

HF-24 Marut and the lost decades/opportunities



Air superiority aircraft, supersonic ground attack fighters, light transport aircraft and advanced jet trainers represent the spine of a modern air force and constitute the bulk of its tactical inventory. The Indian Air Force is such a modern air arm. In the seventies, or some two decades ago, the IAF had formulated a number of key air staff requirements (ASRs) to meet its needs for replacement of ageing aircraft with more modern equivalents. The MiG-21 FLs, which were the spearhead of the air defence system, was an excellent air superiority fighter but with severe limitations of endurance, armament and airborne radar ranging. The fleet of Su-7s, HF-24s and Hunters had to be replaced by a single supersonic tactical air strike aircraft (TASA) type. The Canberra bomber/interdictors were to give way to the supersonic deep penetration strike aircraft (DPSA) while the Vampire trainer would eventually be supplanted by an advanced jet trainer (AJT). The IAF's fleet of aging C-47 Dakotas, Devons and Otters needed replacement by a fuel efficient, versatile STOL light transport aircraft. Obviously, not all programmes could be realised at the same time but long term re-equipment plans were formulated, firming priority and funding because foreign exchange was always limited and precious.

In Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the Indian Air Force, indeed the nation, had an enormous reservoir of opportunity to meet the IAF's requirements for most, if not all, its needs of the forthcoming generation from the mid-70s till the end of the century. HAL had built up a design and development capability through the 'fifties and 'sixties with a number of rational and practical projects, starting with the primary, piston-engined trainer HT-2

