



Aero India 2017 – In Retrospect

The way we were (are)!

The 11th edition of India's biennial Air Show, traditionally preceded by the International Technology Seminar, with the theme this time of 'Aerospace Technology Collaboration and Self Reliance' took place at Bangalore, India's aerospace capital, in mid-February 2017. Organised by the DRDO, the former attracted scores of excellent papers (see separately), some of which were presented live by the authors at parallel sessions at the Royal Orchid Convention Centre, not very far from the Air Force Station Yelahanka, which was hosting the industrial exhibition, static and flying displays.

As for the latter, clearly, some form of exhaustion has crept in, both in terms of organisation and participation. There were fewer exhibitors around and not all international companies which returned to this edition of Aero India, were actually exhibiting, with many of their senior executives choosing instead to 'walk the halls', meet with important (Indian) personalities, political, bureaucratic and military, so as to achieve their objectives without spending an arm and a leg!



HAL's Hawk-i comes into land at Yelahanka (photo : Angad Singh)

Hawk Mk.132s of the Surya Kiran team performing at Aero India 2017 (photo : Angad Singh)

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar had the Goa Chief Minister Laxmikant Parsekar in tow throughout which led to much talk about as to where he was headed : in fact Parrikar continuously alluded to the forthcoming elections in his native state and the speculations about his return there as Chief Minister abounded. (Ed : Manohar Parrikar resigned as Defence Minister on 12 March and headed back to Panaji to be sworn in as Chief Minister of Goa, with Arun Jaitley announced as Interim Defence Minister the next day).

Back to Aero India 2017 : there were many leaders of industry who were at Yelahanka with drums beating and flags flying. Amongst these certainly were the Israelis and Swedes, while there was a welcome return by the British industry. In fact the BAE Systems Hawk advanced jet trainer was much in evidence both in the air and on the ground. Whilst HAL-built Hawk Mk.132s of the Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT) performed over Yelahanka every day, HAL's recently rolled out Hawk-i, the 100th such aircraft produced at Bangalore, was also shown off in its new blue-white livery. Cynosure of all eyes, however, was the 'Advanced Hawk', transported from the UK and strategically displayed at the entrance to Hall E, which housed the huge HAL exhibition (see separate item).

This 'prototype' Advanced Hawk with its new 'combat wing' was smartly painted in British and Indian colours and is the subject of discussions between the two companies to meet the Indian Air Forces' projected need for potent light attack aircraft.

The Inaugural itself

The inaugural took place at sharp 0900 hours on 14 February, off the main taxi track of Air Force Station Yelahanka when Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar arrived to be greeted by Organisers of this Edition of Aero India. Accompanying him was Civil Aviation Minister Ashok Gajapathi Raju, whose presence could well signal a return to Indian aviation "synergy", this being repeatedly stressed by both the Cabinet ministers. There will be much cheer amongst the industry,



India". With reference to and in support of the Regional Air Connectivity (RCS) scheme, Parrikar later said that HAL has been cleared to build ten civilian Dornier 228s, which "sturdy aircraft" will be suitable for such applications. Parrikar also predicted a "boom" in the aviation sector, taking into account both civilian and military needs.

However, almost all the aircraft at Aero India 2017, on static or flying display were unabashedly military types and many felt that the Civil Aviation Minister's presence could well have been complemented by at least some civil airliners at the Show. In fact, considering Air India's growing fleet of A320neos, one such aircraft could have been 'spared' to adorn the apron at AFS Yelahanka and perhaps even an Air India B-787 Dreamliner doing a flyby after the inaugural would have stressed the point!

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar escorted to the dias by Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa and other senior officials



Four of the five aircraft types in the 'Might formation' are, left to right, Su-30MKI, Tejas LCA, Dornier Do-228 and Hawk-i (photo : Angad Singh)

if indeed there is ONE airshow in India with the purportedly 'civil-oriented' India Aviation Show in Hyderabad attracting fewer and fewer participants ; another sign of 'exhaustion' mentioned earlier! However, alert Vayu readers will recollect that during Aero India 2013, then Defence Minister AK Anthony had shared his vision for the future of aviation in India with the then Civil Aviation Minister Ajit Singh, who "appeared to agree to move ahead jointly for such expositions." This has still not happened!

Now, in his inaugural address, Mr Parrikar stated that the government

was committed to creating an enabling environment for a domestic ecosystem in defence production. "The defence public sector undertakings are being revitalised and encouraged. Government has also taken several initiatives for ease of doing business for private firms and additional initiatives are underway to support the role of private sector in defence manufacturing." This was echoed by the Civil Aviation Minister in his speech, who added that "India's airspace is well defended by the armed forces, which has enabled civil aviation to grow and connect an increasing number of destinations in

The speeches over, the invitees were then treated to the customary flying displays, traditionally starting with a trio of Mi-17 helicopters trailing national flags, followed by a most unusual mixed formation of five HAL-built aircraft, which comprised the Tejas LCA, Dornier 228, HTT-40, Hawk-i, and Su-30MKI ('Might Formation'). Individual flying displays were then carried out by single examples of the Tejas, Gripen, Rafale, Falcon and Su-30MKI, followed by Hawks of the IAF's Surya Kiran Formation Aerobatic Team (SKAT) and the traditional finale by four HAL Dhruv helicopters of the Sarang team.