

HAL, GE close to LCA Mk2 engine deal

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The crucial Light Combat Aircraft Mark-2 (LCA Mk2) programme has got a fresh boost, with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) on Wednesday announcing it has signed an agreement with the American engine-maker GE Aerospace to produce the GE F414 engines intended to power the combat jet in India, with substantial transfer of technology (ToT). Certain commercial aspects of the broader agreement are still being discussed, but work to ensure a swift conclusion is ongoing, said a source who did not wish to be named.

The announcement comes at a time when the Indian Air Force (IAF) is in urgent need to induct advanced combat jets like the Mk2.

“The company signed a manufacturing licence agreement with GE for the production of engines for LCA Mk2 under ToT in India,” HAL announced in its 62nd Annual Report (2024-25) filed with the stock exchanges on Wednesday.

The engine-manufacturing contract has been structured in two stages. With the agreement signing announced on Wednesday, the first stage — technical negotiations and the transfer of 80 per cent of engine technology — has been completed. HAL is now working to finalise the commercial stage, aiming to sign the final contract within this calendar year.

The development also comes at a time when the LCA Mk2 programme is gathering momentum, with a source revealing that prototyping for the jet is already underway. “The aircraft is expected to be ready for roll-out between January and March 2026, and to fly by the end of the year,” the source said. “The Mk2 is expected to be certified by 2029, with series production beginning the same year. The order volume is likely to be around 120 aircraft, and the aim will be to complete production between 2030 and 2035.”

Primarily due to delays in the arrival of F404-IN20 engines from GE, HAL missed the original February 2024 deadline to start deliveries of the LCA Mk1A, intended to replace the last of the IAF’s Russian-origin MiG-21s, which retire in September.

Amid the IAF’s mounting challenges, HAL has assured that 12 Mk1A aircraft will be delivered by the end of 2025-26. The company has already built six, which are currently flying with reserve engines — a temporary measure amid delays in the arrival of the F404 engines. The second GE engine for the Mk1A was delivered to HAL in mid-July.