

Challenging times ahead for the Indian Air Force



As we all know, the Indian Air Force celebrated its 92nd year of formation on 8 October 2024 and each passing year is bringing new challenges as our adversaries are modernising at a rapid pace, even our western adversary is doing quite well towards their modernisation even after facing financial issues due to poor economical performance, but Indian Air Force, on the other hand, is facing serious capability issues even after India's rapid economic growth.

Most of this capability issue is due to poor acquisition planning and execution. We are riding on two boats simultaneously, one is sailing towards Atmanirbharta and the second one is sailing towards capability build-up, ultimately they will meet at a common destination as Atmanirbharta (Self-Reliance) will lead to serious capability buildup which will have a strong base. But till it happens it's also important that both of these boats sail together. Unfortunately, this is not happening.

While there is an important push for Atmanirbharta, which is very much necessary, we are compromising on

capability build-up as we are trying to ignore imports over indigenous systems. We need to understand, that modern technologies are very sophisticated, with the current base we have, it will take time to develop the capability to make these modern types of equipment, for many systems we don't even have proper testing facilities, although we are doing an impressive job. Still, it is taking time and we are missing on important timelines. Our adversaries are building capabilities, while we are lagging dangerously.

It is very important to have a parallel approach, to sail both boats together. The solution is expensive but we can afford it. We cannot stop importing in one day as we were the biggest arms importer for decades, we must maintain fighting capabilities while ensuring that our imports are reduced. The sanctioned IAF fighter squadron strength is 42 for two front scenarios, and with the retiring MiGs it's reaching just 30, which will further go down with the retirement of MiG-29s, Jaguars and Mirage 2000.

Right now, as a replacement case for these aircraft, we are relying on the indigenous fighter development