

Nipped in the Bud!

India's Aviation Industry



HAL HF-24 Maruts at Bangalore

Dr Sanjay Badri Maharaj explores India's aviation industry with special focus on how a clear and systematic development programme for combat aircraft and trainers was destroyed before it could bear fruit. This has had serious consequences for the industry, which was reduced to becoming a serf for licence-production, with consequential loss of design capability.

India's defence industry is perhaps one of the most unfairly maligned extant. From Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) to the Ordnance Factories Board (OFB) and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), there is a litany of complaints, insinuations and insults – some undoubtedly justified, but

others incited either by malafide intentions or out of pure ignorance.

As the country has embarked upon the 'Make in India' initiative in defence production, which is still winding its way towards delivering usable products, it is worth examining the period in India's defence industry between 1948 and 1980

in which much progress was made, but such strong foundation betrayed by a fatal combination of military exigencies, fiscal constraints but mostly political and military myopia.

It should be noted that 'indigenisation' is a much used and abused word. It is not entirely clear whether the Indian Navy has