

30 Years on



Typical scene at the flight line at Chakeri, with HAL-built Dornier 228s of the Indian Navy, before handing over to the Service

The Dornier 228 programme in India

The contract for licence production of the Dornier 228 Light Transport Aircraft in India was signed 30 years back, on 29 November 1983. Since then, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited at their Transport Aircraft Division at Chakeri (Kanpur) have systematically manufactured several variants of this versatile aircraft for the Indian Coast Guard, Air Force, Navy and the erstwhile Vayudoot. Single examples were also produced for the Airports Authority of India and private operators such as UB Air and Jagsons (remanufactured from

an earlier Druk Air delivery) while a few have been exported to the Mauritius Coast Guard and recently, the Seychelles.

With over 120 aircraft delivered so far and another 35 plus on order, this ensures that production of this ubiquitous light transport aircraft will continue till at least the end of this decade, making it one of the most successful licence production and true transfer-of-technology programmes in Indian aviation history.

However, HAL has not taken advantage of the rights earned by it wherein, the original licensor was to 'buy back' a

minimum of 35 aircraft kits during the initial 10 year period nor indeed market the HAL-built 228 to the 30 countries earmarked as 'exclusive' to it. The original company Dornier was thereafter 'taken over' by a US investor which soon enough closed the programme in Germany and HAL became the only production agency for the 228 in the world and could have, over the past decade, exported at least two score aircraft worldwide.

The Swiss company RUAG, which 'inherited' the Dornier 228 IPR, restarted the programme to the extent that in 2008, it



Historic photograph of the signing ceremony at South Block on 29 November 1983, between Secretary Defence Production Mahesh Sarin and Dr Fritz Mader, Director Dornier GmbH to his right. Further right are Gerd Schoenbuchner and Reinhold Birrenbach of Dornier. Opposite them is (then) Air Marshal Lakshman Katre, Chairman HAL (later Chief of the Air Staff).

ordered 50 odd 228s from HAL in kit form for completion in Germany to the 228NG standard for worldwide sales. However, the very high price reportedly quoted by RUAG have precluded success and the

programme seems to have petered out. A few aircraft have however been sold by RUAG to India's neighbours, particularly the Bangladesh Navy which will operate two 228s in the maritime surveillance

role from Chittagong, covering the Bay of Bengal. Ironically, the same space is being covered by Indian Coast Guard HAL-Dornier 228s operating from Calcutta (*see story in this issue*).



The key sensor on Indian Navy HAL-Dornier 228s is the ELTA EL/M2022 360° Maritime Surveillance Radar