

The Second Coming



Rafales for the Indian Air Force

8 October 2019 was special for many reasons, some cultural, others martial, some in Southern Asia another in Western Europe. This year on that date, Dussehra was celebrated, a major Hindu festival observed in the Calendar month of Ashvin or Kartik and marking Rama's victory over Ravan. 8 October 2019, also marked 87th Anniversary of the Indian Air Force which celebrated its foundation with parades at Air Force Station Hindan in the morning and an 'at home' hosted by the CAS at Air House in New Delhi in the evening.

Some 7000 kilometres away to the west is Merignac, a suburb of Bordeaux in France, where another ceremony took place with the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath

Singh formally accepting the first Dassault Rafale fighter for the Indian Air Force. Rafale means 'gust' or 'squall' in English and certainly the selection of this superlative multirole combat aircraft has created much turbulence in Indian political circles.

But then a flash back to 1953 when the first French-origin fighter was inducted by the Indian Air Force : Dassault's Ouragan which translates as 'hurricane' or 'storm' in English and so the title of this article! In fact, the Rafale is the sixth Dassault aircraft type to adorn Indian markings, the Ouragan (*Toofani*) being followed by the Mystere IVA, then the Alize carrier-borne ASW aircraft, the Jaguar DPSA (jointly with BAe) and Mirage 2000, the latter currently subject of an intensive upgrade programme.

At Merignac, as Defence Minister Rajnath Singh officially accepted the first Rafale (RB 001) for the Indian Air Force, he stated "Our air force is the fourth-largest in the world and I believe that the Rafale aircraft will make us even stronger and will give a boost to India's air dominance exponentially to ensure peace and security in the region".

He was speaking at a formal handover ceremony along with his French counterpart Florence Parly at the Dassault facility in Merignac, southwestern France. The minister then performed a *shastra puja* on the new aircraft as he emblazoned it with an 'Om' *tilak*, laid flowers, coconuts and lemons (*which was subject of much comment in India*) He was also given a flight in a