at No. 1 BRD (Kanpur). Presently 10 aircraft are in Ukraine. The TTLE will increase the calendar life of the An-32 aircraft from 25 to 40 years. The upgrade programme is on schedule.



VAYU : *In the present scenario, national and global, the need for highly effective transport aircraft and helicopters comes into focus. Apart from steps to acquire the C-130J and C-17 heavy lift transporter what is the IAF's long-term plan to enhance tactical air transportation in synergy with the Army?*

CAS : At present, the IAF has An-32 and Il-76 aircraft with airlift capacity of five tons and 40 tons respectively. Ten C-17 aircraft are also being inducted to enhance our strategic lift capability. In addition, the IAF is acquiring six C-130s which are capable of airlifting 20 tons. The IAF is also planning to acquire 16 aircraft as replacement to the ageing Avro aircraft. Moreover, in the 11th Plan, 15 Saras aircraft will be inducted followed by another 15 in the 12th Plan. 16 Multirole Transport Aircraft (MTA) with a tonnage capacity of 10 tons will be inducted in the 11th Plan and further 16 in the 12th Plan. So the IAF has got the plans in place to significantly enhance its strategic and tactical airlift capacity.

VAYU : *In context of the quality of Air Force personnel and their indispensable technology-based knowledge and training in all disciplines, what is the increased role of women as planned in the IAF, considering they have been active participants even in space missions abroad. Your comments please.*

CAS : Highly motivated and dedicated personnel are a prerequisite to successful transformation of the IAF into an advanced aerospace power. Women will have an important role to play in this transformation. The women officers have been executing the tasks and roles assigned to them with dedication and sincerity, thus contributing in the overall progress of the IAF. They are presently represented in all branches except the fighter stream. I am very optimistic about the contribution that women officers will make for the IAF in the years ahead.



IAF Mi-17, trailed by Cheetah over Punjab countryside. (photo: Wg Cdr RS Chauhan).

Boeing



Ilyushin Il-78MKI mid-air refueling pair of Mirage 2000Hs.



In 2032, I am confident that the IAF would be one of the leading Aerospace Forces of the world. It would not only reflect the most potent capability of India’s military power, but would also reflect the cutting edge of India’s aerospace industry, technology and its research, design and development capabilities.

VAYU: *The Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) is to be produced in India in collaboration with Russia. What has been the IAF’s contribution to evolution of this type and what is the envisaged time frame for its service induction into the IAF?*

CAS: The IAF is a stakeholder in the FGFA programme. The Technical requirements were proposed by the IAF and have been accepted by the Russians. The development of the project is divided into Preliminary Design Phase, R&D phase and Production Phase. Currently the Preliminary design contract is being progressed and is expected to be signed this year. The likely date for FGFA service induction is 2017.

VAYU: *What is your vision of the IAF in 2032, the Centenary of the Service? Would you please elucidate how the IAF would plan to integrate unmanned aerial vehicles, as force multipliers with its current assets?*

CAS: Artificial intelligence would be the norm and computer aided decision making tools will ensure precision targeting and minimal collateral damage. This network-centric form of warfare is in line with the evolving concept of effect-based warfare.

The Indian Air Force has come a long way from its humble beginning as a tactical force. We are today transforming into a potent strategic force. In the coming decade the IAF envisions itself to be a modern force with cutting edge technologies which are flexible, adaptable and allow us to respond to any kind of situation.

VAYU: *Your message to the Air Force and Nation on the eve of the 78th Anniversary of the IAF!*

CAS: I would like to assure the Nation of the absolute readiness and commitment of the Indian Air Force in National Security and Defence of the country. The IAF today is a force, which is flexible, adaptive and has strategic reach to meet our national aspirations. The mission of the Indian Air Force is :

“To safeguard national interests from threats arising through the medium of air and space”.

I would like to assure all of you that the Indian Air Force will always be there to defend the skies – *on time and on target!*



The Boeing C-17A Globemaster III.

Lockheed Martin