

HAL launches third assembly line of Tejas jets

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Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Friday inaugurated a third production line for the Tejas light combat aircraft (LCA) in Bengaluru.

Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) currently operates two LCA assembly lines in Bengaluru, which allow it to churn out 16 Tejas fighters per year. “The new line will enable the company to enhance Tejas Mark 1 A production capacity from 16 to 24 aircraft per year,” said C B Ananthakrishnan, HAL’s chairman and managing director.

With the Indian Air Force (IAF) having placed orders on HAL for 40 Tejas Mark 1 and 83 Tejas Mark 1A fighters, it is essential to build these quickly so that the Tejas assembly lines are free for making six squadrons of Tejas Mark 2 aircraft. Senior HAL and Aeronautical Development Agency officials agree that the Tejas Mark 2 is unlikely to enter production until 2027-28.

Developing the Tejas Mark 2 will involve replacing the Tejas Mark 1A’s current General Electric F-404 engine with the more powerful GE F-414 and upgrading avionics and weaponry. Prototype development is expected to take till 2025 and another two-to-three years would go in flight-testing the Tejas Mark 2 and preparing production drawings.

HAL wants the IAF’s order of 83 Tejas Mark I-A to keep the current production lines occupied till 2028. The Mark 1A would be faster and more agile than the current Mark I. Developing it would involve shaving off 800 kg of weight from the current fighter, especially from systems like the landing gear,

which are currently “over-engineered”, or built heavy, for safety. HAL also proposes to remove 300 kg of dead weight distributed across the Mark I to balance the fighter evenly.

Sukhoi-30MKI overhauled

The defence secretary also handed over to the IAF the 100th Sukhoi-30MKI fighter that had undergone repair and overhaul (ROH) at HAL’s Nashik Division. He lauded HAL’s efforts in setting up a ROH facility for the Su-30MKI and also establishing a new production line for LCA manufacturing. “The government has come out with several Aatmanirbhar Bharat policies, and that puts HAL in a very important position,” he said. The Nashik division has achieved peak overhaul capacity of 20 Sukhoi-30MKI aircraft a year, despite confronting supply chain issues.

The Nashik division set up a ROH facility for its large fleet of 272 Sukhoi-30 MKI in 2014, the first of its kind anywhere in the world. Having gained experience from manufacturing and overhauling MiG-series and Sukhoi-30MKI fighters, HAL mastered ROH technology with valuable support from the IAF, regulatory bodies and private industries.

GOING STRONGER

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■ 100th Sukhoi-30MKI fighter that underwent repair handed over to IAF