

Interview with Air Chief Marshal AP Singh Chief of the Air Staff, Indian Air Force



VAYU: *The Indian Air Force is short of Airborne Early Warning & Control Aircraft (AWACS) systems. What are the current plans to fill the gap? Can you share updates regarding the ongoing indigenous AWACS (Netra Mk II) development involving ex Air India A320/21 and the status of the AEW&C Netra Mk.1A?*

Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) systems are a vital component of modern air power, and the Indian Air Force recognises the need to strengthen this capability in adequate numbers. To bridge the gap, we are pursuing multiple projects that will substantially enhance our airborne surveillance and command network in the coming years.

The AEW&C Mk.IA programme, based on the Embraer-145 platform, is being developed by the Centre for Airborne Systems (CABS) under the aegis of DRDO. Six such aircraft are planned for induction, each equipped with significantly upgraded radar ranges and advanced Mission System Avionics. These improvements will greatly enhance our ability to detect, track and manage air operations across a wide battlespace.

In parallel, the AEW&C Mk.II programme represents a major leap forward in indigenous capability. For this, six pre-owned Airbus A321 aircraft have been transferred

from Air India to the IAF. The design and development are being spearheaded by CABS, DRDO, under the 'Make in India' initiative. The Mk.II system will feature next generation sensors, advanced electronic warfare suites, and extended endurance, offering far superior performance compared to earlier variants. Development of the mission systems is progressing well at DRDO, while contracts for structural modifications are being finalised with AIESL and ADS, Spain.

Additionally, the IAF is also progressing plans to induct state-of-the-art Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) aircraft. These platforms, incorporating indigenous sensor technologies, will further enhance our situational awareness and provide critical capabilities for joint operations. Collectively, these initiatives reflect our commitment towards building a robust, networked, and self-reliant airborne surveillance architecture for the future.



AEW&C Netra Mk.1 and Su-30MKI (Photo: Phil Camp)

VAYU: *On capability enablers, what are IAF's plans on refuellers? We have been tracking this saga for 2 decades.*

The Indian Air Force has made notable headway in strengthening its force multiplying capabilities, particularly in the area of air-to-air refuelling. A contract has already been concluded for the wet lease of a Flight Refuelling Aircraft (FRA), which will be jointly utilised by the IAF and the Indian Navy for training purposes. We expect this aircraft to become operational within this year, significantly enhancing our training and operational readiness.

In parallel, the IAF is also processing a case for the procurement of six additional FRAs to meet long term operational requirements. The responses to our Request for Proposal (RFP) are presently under evaluation. Combat enablers such as flight refuelling aircraft and AEW&C