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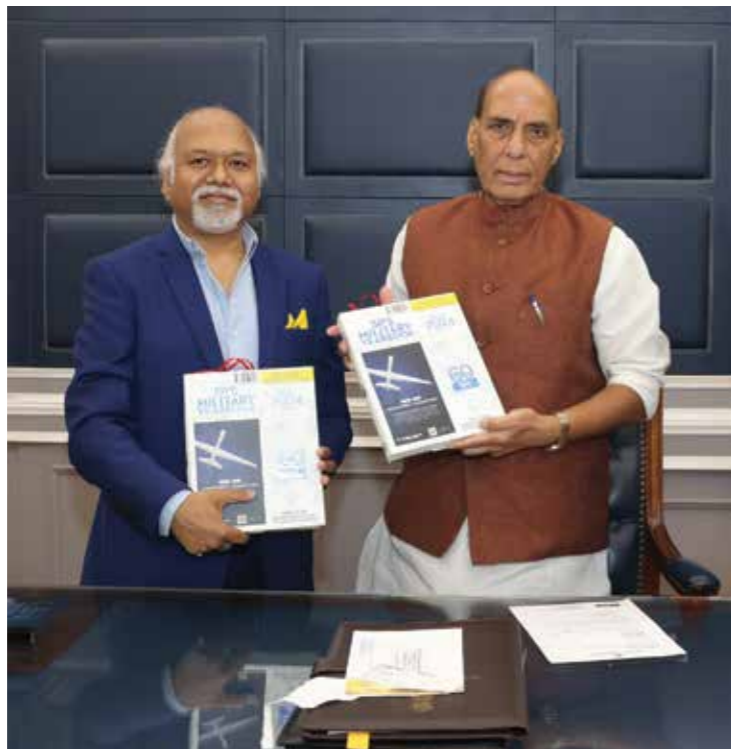
ARTEMIS II CREWED MISSION

BY SETTING NEW FRONTIERS IN HUMAN SPACE EXPLORATION, THE MISSION HAS VALIDATED DEEP-SPACE SYSTEMS, CAPABLE OF SENDING HUMANS FARTHER THAN EVER BEFORE **PAGE 3**

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The long journey of Artemis II back from lunar space to a flawless Pacific splashdown closed with every major objective met. The successful homecoming now clears the path for Artemis III, the mission expected to return humans to the lunar surface, later this decade.

(Cover Photo: NASA / Daniel O'Neal)

COVER DESIGN BY: SP's Team



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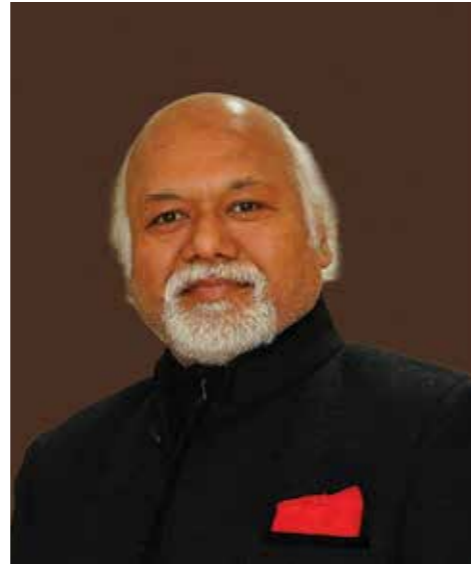
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The Artemis II mission marks a decisive shift in human space exploration, demonstrating the capability to send astronauts farther than ever before and safely return them to Earth. By validating deep-space systems, mission architecture and crew operations, it lays the groundwork for sustained lunar missions and eventual journeys to Mars, redefining the scope and ambition of future space exploration.



IN THE LEAD FEATURE STORY, ROHIT GOEL EXAMINES HOW the Artemis II mission marked humanity's return to deep space after more than five decades, validating NASA's Orion spacecraft and broader Moon-to-Mars architecture through a 10-day crewed mission beyond lunar orbit. It set a new record for the farthest human travel from Earth while rigorously testing life-support, navigation, communications and re-entry systems. The mission demonstrated full operational capability and provided critical data for future lunar landings and eventual Mars missions, signaling a strategic shift toward sustained human presence in cislunar space.

Air Marshal R.G.K. Kapoor (Retd) analyses the ongoing USA–Israel–Iran conflict, highlighting the enduring centrality of air power amid evolving realities shaped by drones, missiles and geography. Despite air superiority, dispersed and deeply buried assets limited decisive outcomes. The conflict underscored the need for scalable air defence, greater magazine depth and manned-unmanned integration, reinforcing that air power must adapt to asymmetric, high-intensity warfare increasingly defined by cost-effective threats.

Manish Kumar Jha outlines India's modernisation effort to rebuild the Indian Air Force's combat strength through planned acquisitions, including 114 Rafale fighters, Medium Transport Aircraft and AEW&C systems. The scale signals a shift toward high-intensity, technology-driven warfare, aiming to restore squadron strength, enhance readiness and improve deterrence, potentially transforming the IAF into a more capable, future-ready force.

Dassault Aviation has unveiled the Falcon 10X, a clean-sheet ultra-long-range business jet with the largest cabin in its class. Designed for enhanced comfort through flexible configurations and advanced systems, it offers a 7,500 nautical mile range, targeting global connectivity needs. Rohit Goel highlights how the aircraft combines performance, efficiency and innovation, positioning it as a flagship in a competitive segment.

Sanjay Julka discusses the evolving structure of business aviation, where separating aircraft ownership from opera-

tional management is gaining relevance. Traditional models face pressure for efficiency, transparency and specialised services. Decoupling ownership enables better cost control and flexibility, particularly in emerging markets, and is expected to improve utilisation, service standards and participation from global operators and financiers.

In his opinion piece, Alasdair Whyte highlights India's business aviation sector as it begins to unlock long-standing potential. Growing interest from OEMs and operators reflects increasing confidence, with projections pointing to significant fleet expansion by 2030 as the market transitions from latent promise to tangible growth.

Neetu Dhulia explains the growing divide in aviation fuel economics, shaped by taxation, pricing disparities and sustainability pressures. In India, high ATF taxes continue to impact costs, while the shift toward sustainable fuels adds complexity. Balancing environmental goals with economic viability remains a key challenge, highlighting the need for policy alignment and coordinated industry efforts.

SP's Special Correspondent captures strong momentum at AERO Friedrichshafen 2026, marked by record participation and growing confidence in business and general aviation. The event showcased advancements in aircraft, avionics and sustainable technologies, reflecting an industry adapting to evolving demands. Rising international participation also reinforced its global relevance.

All this and more in this issue of *SP's Aviation*. Welcome aboard and we wish you safe landings!


JAYANT BARANWAL
 PUBLISHER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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THE ARTEMIS II CREW IN A GROUP PHOTO WITH THEIR ZERO GRAVITY INDICATOR "RISE," INSIDE THE ORION SPACECRAFT ON THEIR WAY HOME

TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE OF HUMAN SPACE EXPLORATION

After a 10-day journey that took humanity farther from Earth than ever before, the four astronauts of Artemis II splashed down on Earth, completing a mission that validated NASA's entire deep-space architecture, paving the way for the next generation of human space exploration

By ROHIT GOEL

AS DUSK SETTLED OVER FLORIDA'S SPACE COAST ON THE evening of April 1, 2026, thousands gathered along the shoreline and around Kennedy Space Center, their eyes fixed on the illuminated silhouette of the Space Launch System standing against the darkening sky. Then, with a flash that turned night briefly into day, the rocket came alive. Fire billowed from its base, the air trembled under the force of nearly 8.8 million pounds of thrust, and slowly, almost majestically, the vehicle began its ascent. In that instant, history moved forward. With the launch of Artemis II, NASA sent humans beyond low Earth

orbit for the first time since Apollo 17 in 1972, reopening a route that had remained dormant for 54 years.

THE MISSION BEHIND THE MOMENT

Artemis II was not designed as a landing mission. No crew member would set foot on the lunar surface. Instead, the flight was structured as the most critical proving mission in NASA's new deep-space architecture — a systematic, end-to-end test of the Orion spacecraft and its ability to support astronauts in the deep space environment. Life-support systems, communications,

PHOTOGRAPH: NASA

guidance, navigation, propulsion, radiation performance and re-entry capability were all being evaluated under real operational conditions that no simulation can fully replicate.

At the centre of this mission stood the Space Launch System (SLS), NASA's most powerful launch vehicle ever flown. Built using shuttle-derived RS-25 engines combined with advanced solid rocket boosters and a new upper stage, it represented the backbone of America's Moon-to-Mars architecture — a statement of both engineering ambition and industrial commitment.

Carrying this machine into history were four astronauts: Commander Reid Wiseman, a former US Navy test pilot and former NASA Chief Astronaut who had previously logged 165 days aboard the International Space Station; Pilot Victor Glover, a US Navy aviator who had served on the SpaceX Crew-1 mission and, on Artemis II, became the first Black astronaut to travel toward the Moon; Mission Specialist Christina Koch, who holds the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman at 328 days and became the first woman to travel to lunar space; and Mission Specialist Jeremy Hansen, a Colonel in the Royal

Canadian Air Force and the first Canadian — and first non-American — ever assigned to a lunar mission.

Distance in spaceflight is never merely a numerical achievement. Every additional mile from Earth introduces greater operational complexity — from communications delays and cosmic radiation exposure to crew endurance and autonomous mission decision-making. The farther a spacecraft travels, the less immediate support it can receive from the ground, making onboard systems reliability, and crew preparedness critical. This is why the Artemis II distance record carries importance far beyond the headline figure. It demonstrates that humans can operate safely and effectively at the ranges that will define all future lunar and planetary missions.

That day also carried a distinctly human moment. Following their historic flyby, the crew held a live conversation with the US President from the far side of the Moon — a call that underscored not only the mission's technical achievement but the degree to which deep-space communication systems had been validated in real time.



(LEFT-RIGHT) NASA'S SPACE LAUNCH SYSTEM ROCKET CARRYING THE ORION SPACECRAFT LAUNCHES ON THE ARTEMIS II MISSION ON A 10-DAY JOURNEY AROUND THE MOON AND BACK ABOARD; FLIGHT PATH OF ARTEMIS II MISSION, THE FIRST CREWED TEST FLIGHT TO THE MOON SINCE APOLLO.



Canadian Air Force and the first Canadian — and first non-American — ever assigned to a lunar mission.

WHERE NO HUMAN HAD GONE BEFORE

Over the days that followed launch, the Orion spacecraft, named Integrity by its crew, fulfilled objectives methodically as it arced toward the Moon on a free-return trajectory. Then, on April 6, the mission crossed a threshold that no amount of mission planning had diminished in significance.

Artemis II surpassed 2,52,756 miles from Earth — beyond the record long held by Apollo 13, whose crew had reached approximately 2,48,655 miles during their emergency return trajectory around the Moon in 1970. For more than five decades, while spaceflight advanced dramatically through the Shuttle era and the International Space Station, human missions remained confined to Earth's orbital neighbourhood. The Apollo 13 distance stood as a marker of both achievement and the limits of ambition.

Artemis II dismantled that marker by design. The Orion spacecraft crossed the historic threshold as it swept around the far side of the Moon, officially completing the farthest human voyage ever undertaken. For the crew onboard, it was the greatest physical separation from Earth ever experienced by human beings. For NASA and the aerospace industry, it was something equally important: decisive validation of spacecraft autonomy,

THE LONG ROAD HOME

The return journey began immediately after Orion completed its sweep around the far side of the Moon and exited the lunar sphere of influence — the point at which the Moon's gravity yields to Earth's pull. From that point, the spacecraft entered the most critical leg of the entire mission. The outward journey had demonstrated propulsion, navigation and deep-space communications. The trip home would test the systems that matter most to crew survival: thermal protection, re-entry guidance, parachute deployment and coordinated recovery operations.

Inside Integrity, the crew transitioned from exploration mode to return procedures. NASA's mission updates confirmed that the astronauts spent the final days of flight conducting cabin checks, reviewing re-entry protocols with mission control and securing onboard equipment for descent. By Flight Day 9, formal splashdown preparations were underway, and on Flight Day 10 the Orion spacecraft executed its final return-trajectory correction burn — an eight-second thruster firing that placed the vehicle precisely on course for Earth. NASA confirmed that the mission had consumed less than half of the fuel aboard the European Service Module, a significant margin that speaks to the precision of the mission's navigation planning throughout.

RE-ENTRY: THE ULTIMATE TEST OF THE ARCHITECTURE

As Orion descended toward Earth, the mission entered its most technically demanding phase. Returning from lunar space is fundamentally different from re-entry from low Earth orbit. The spacecraft approached Earth at more than 24,000 mph — over 30 times the speed of sound — while its heat shield endured temperatures approaching 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit during atmospheric entry. The crew was expected to experience up to 3.9 Gs in the planned entry profile.

During peak heating, the spacecraft passed through a planned communications blackout as plasma built around the capsule and for several minutes, there was silence in Mission Control at Johnson Space Center. Then communications were restored and the drogue parachutes deployed, the three main parachutes unfurled at approximately 6,000 feet.

The Orion spacecraft splashed down safely in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of San Diego on April 10, 2026, completing a total journey of 6,94,481 miles. The recovery team — working alongside the Department of Defense and the USS John P.

For the aerospace industry, the implications run deeper still. The mission has now provided NASA and its entire contractor ecosystem with real-world performance data across every critical phase of a deep-space crewed flight. Propulsion, habitation, communications, re-entry, parachute systems and recovery operations have all been tested under live conditions. Every subsystem advances into the next phase of programme maturity with the confidence that only an actual mission can provide — and that no amount of simulation expenditure could have purchased.

THE NEXT CHAPTER OPENS

If Artemis II reopened the road to the Moon, and its record-setting distance redefined the scale of modern exploration, then its successful splashdown has achieved something equally important — it has proved that humanity can once again travel into deep space and come home safely.

The deeper narrative of Artemis II was never solely about reaching the Moon's vicinity. It was about building the operational confidence needed for the next era. With China



(LEFT-RIGHT) ON APRIL 6, 2026, SIX DAYS INTO THE ARTEMIS II MISSION, ASTRONAUTS ON ARTEMIS II SURPASSED THE RECORD FOR HUMAN SPACEFLIGHT'S FARTHEST DISTANCE FROM EARTH; NASA'S ORION SPACECRAFT, WITH ARTEMIS II CREWMEMBERS ONBOARD, LANDS IN THE PACIFIC OCEAN ON APRIL 10, 2026.



Murtha — moved swiftly to secure the capsule. Navy divers approached Orion, opened the hatch and assisted the crew onto the inflatable "front porch" before helicopter transfer to the recovery ship.

EVERY OBJECTIVE MET

The splashdown marked far more than the end of a single mission. It marked the successful completion of every primary objective set out for Artemis II. NASA's goals for the flight had been defined with precision: validate Orion's life-support systems in deep space, test crew interfaces and operational procedures, verify navigation and communications at lunar distance, and prove the spacecraft's ability to safely return astronauts from beyond Earth orbit. By the time Integrity was secured on deck, those objectives had been met in full.

In NASA's post-splashdown remarks, Commander Wiseman reflected on the journey's significance, noting that the mission had demonstrated the complete operational cycle — outward journey, deep-space systems performance and safe return — with the confidence that only an actual crewed mission can provide. NASA's mission leadership described the successful completion as the foundational step for all future missions under the Moon-to-Mars roadmap, reinforcing that Artemis II was the essential bridge to Artemis III and future lunar surface operations.

accelerating its own lunar ambitions, including plans for crewed missions and long-term surface infrastructure, Artemis II also serves as a declaration that the United States and its international partners intend to lead the next phase of cislunar operations. This is no longer the Cold War-era race to plant a flag. The competition now is about long-term presence — communications networks, logistics systems, scientific infrastructure and eventual resource utilisation, particularly at the Moon's South Pole, where deposits of water ice could support future habitation and fuel generation.

The road ahead leads directly to Artemis III, which will test rendezvous and docking with commercial lunar landing systems in Earth orbit, and then to Artemis IV, the planned crewed lunar surface landing later this decade. Every lesson from Artemis II — on crew endurance, spacecraft reliability, thermal management and deep-space operations — feeds directly into those missions. And beyond the Moon, the systems and procedures validated by Artemis II are the same foundational elements required for Mars.

Apollo proved humanity could reach the Moon. Artemis II has proved humanity can do it again — deliberately, safely, and as the first step in a programme designed not for one triumphant moment, but for permanence. And this time, the journey has only just begun. **SP**

PHOTOGRAPHS: NASA / BILL INGALLS, NASA

PHOTOGRAPHS: NASA, BILL INGALLS



LESSONS FROM THE IRAN WAR

How Air Power Shaped the USA/Israel–Iran War and Strategic Lessons from the Conflict

By AIR MARSHAL R.G.K. KAPOOR (RETD)

“The military mind always imagines that the next war will be on the same lines as the last. That has never been the case and never will be. One of the great factors on the next war will be aircraft obviously. The potentialities of aircraft attack on a large scale are almost incalculable.” – Ferdinand Foch

AIR POWER HAS PLAYED A PIVOTAL ROLE IN EVERY CONFLICT since its inception at the beginning of the 20th century. This role of air power has become more critical when contextualised against national objectives and political intent. While a lot is being spoken about the exponential growth of drones and mis-

siles, air warfare, doctrinally remains the cornerstone in winning any conflict. When guided by clearly spelt-out objectives, an air campaign can be decisive; the converse also holds true, as is evident in protracted conflicts across the world.

The ongoing Iran-USA/ Israel war has generated a debate on certain aspects of air warfare. It must, however, be viewed in the context of air power doctrine and multi-domain operations and the geographical distance between the combatant nations. Air superiority has always been the first goal in any war, and the same held primacy in this conflict, too. Now that there is a pause in operations, it is clear that air power achieved every tactical and operational objective, while the strategic outcome of the war remains a source of worldwide debate.

While, USA and Israel engaged around 15,000 targets in Iran (as quoted by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth of the USA), Iran launched almost 7,000 drones and missiles. The damage achieved by the air strikes far outweighs the damage caused by drones and missiles from Iran. Analysis of the conflict brings out lessons, some of which would be applicable in our context too.

VALIDATION OF DOCTRINAL PRECEPTS OF AIR WARFARE

The modern air power doctrines stress the establishment of



(LEFT-RIGHT) ISRAEL AND THE US HAVE USED THEIR LATEST TECHNOLOGY AND WEAPONS SYSTEMS TO ACHIEVE AIR DOMINANCE OVER IRAN

control of the air as a prerequisite for a successful air campaign. This was achieved in the initial days of the war through systematic degradation of the Iranian Air Force, which allowed almost complete freedom of operation for the USA and Israel. US and Israel used a combination of drones, loiter munitions, missiles and stand-off precision attacks by fighter aircraft to produce desired effects in a multi-domain operational scenario.

Slow-moving large-sized UAVs are vulnerable in highly contested airspaces. 24 MQ-9 Reapers and 18 Hermes/ Herons were lost, against the loss of just one F-15E and damage to one F-35A to Iranian air defences. This proves two things: firstly, the utility of large UAVs in contested air spaces and secondly, mission planning must cater for mobile, especially passive AD resources of the adversary, despite a high degree of control of air.

INTELLIGENCE SURVEILLANCE RECONNAISSANCE

ISR played an important role in the entire conflict, and Mossad penetrated the highest echelons of Iranian political and military leadership. The USA deployed assets for ISR and real-time

intelligence; this led to the selective targeting of Iranian leadership throughout the war and the sabotage of numerous Iranian systems, especially AD systems. Credible intelligence led to the targeting of hardened underground facilities, missile and drone storage sites and military industrial complexes.

On the other hand, Iran was able to target US assets on the ground in virtually all Gulf nations based on quality intelligence through its proxies, supporters and its own TEE-01B satellite, drones like Shahed-147, Mohajer-6/10, Ababil and Fotros. It also used Agentic AI in processing SIGINT. Iran successfully employed its ISR resources to target AWACS and Tankers on the ground.

A major lesson in ISR was distinguishing between the real targets and decoys, persistence and timely intelligence to reduce sensor to shooter loop and the importance of HUMINT. It also brought out the challenges in acquiring and processing ISR data over a large geographic area (Iran is spread over a landmass of 1.64 million sq km). The gaps that increased with the passage of the war allowed Iran to successfully deploy its dispersed missiles and drones. This war once again underscores the importance of capacious ISR capability and capacity, especially while dealing with a geographically expansive adversary.

IMPORTANCE OF MANNED SYSTEMS

This war has opened a debate on manned versus unmanned aerial systems. Extensive use of unmanned systems by both Ukraine and Iran has been effective; however, the nation cannot gain control of the air with unmanned systems and missiles alone. Statistically, almost 90 per cent of drones and missiles were intercepted by US and Israeli air defence systems, against just two fighters being intercepted by Iranian air defences. Omni-role aircraft with stealth capability can engage multiple targets in a single mission with high accuracy and weight of attack while acting as a command node integrating precision fires in multiple domains. They create a favourable environment for land and maritime forces to operate with relatively greater freedom, which drones and missiles cannot achieve.

Modern multi role fighters undertake a range of functions simultaneously, from SEAD, long range precision strike, air-to-air, ISR and EW. Missile launchers need refurbishment after a few launches, while manned fighters can undertake multiple missions by day and night and most importantly, the manned fighter takes decision and can abort a mission, which is dif-

ILLUSTRATION: VIMLESH YADAV / SP GUIDE PUBNS

PHOTOGRAPHS: IDF / X, US AIR FORCE

difficult for a missile. The major lesson is to have a judicious mix of manned and unmanned systems, rapidly achieve manned-unmanned teaming and supplement them with a mix of ballistic and cruise missiles with high accuracy and manoeuvrability to saturate adversary air defences.

AIR DEFENCE

This war demonstrated how low-cost cheap drones and missiles with cluster warheads can saturate air defences. At the same time, it brought out the inadequacies in the American approach to Air Defence, where they relied on expensive kinetic kill measures in the form of THAAD and Patriot systems driving up the cost of interception. US Air Defence philosophy relied heavily on kinetic options, and its low density and fixed large radars were successfully targeted by cheap Iranian drones due to disparate and thinly located air defence systems and large number of nations involved in defending US assets on ground.

US and Israel severely degraded the Iranian Integrated Air Defence system in the initial phase of the war using kinetic and soft kill systems. Lack of refined networking created gaps that could be exploited by the US and Israeli Air Forces. This proved critical for the subsequent employment of low-tech aircraft and other airborne systems. The challenges of completely decimating the air defences were also highlighted when an F-35 was engaged by an IR-based AD system, and an F-15 was shot down. Survivability of, especially highly mobile systems, passive AD systems and MANPADS must always be factored in mission planning. Continuous innovation in AD techniques of ambushing fighters remains relevant in present air warfare.

Air Defence needs to be multi layered, automated and net centric to deal with the entire range of aerial threats from low observable, low speed drones to hypersonic missiles, air launched supersonic weapons and multiple warheads in a single missile. Use of AI in target identification and interception for cost-effective air defence was proved by Israeli defences by achieving an almost 95 per cent interception rate in the initial phases of war. Scalable and modular solutions against cheap and massed drone attacks, including innovative interceptor drones, are necessary to achieve a cost balance. The USA used expensive missiles, aircraft and high-end weapon systems, driving up the cost of war adversely. Air Defence systems need to be scalable, modular, low-cost with high magazine depth to cater to the complete spectrum of threats.

IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY

Geography played a crucial role in this conflict. Despite engaging almost 15,000 targets and having overwhelming air superiority, both the USA and Israel could not completely destroy the missile and drone arsenal of Iran. This proves the importance of geography and the limits of conventional weapons. Iran effectively used mountainous terrain to its advantage in the form of missiles and drone cities deeply buried in its mountains, well dispersed over its large geographical area. Reports indicate that almost 40-50 per cent of its drone and 60 per cent of its missile arsenal remains intact. This proves

that dispersed and deeply buried force can survive longer and remain effective against a sustained air campaign, while the cost of doing so may be huge.

Conventional weapons have limitations against deeply buried targets. The most powerful bomb of the USAF, GBU-57, can penetrate about 60-meter depth; however, Iran is believed to have constructed tunnels that are almost 500 meters deep. Iran also dispersed such facilities across the entire nation, thus straining the ISR and strike resources of US/Israel. This is an example of exploiting the limits of conventional weapons for force preservation; it also supports that targeting becomes harder even for a conventionally superior force. Iran learned this from the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Ukraine and implemented it on a large scale in its war strategy.

FORCE PROTECTION

Expensive force multipliers like AWACS, Air refuelers and special mission aircraft are critical to warfighting and limited in numbers. Both the Ukraine and Iran war have now underscored the effectiveness of long-range low observable drones against these assets if they are not protected, since loss of such platforms has a significant strategic impact.

These assets, by their size, can be easily picked up by aerial/space-based ISR systems or HUMINT. Their dispersed operations and preservation measures, including passive defence measures, are extremely relevant in modern warfare against low-cost drones. Even hardened shelters were seen to be rendered ineffective by accurate low-cost drones and air-launched precision weapons. A cost versus benefit analysis on hardening of infrastructure versus passive measures, dispersal and other actions needs to be a part of the overall operational plan, including positioning of AD assets to defend such assets.

CONCLUSION

The USA/Israel-Iran war has many lessons for air warfare in the future. Air power ensured outright success at the tactical and operational levels. Air power continues to be the instrument of choice especially, while dealing with a geographically distant theatre of operation. Going forward, affordable mass, magazine depth, scalable and modular systems are critical in a high intensity conflict where the adversary has the depth and endurance with asymmetric options. The cost of air warfare being very high, affordable mass can be created by manned-unmanned teaming, autonomous aerial systems and a combination of strike options including manned fighters, drones and missiles integrated with cyber and EW capabilities.

Most important takeaway perhaps is that Indian challenges are unique on its two fronts and hence, lessons from the ongoing conflicts must be adapted to the Indian context. The most important lesson is that a defensive approach can perhaps delay defeat but not win wars. While the latest generation fighters are critical to operate in highly contested air spaces and achieve control of air, contemporary fighters remain relevant to deliver the desired weight of attack once the desired degree of control of air is achieved. Air power is inherently offensive and needs to be deployed offensively to achieve cross-domain effects. [SP](#)

The modern air power doctrines stress the establishment of control of the air as a prerequisite for a successful air campaign



THE PLANNED ACQUISITION OF 114 RAFALE JETS UNDER THE MRFA PROGRAMME INDICATES URGENCY TO RESOLVE THE IAF'S SQUADRON STRENGTH

MAJOR IAF BOOST WITH RAFALE, MTA AND AEW&C DEALS

The scale of acquisitions signals a shift from incremental upgrades to preparing for high-intensity, technology-led warfare. If executed well, they could rebuild IAF squadron strength, boost readiness, and strengthen deterrence.

By MANISH KUMAR JHA

INDIA'S DEFENCE MODERNISATION HAS OFTEN MOVED IN cautious, incremental steps. The latest disclosure to the parliamentary standing committee on defence, however, signals something markedly different: a decisive, high-stakes push to rebuild the Indian Air Force's (IAF) eroding combat and support capabilities.

The proposed conclusion of mega deals—114 Rafale fighters, up to 60 Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA), and advanced AEW&C systems—between 2026 and 2027 reflects both urgency and strategic clarity.

At the heart of this shift is money—serious money. A 37.03 per

PHOTOGRAPH: SP GUIDE PUBLIS

cent increase in the IAF's capital budget over the 2025–26 estimates is strategic. The government appears willing to back long-pending modernisation plans with real financial muscle, a departure from years of constrained procurement cycles and delayed decisions.

The headline acquisition—the 114 Rafale jets under the MRFA programme—indicated urgency to resolve the IAF's squadron strength. The Rafale has already proven its value in the IAF's fleet, offering advanced avionics, multi-role flexibility, and strong deterrence capability. The MRFA programme will cost around ₹3.25 lakh crore. The proposed aircraft under the MRFA will be manufactured in India through a partnership between French entity Dassault Aviation and an Indian defence firm.

India already operates a fleet of 36 Rafales, which pushes for the operational and logistics benefits. Expanding this fleet could provide operational uniformity and reduce logistical complexity. But it also raises questions. Will India double down on a proven but expensive platform at the cost of indigenous alternatives? Or can this deal be structured to meaningfully boost domestic manufacturing under 'Make in India,' avoiding the pitfalls of past import-heavy acquisitions?

MEDIUM TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT GETS CLEARANCE

Equally critical, though less headline-grabbing, is the Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA) programme. India's military logistics backbone is ageing, and recent experiences—from border standoffs to humanitarian missions—have underscored the importance of rapid airlift capability.

The Defence Acquisition Board's nod to a ₹1 lakh crore (MTA) programme is a timely, if overdue, step toward fixing a critical gap in the Indian Air Force's logistics chain. The ageing Antonov An-32 fleet has long stretched beyond its intended lifespan, and replacing it is essential for maintaining operational readiness across diverse and demanding terrains.

The real significance of the programme lies not just in numbers—60 aircraft—but in its structure. With only 12 to be imported and 48 to be built domestically, the project offers a good opportunity to strengthen India's aerospace manufacturing base. The choice between platforms like the Embraer C-390 Millennium, Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules, and Airbus A400M Atlas must therefore go beyond performance metrics to include technology transfer and long-term industrial gains.

A fleet of 60 MTAs would significantly enhance mobility, allowing the armed forces to respond swiftly across diverse terrains, from the Himalayas to island territories. In modern warfare, logistics is not a support function; it is a decisive advantage.



EMBRAER HAS PROPOSED C-390 MILLENNIUM FOR IAF'S MTA PROGRAMME

The inclusion of advanced AEW&C systems is another strategically sound move. Air superiority today depends as much on information dominance as on firepower. These airborne surveillance platforms act as force multipliers, extending radar coverage, coordinating assets, and providing real-time battle management. In a region marked by increasingly sophisticated aerial threats, strengthening this capability is not optional—it is essential.

However, ambition must be matched by execution. India's defence procurement history is littered with delays, cost overruns, and shifting requirements. The MRFA programme itself has been in discussion for years. If these deals are to be concluded within the 2026–27 timeframe, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) will need to streamline procedures, ensure transparency, and maintain consistency in decision-making. Bureaucratic inertia cannot be allowed to dilute strategic intent.

There is also the broader question of balance. While imports can plug immediate capability gaps, long-term security depends on domestic industrial strength. The simultaneous allocation for Tejas MK1A jets and drones suggests an awareness of this dual need. The challenge will be to ensure that big-ticket foreign acquisitions do not overshadow or undercut indigenous programmes.

Ultimately, this moment represents an inflection point. The scale of planned acquisitions indicates that India is no longer content with incremental upgrades; it is preparing for a future defined by high-intensity, technology-driven conflict. If executed well, these deals could restore the IAF's squadron strength, enhance operational readiness, and reinforce deterrence.

The intent is clear. The resources are being mobilised. What is expected that India must translate into timely, effective capability on the ground—and in the air. **SP**

The proposed conclusion of mega deals—114 Rafale fighters, up to 60 Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA), and advanced AEW&C systems—between 2026 and 2027 reflects both urgency and strategic clarity

PHOTOGRAPH: EMBRAER

TRANSFORMING INDIA'S HELICOPTER LANDSCAPE

In a major push to developing India's Helicopter Ecosystem, Adani and Leonardo have announced a MoU to build a Helicopter Manufacturing Hub



(LEFT) ADANI-LEONARDO SIGN STRATEGIC COLLABORATION; (RIGHT) AW169M MARITIME HELICOPTER.



IN EARLY FEBRUARY THIS YEAR, ADANI DEFENCE & AEROSPACE, the flagship defence and aerospace arm of Adani Enterprises Ltd and a frontrunner in India's defence sector, and Leonardo, a global leader in defence, aerospace, and security, announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). According to the partners, this landmark partnership will establish a fully integrated helicopter manufacturing ecosystem in India, addressing surging military demands and propelling the nation toward self-reliance in helicopter production.

Targeting the Indian Armed Forces' requirements, particularly for Leonardo's advanced AW169M and AW109 TrekkerM helicopters, the collaboration will deliver phased indigenization, robust maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) capabilities, and comprehensive pilot training.

By fusing Leonardo's world-class helicopter design and engineering prowess with Adani Defence's end-to-end defence and aerospace expertise, the initiative advances the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision, strengthens national defence readiness, with the potential to be extended to civil aviation applications and international supply chain integration.

This ecosystem, according to the partners, promises transformative economic impact: thousands of high-skill jobs in engineering, manufacturing, logistics, and sustainment services, while cementing India as a competitive hub for helicopter production.

The Indian Armed Forces are believed to project demand for over 1,000 helicopters in the coming decade, therefore this

partnership intends to provide its contribution for the future, helping to redefine India's aerospace landscape, strengthening defence autonomy and position the country as a trusted global hub for helicopter manufacturing and sustainment.

The first platform involved in this collaboration would be the Leonardo AW169. An example would be the NUH (Naval Utility Helicopter) requirement. Given the Indian Navy expectations in terms of readiness, maturity, robustness and compatibility for maritime / ship environmental conditions, the AW169M dual-use helicopter is the unique newly certified light-intermediate weight class type delivering latest standard of safety margins, mission availability, superior capabilities, and consistently stronger performance in naval operating conditions. Its pedigree in offshore and maritime civil roles combined with the maturity achieved in robust military design also testified by the selection of several operators among Italian Forces and export customers, represents the best choice for a modern Navy requiring safer and cheaper maritime multirole capabilities from Land and Ship. The type combines the successful architecture and outstanding performance of the family mother benchmark AW139 (1,500+ units sold in around 20 years to operators worldwide to date, many of them military operators from across all continents and all weather/environment conditions) with compact dimensions, folding rotor and tricycle landing gear to operate on board of the ships with superior safety margins. **SP**

PHOTOGRAPHS: LEONARDO / ADANI DEFENCE & AEROSPACE



DASSAULT AVIATION ROLLING OUT THE FALCON 10X, ITS MOST AMBITIOUS BUSINESS JET EVER, AND A BOLD NEW BENCHMARK FOR THE FUTURE OF LONG-RANGE BUSINESS AVIATION

FALCON 10X UNVEILED

Dassault Aviation Redefines the Ultra-Long-Range Business Jet Segment

By ROHIT GOEL

IN A LANDMARK MOMENT FOR BUSINESS AVIATION, DASSAULT Aviation has officially unveiled the Falcon 10X, its most ambitious and technologically advanced business jet to date. Revealed before more than 400 customers, partners and industry leaders at Bordeaux-Mérignac, the aircraft represents a decisive step by the French manufacturer to redefine the top end of the ultra-long-range business jet segment.

Positioned as the new flagship of the Falcon family, the Falcon 10X is not merely an incremental upgrade—it is a clean-sheet design that brings together cutting-edge aerodynamics, advanced flight technologies and an unprecedented focus on passenger experience. In doing so, Dassault is clearly targeting the most competitive and lucrative segment of business aviation, dominated by ultra-long-range, large-cabin aircraft.

PHOTOGRAPHS: DASSAULT AVIATION



(TOP AND RIGHT): FALCON 10X'S LARGEST, MOST COMFORTABLE AND MOST VERSATILE CABIN REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT LEAP FORWARD IN HOW IN-FLIGHT SPACE IS CONCEIVED AND POSITIONING THE AIRCRAFT AS A TRUE 'FLYING LIVING SPACE.'



A NEW BENCHMARK IN CABIN EXPERIENCE

At the heart of the Falcon 10X's value proposition lies its cabin—arguably the most defining feature of the aircraft. Designed to be the largest, most comfortable and most versatile cabin in a purpose-built business jet, it represents a significant leap forward in how in-flight space is conceived.

The aircraft's cabin measures 9 feet 1 inch in width and 6 feet 8 inches in height, making it wider and taller than its closest competitors. This scale allows for interior configurations that go beyond traditional layouts, enabling owners to design spaces that resemble private residences or executive offices rather than conventional aircraft cabins. Passengers can opt for three- or four-zone configurations, including full-size bedrooms, dedicated dining areas, private suites and even optional shower installations. Complementing this is a suite of comfort-focused features, including 100 per cent fresh air circulation, individually controlled temperature zones and an exceptionally low cabin altitude of 3,000 feet at cruise—designed to minimise fatigue on long-haul missions. Large windows—38 in total

and significantly bigger than those on earlier Falcon models—further enhance the cabin environment, flooding the interior with natural light and reinforcing the aircraft's positioning as a true "flying living space."

Eric Trappier, Chairman and CEO of Dassault Aviation emphasised the intent behind the design, "The objective is to allow passengers to experience time on board the aircraft as just another part of their everyday life, not as a long interval between origin and destination. So they arrive feeling refreshed and at their very best."

PERFORMANCE MEETS GLOBAL REACH

Beyond comfort, the Falcon 10X delivers performance metrics that firmly place it at the top tier of business aviation. With a maximum range of 7,500 nautical miles, the aircraft is capable of connecting major global city pairs such as New York to Shanghai, Los Angeles to Sydney and Paris to Santiago without refuelling. Its top speed of Mach 0.925 positions it among the fastest business jets in its class, enabling operators to combine

FALCON 10X - SPECIFICATIONS

Performance		External Dimensions	
Maximum number of passengers	19	Wingspan	110 ft 4 in
Range (8 pax, NBAA IFR Reserves)	7,500 nm	Length	109 ft 7 in
Maximum Operating Mach Number (MMO)	.925	Height	27 ft 7 in
Maximum Certificated Altitude	51,000 ft	Internal Dimensions	
Takeoff Distance (Sea Level - ISA, Max Takeoff Weight)	< 6,000 ft	Cabin Height	80 in
Landing Distance (Unfactored, Sea Level, ISA, Typical Landing Weight)	< 2,500 ft	Cabin Width	109 in
		Cabin Length	53 ft 12 in
Engines & Avionics		Cabin Volume	2,780 ft ³
Engines	2 Rolls-Royce Pearl® 10X	Baggage Volume	198 ft ³
Engine Thrust-SL/ISA	> 18,000 lb	Weight / Capacity	
Avionics	Next-generation NeXus Flight Deck with all Multi-Touch Displays	Maximum Takeoff Weight	1,15,000 lb
		Maximum Fuel Weight	51,700 lb
		Maximum Zero Fuel Weight	67,800 lb

Source: dassaultfalcon.com

long-range capability with reduced travel time.

These performance characteristics are particularly significant in the context of the aircraft's target market. Ultra-high-net-worth individuals, heads of state and global corporations increasingly demand non-stop connectivity between distant city pairs, and the Falcon 10X is engineered to meet precisely these requirements.

ADVANCED ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

One of the defining aspects of the Falcon 10X is the integration of technologies derived from Dassault's military aviation expertise. As the only manufacturer producing both advanced fighter aircraft and business jets, the company has leveraged cross-domain capabilities to enhance performance, safety and efficiency.

A standout innovation is the aircraft's all-composite wing—the first of its kind in business aviation. This advanced structure improves aerodynamic efficiency, reduces weight and enhances overall performance, while maintaining the low-speed handling and runway flexibility that Falcon aircraft are known for.

The Falcon 10X is powered by the Rolls-Royce Pearl 10X engine, delivering more than 18,000 pounds of thrust while offering improved fuel efficiency and reduced emissions.

In the cockpit, the aircraft introduces the next-generation flight deck, featuring large touch-screen displays, enhanced automation and advanced vision systems designed to reduce pilot workload while improving situational awareness.

Complementing this is Dassault's advanced digital flight control system, incorporating a "Smart Throttle" inspired by fighter aircraft technology. This system enables more intuitive engine management while enhancing safety through automated protections and recovery modes.

Ultra-high-net-worth individuals, heads of state and global corporations increasingly demand non-stop connectivity between distant city pairs, and the Falcon 10X is engineered to meet precisely these requirements

STRATEGIC POSITIONING IN A COMPETITIVE MARKET

The unveiling of the Falcon 10X comes at a time when the ultra-long-range segment is witnessing intense competition. Aircraft in this category are not only technological flagships but also key revenue drivers for manufacturers. With the 10X, Dassault is positioning itself directly against the largest and most capable jets in the market. Its strategy is clear: differentiate through a combination of cabin experience, technological innovation and operational efficiency.


Unlike competitors that often prioritise either speed or range, Dassault is emphasising a balanced approach—delivering long-range capability and high-speed performance while maintaining superior cabin comfort and operational flexibility. This positioning is fur-

ther reinforced by the aircraft's ability to operate from shorter runways compared to some rivals, expanding its accessibility to a wider range of airports.

REDEFINING THE TOP END OF BUSINESS AVIATION

The Falcon 10X represents more than just a new aircraft—it signals Dassault's intent to redefine expectations in the ultra-long-range segment. By combining a residential-style cabin, advanced aerodynamics and next-generation flight technologies, the aircraft sets a new benchmark for what business aviation can offer.

In doing so, Dassault is not only strengthening its position in the high-end market but also shaping the future direction of the industry. As demand for long-range, high-comfort aircraft continues to grow, the Falcon 10X stands as a compelling response to the evolving needs of global travellers.

With entry into service expected later this decade, the aircraft is poised to play a central role in the next chapter of business aviation—one defined by connectivity, comfort and technological sophistication. 

AIRCRAFT MANAGEMENT: THE CASE FOR DECOUPLING

Why India Needs Specialised Aircraft Management Companies for its Business Aviation Sector

By **SANJAY JULKA**,
CEO TECHNICAL, CLUB ONE AIR

THE INDIAN AVIATION SECTOR IS ON A METEORIC TRAJECTORY, with record-breaking aircraft orders and a burgeoning demand for private and business travel. However, a systemic bottleneck persists on the ground: the regulatory hesitation to fully embrace the Aircraft Management Company (AMC) model. While global aviation hubs thrive by separating aircraft ownership from operation, Indian practice often insists on a "Unified Entity" approach. To achieve the government's vision of "Safer Skies," it is time to shift this paradigm.

THE SAFETY ARGUMENT: INTEGRITY OVER PROFIT
The most compelling reason to separate the owner from the operator is flight safety. When the same entity owns the asset and manages the operation, a dangerous conflict of interest arises. The owner-operator bears the full weight of the Profit and Loss (P&L) statement. In times of financial pressure, the temptation to cut corners—deferring "non-essential" maintenance or pushing crew duty limits—becomes a systemic risk.

In an AMC model, the operator is a service provider, not

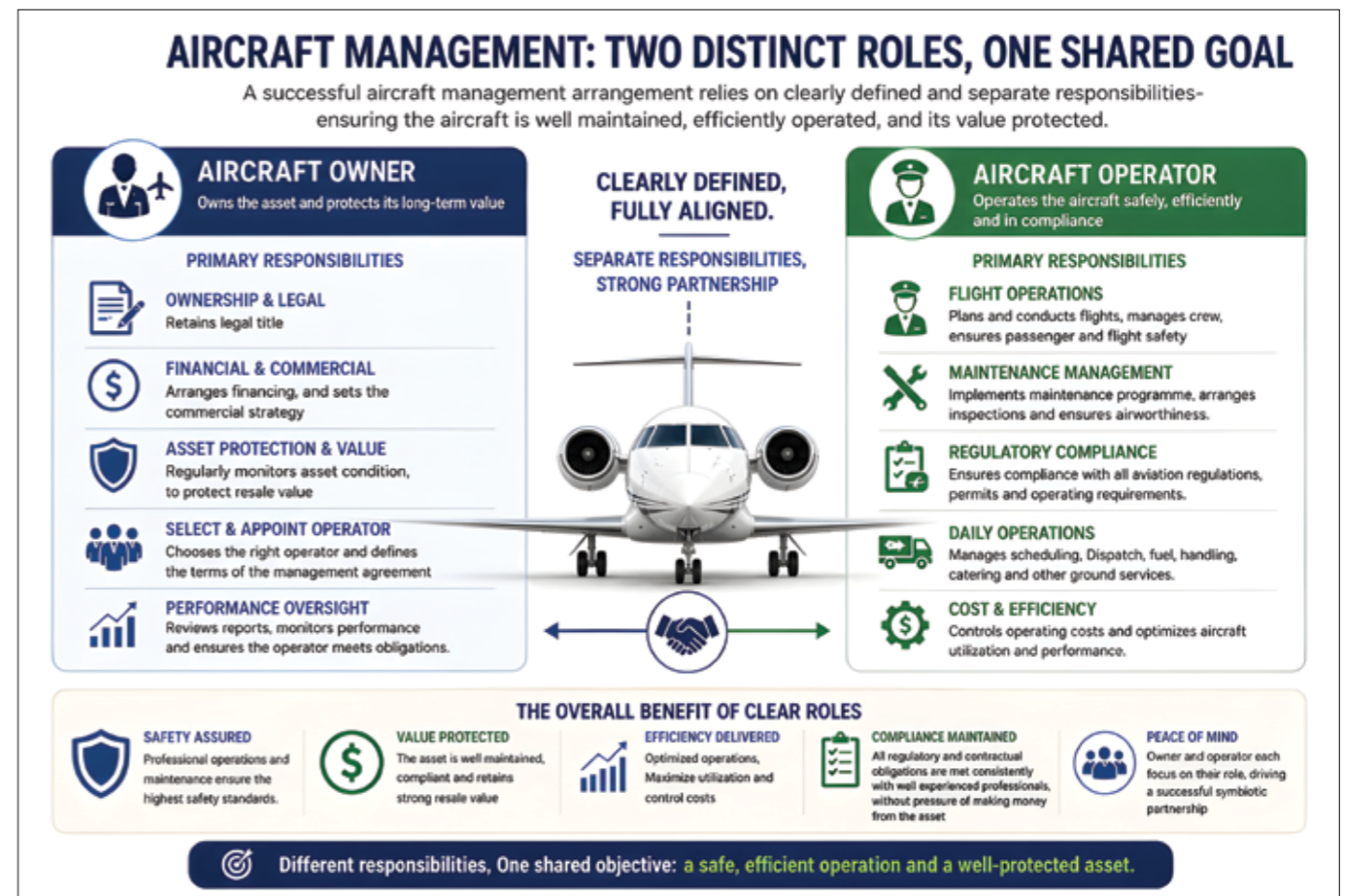


ILLUSTRATION: ROHIT GOEL / SPGUIDE.PUBNS



RECOGNISING AIRCRAFT MANAGEMENT COMPANIES AS LEGITIMATE AND DESIRABLE OPERATING ENTITIES WOULD MAKE THE SECTOR SAFER, MORE EFFICIENT, AND EASIER TO SUPERVISE

the bill-payer. Their primary “product” is safety and regulatory compliance. Since the owner covers the operational costs, the operator has no incentive to take shortcuts. If a supervisor at an AMC decides an aircraft is not airworthy, they make that call without the personal financial sting of a lost charter fee. This creates a natural “check and balance” where the operator errs on the side of caution, prioritising the hull’s longevity and passenger safety over immediate margins.

STREAMLINING THE SKIES: EXPERIENCE AND OVERSIGHT

The current insistence—driven largely by historical interpretations of customs and import rules—that an aircraft importer must hold their own Non-Scheduled Operator’s Permit (NSOP) or Air Operator Certificate (AOC) leads to a fragmented market. We end up with dozens of small, inexperienced operators managing one or two aircraft each.

This fragmentation has two major downsides:

- **Diluted Expertise:** Small, bespoke flight departments often lack the robust Safety Management Systems (SMS) and deep bench of experienced personnel found in dedicated management companies.
- **Regulatory Overload:** For the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), inspecting 150 individual operators, some of them with 1-2 aircraft, is a logistical nightmare compared to overseeing lower number of large, professional AMCs that manage 10-15 aircraft each. Concentrating aircraft under professional management reduces the burden on regulators and ensures a higher, more uniform standard of oversight.

BEYOND SAFETY: THE ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES

Aircraft management companies offer benefits that go far beyond the cockpit:

- **Scale Economies:** AMCs leverage “fleet power” to negotiate better rates on insurance, fuel, and hangarage, passing those savings to the owner.

- **Professional Asset Protection:** An AMC ensures the aircraft is maintained to the highest standards, protecting its residual value—a critical factor for an asset that costs millions of dollars.
- **Depreciation Benefits:** Since small size operators are unable to record profits, the owners are unable to book depreciation benefits of the aircraft thereby discouraging aircraft acquisition.
- **Turnkey Convenience:** For a corporate house or a high-net-worth individual, an AMC removes the headache of HR, training, operations management, and complex technical compliance, allowing them to enjoy the utility of the aircraft without the administrative burden.
- **Fractional Ownership:** A more mature AMC regime would also create the conditions for fractional ownership to develop more naturally in India. That would expand access, improve aircraft utilization, and support a broader base of ownership without compromising operational professionalism.

THE PATH FORWARD: A MATTER OF INTERPRETATION

Interestingly, India does not necessarily need a radical overhaul of its financial or aviation laws. The barrier is primarily an interpretive one. Regulators often hesitate to allow “Owner A” to hand an aircraft to “Operator B” due to fears of violating customs notifications related to “Actual User” conditions.

However, if we read these laws through the lens of international best practices, also intended while making the Indian law, the “operator” is the professional user of the asset and as long as end use of the aircraft is for charter purposes, the import and custom laws don’t get violated. By recognising AMCs as legitimate entities, India can foster a mature ecosystem where specialised experts fly the planes, wealthy investors buy them, and the DGCA monitors a streamlined, professionalised industry. For India to truly lead in global aviation, we must stop fearing the separation of deed and deck; in that separation lies our safest path forward. **SP**

PHOTOGRAPH: JET AVIATION



THE INAUGURAL EDITION OF CORPORATE JET INVESTOR (CJI) INDIA 2026, HELD IN NEW DELHI BROUGHT TOGETHER INDUSTRY LEADERS FROM THE BUSINESS AVIATION SECTOR POINTING TO A VISIBLE SHIFT IN MOMENTUM IN THE SECTOR, DRIVEN BY ECONOMIC EXPANSION, RISING DEMAND FOR CORPORATE MOBILITY AND A GRADUAL EVOLUTION IN POLICY THINKING

COUNTING CRORES – INDIA’S BUSINESS JET MARKET IS ABOUT TO BOOM

India’s business aviation market holds strong untapped potential, with expectations of significant fleet expansion and broader market development by 2030

By ALASDAIR WHYTE

PHOTOGRAPHS: CORPORATE JET INVESTOR



“It is evident that India’s story is shifting from latent potential to execution and scale”
—Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, Director General, DGCA

ECONOMISTS SPEND A LOT OF TIME TALKING ABOUT THE global productivity problem. There are so many easy wins. If only people could be bothered to notice them.

The US could free up millions of bartender hours simply by not asking white-haired grandparents for ID before serving them a Bud Light. The Indian subcontinent could free up trillions of keystrokes by revaluing their currencies. When you need to use crores (10 million units) or lakhs (1,00,000) you know something is wrong.

The numbers in India are already hard enough to comprehend. One in seven of people on the planet is Indian. Delhi alone has 32 million inhabitants.

There are also a lot of very rich people in the country. Altrata, a wealth data company, says that the country ranks 10th for people with more than INR249 crore or \$30 million (you see my point) in assets. That is 11,865 people. Forbes says India has 284 billionaires, third behind the US and China.

But there are fewer than 200 business jets based there. That is correct. There were more aircraft in Teterboro yesterday than in the whole of India.

The market potential is ridiculous. But this is not new. India has been tomorrow’s market for years, with tomorrow never coming. But this could be about to change. “Change is happening,” said Colonel Sanjay Julka, CEO technical, Club One Air, speaking at the first Corporate Jet Investor India conference in March 2026 in New Dehi. “The market is growing now with a lot more growth to come.”

India’s government and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the equivalent of its FAA, is keen to help the market grow. “It is evident that India’s story is shifting from latent potential to execution and scale. This conference is about how stakeholders can transform optimism into bankable projects and sustainable operations,” said Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, Director General of the DGCA.

Importing an aircraft into India has never been easy. The Reserve Bank of India maintains currency controls so sending a deposit takes longer. And then there is tax. A private aircraft buyer faces a 40 per cent general sales tax. Some buyers pay this, but others create their own aircraft flight departments by applying for non-scheduled operator permits (or NSOPs). There are around 160 NSOPs. Some of these are well-run flight departments for large corporates and billionaires. Others were created just to avoid the tax.

Regulations have made it very difficult for third-party aircraft management companies to enter the market. This has also discouraged financiers. The DGCA is now working on policies to make true aircraft management and fractional ownership work.

Some 85 per cent of attendees believe that India will have regulations allowing for traditional third-party management companies by the end of 2027. Most believe that there will be between 300 and 400 business jets registered in India by 2030.

“The Indian economy is going to grow the market. We need to create more services – charter, aircraft management, fractional, jet cards and the rest will happen. Boom!” said Jayant Nadkarni, MD, Flightshares.

Aircraft manufacturers and brokers are excited. They have seen an increase in demand from Indian customers over the past two months. This could be useful if we see a global slowdown. No fast-growing international market can replace the US, but it can make a big difference. Back in 2012, Chinese buyers helped OEMs by taking a lot of aircraft. India is also a more mixed market with opportunities for all manufacturers, not just large cabin aircraft like China. There are also a lot of pre-owned buyers.

“We’ve been working with the DGCA and the ministry to pave the way for both fractional and aircraft management companies and we are confident that we are seeing rapid changes coming,” said Sudhir Rajeshirke, Jubilant Enpro, the Textron and Bell representative in India. “We can accelerate new innovations.” Jubilant is also looking at launching an operator.

There are opportunities for international companies. “We kept seeing aircraft parts orders and we were like: wow there is a major demand and then we ended up selling aircraft into the region,” said Kevin Wargo, CEO, Fly Alliance. “We are now working on getting our own NSOP here in the country. We

are working on our very first aircraft to be imported which will give us the ability to lease aircraft and continue with sales.”

Tax is still an issue but one of the biggest developments is the launch of the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City or GIFT City. GIFT City is a tax-free centre for banks, finance companies and insurers. It has been enthusiastically adopted by aircraft leasing companies, helped by a guaranteed 20-year tax holiday. Some 196 aircraft have been imported through GIFT City in the past few years – including 17 private jets and 17 helicopters. GIFT City can be used to import new aircraft.

“I see a great opportunity here for inviting the global business aviation community to establish their presence in the vibrant Indian business aviation market and create an international business aviation hub for the whole region,” said the DGCA’s Kidwai.

One other way to improve productivity is getting rid of economists. But they never get round to modelling that. **SP**

The fundamental building blocks — demand, regulatory intent, financial interest and industry collaboration — are now firmly in place. The challenge ahead lies in execution.

AVIATION’S NEW FUEL DIVIDE

Differential fuel pricing emerges for the first time, raising questions on cost allocation and the future of business aviation

THE RECENT REVISION IN AVIATION TURBINE FUEL PRICES HAS been widely seen as a sharp escalation. Look closer and a different story emerges. The increase for scheduled domestic airlines is around 8 to 9 per cent. At the same time, business aviation and other non-scheduled segments, including even international operations, are facing much higher fuel benchmarks linked to global markets.

For the first time, fuel is not moving uniformly across the system. It is moving differently depending on who you are. That distinction matters.

For years, India’s aviation sector has dealt with inefficiencies, but fuel pricing was at least consistent across users. Airlines, charter operators, corporate fleets, and air ambulance services all operated within the same framework. That baseline has now shifted. One part of the system is being cushioned. Another is taking the full impact.

Within business aviation, the concern is not about high fuel prices. The sector is used to volatility. The concern is about parity. As an operator put it simply, “We are not asking for lower prices. We are asking for the same rules.”

There is also a growing view that the current differential reflects a dated way of looking at the sector. Business aviation is still seen in some quarters as discretionary, rather than as an operational tool. That view no longer holds.

Business aviation today connects regions that scheduled airlines do not serve. It supports corporate movement across industrial clusters. It enables time-critical operations such as air ambulances, disaster response, and urgent logistics. It supports pilgrimage travel where connectivity is limited and is often used for organ transport and emergency missions.

A simple data point adds context. The total fuel consumption of business aviation is a small fraction of that of commercial airlines. Its impact on overall fuel demand is minimal. Yet, it is the segment facing the sharper end of the current pricing structure. This raises a basic question. Is the pricing based on economics, or on perception?

In most global markets, fuel pricing does not distinguish between types of operators in this manner. In the United States, business aviation and airlines operate within the same fuel framework. In Europe, pricing remains transparent across users. In the Middle East, business aviation is actively supported

as part of a larger connectivity and investment strategy. The common thread is simple. Not subsidy. Not protection. Just predictability and parity.

India now appears to be moving away from that approach. The Business Aircraft Operators Association (BAOA) has already flagged the issue in its submission to the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA). It points to “significant variability and uncertainty” in how charges are applied across airports. It also highlights the absence of a structured framework governing business aviation, even though these operators use the same infrastructure as scheduled carriers. The argument is straightforward. If the infrastructure is shared, the principles should be too.

What is happening now goes beyond fuel. It is about how costs are being distributed across the system. There is a clear case for supporting scheduled aviation. It carries scale and connects the country. But support cannot come without clarity on how costs are being shifted elsewhere. “If you start differentiating without rules, you create uncertainty. And uncertainty is worse than high cost”, a senior industry player summed it up.

That uncertainty is already showing up in planning decisions. Fleet

deployment, basing, and long-term investments depend on stable assumptions. When those assumptions change without a clear framework, the impact goes beyond immediate costs.

The question now is whether this is temporary or structural. If it continues, the implications go beyond fuel. The same logic can extend to navigation charges, parking, terminal access, and handling. Over time, that creates a fragmented system.

Business aviation is not asking to be insulated from market forces. It operates in a competitive environment. What it needs is clarity on the rules. Parity is not about equal outcomes. It is about equal principles.

India’s aviation market is growing fast. Airports are expanding. Fleets are increasing. Connectivity is improving. Business aviation is part of that ecosystem. It supports sectors that depend on speed and flexibility. It complements scheduled aviation. Fuel prices will move. That is expected. But when pricing changes without principles, it is not the market that shifts. It is the trust! **SP**

— By Neetu Dhulia



INDIAN GOVERNMENT HAS HIKE JET FUEL PRICE BUT HAS LIMITED IT TO 25 PER CENT ON DOMESTIC ROUTES BY SCHEDULED AIRLINES WHILE NON SCHEDULED OPERATORS (CHARTER COMPANIES) AND PRIVATE AIRCRAFT OWNERS WILL HAVE TO PAY DOUBLE THE RATES

ILLUSTRATION: ROHIT GOEL / SP/UIDE/PUBINS



AERO FRIEDRICHSHAFEN 2026 RECORDED THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION EVER, UNDERSCORING THE EVENT'S GROWING GLOBAL RELEVANCE AND ITS POSITION AS EUROPE'S PREMIER GENERAL AND BUSINESS AVIATION SHOW

ACCELERATING MARKET MOMENTUM

With Record participation, AERO Friedrichshafen 2026, Europe's Leading General Aviation Show, Delivers a Landmark Edition

By SP'S SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THE 2026 EDITION OF AERO FRIEDRICHSHAFEN CONCLUDED as one of the most successful and consequential in the show's history, reflecting a global general aviation industry that has moved decisively into a phase of expansion. Held from April 22 to 25 in Friedrichshafen, Germany, the event delivered record participation, the largest aircraft display to date and a clear affirmation of business aviation and sustainability as the sector's primary growth drivers.

Organised by Fairnamic GmbH, the 32nd edition of the show brought together 860 exhibitors from 50 countries, marking the highest level of participation ever recorded. Visitor turnout also

reached new highs, with approximately 37,000 attendees from 88 countries, underscoring the event's growing global relevance and its position as Europe's premier platform for general and business aviation.

BUSINESS AVIATION EMERGES AS THE DEFINING THEME

AERO Friedrichshafen 2026 opened with a heightened focus on business aviation, following the surprise cancellation of the European Business Aviation Conference and Exhibition (EBACE), which had been scheduled for early June in Geneva. With EBACE gone, Fairnamic GmbH — the show's organiser —



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) THE SHOW HAD A HEIGHTENED FOCUS ON BUSINESS AVIATION, CLEARLY REFLECTED IN THE ENLARGED BUSINESS AVIATION DOME AND THE INCREASED ALLOCATION OF EXHIBITION SPACE; EMBRAER SHOWCASED ITS POPULAR PHENOM 300E; THE PC-24 FROM PILATUS AIRCRAFT; DASSAULT AVIATION DREW SIGNIFICANT ATTENTION WITH THE PRESENCE OF ITS FALCON 6X.

now position AERO Friedrichshafen as Europe's leading show-case for business aviation, a claim that, on the evidence of this edition, is difficult to dispute. AERO 2026 clearly demonstrated the growing centrality of business aviation within the broader aviation ecosystem. The segment recorded the highest growth rate at the show, both in terms of exhibitor presence and aircraft on display.

More than 50 business aircraft were showcased across the static display and exhibition halls, a significant increase compared to previous editions. This expansion was visibly reflected in the enlarged Business Aviation Dome and the increased allocation of exhibition space across multiple halls.

The shift was further reinforced by broader industry dynamics, including the absence of competing European business aviation events, which positioned AERO as the primary gathering point for OEMs, operators and service providers in the region.

MAJOR EXHIBITORS ANCHOR THE SHOW

The 2026 edition saw strong participation from leading global OEMs, with companies such as Dassault Aviation, Embraer, Pilatus Aircraft, Textron and Piaggio Aerospace playing a prominent role in shaping the show's narrative.

Dassault Aviation drew significant attention with the presence of its Falcon 6X, reinforcing its positioning in the

large-cabin, ultra-long-range segment. The aircraft served as a key attraction within the business aviation display, highlighting the continued demand for high-comfort, long-range platforms.

Embraer, meanwhile, showcased its popular Phenom series, including the Phenom 300E, one of the best-selling light jets globally. The company's presence underlined the strength of the light and mid-size jet market, particularly for regional and corporate travel.

Pilatus Aircraft maintained a strong footprint with both the PC-24 jet and the PC-12 PRO turboprop on display. The PC-24, often positioned as a "super versatile jet," attracted considerable interest for its ability to operate from short and unpaved runways, while the PC-12 PRO continued to demonstrate the enduring appeal of high-performance turboprops.

A notable highlight came from Piaggio Aerospace, which marked a significant return to the show with the P.180 Avanti EVO. The aircraft's presence was complemented by a major development during the event, as the company secured a launch order for its upgraded Avanti NX variant, signalling renewed momentum for the manufacturer and its distinctive high-speed turboprop platform.

AIRCRAFT DISPLAY: BREADTH AND DEPTH ACROSS SEGMENTS

The static aircraft display at AERO 2026

AERO 2026 clearly demonstrated the growing centrality of business aviation within the broader aviation ecosystem

PHOTOGRAPHS: FAIRNAMIC GMBH

was the largest in the show's history, offering a comprehensive overview of the aviation ecosystem.

In the business jet category, key aircraft included the Falcon 6X, Bombardier Global 6500, Cessna Citation Longitude and the new Citation Ascend, which made a notable appearance as part of its European demonstration tour.

The light and mid-size segment featured aircraft such as the Embraer Phenom 300E and HondaJet Elite II, both of which continue to dominate their respective categories.

Turboprop aircraft formed another major highlight, with the Daher TBM 980, Kodiak 900 and Pilatus PC-12 PRO drawing strong attention for their operational flexibility and cost efficiency. The return of the Piaggio P.180 Avanti EVO added further diversity to this segment, reinforcing its relevance in both executive and special mission roles.

The exhibition also featured a wide range of general aviation aircraft, including piston trainers, gliders, ultralights and helicopters, alongside emerging electric and hybrid platforms.



(LEFT-RIGHT) TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY WERE CENTRAL THEMES THROUGHOUT AERO 2026, WITH EXHIBITORS PRESENTING A WIDE RANGE OF SOLUTIONS

INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABLE AVIATION TAKE CENTRE STAGE
Sustainability and technological innovation were central themes throughout AERO 2026, with exhibitors presenting a wide range of solutions aimed at reducing aviation's environmental footprint.

The e-flight Expo and dedicated innovation zones showcased advancements in electric propulsion, hybrid systems and hydrogen-based technologies. Companies such as Pipistrel and emerging European startups demonstrated tangible progress in electric aviation, moving closer to commercial viability.

The Hydrogen & Battery Summit, held alongside the show, brought together experts from industry, academia and regulatory bodies to discuss infrastructure, energy storage and the future of zero-emission flight.

These developments reflected a broader industry transition, with sustainability increasingly moving from conceptual discussions to practical implementation.

CONFERENCES AND INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

AERO Friedrichshafen 2026 also delivered an extensive conference programme, reinforcing its role as a platform for industry dialogue and knowledge exchange.

The Air Charter Association brought its European Regional Forum to AERO for the first time, with three panel sessions covering the scope and scale of the charter industry, the risks of

illegal charter operations, and the role of the air charter broker. Corporate Jet Investor contributed two panels examining the practicalities of buying pre-owned aircraft and the broader economics of aircraft ownership, drawing executives from across the transactional spectrum of the industry. The Women in Aviation International Connect Brunch brought a welcome dimension of inclusion to the programme, while the newly formed TAB (Technology Aviation Business) took to the Dome stage to announce new directions in aviation technology development.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) held a General Aviation Conference focused on simplifying rules for safer GA — covering regulatory initiatives aimed at reducing administrative burdens for small and medium-sized enterprises and improving the broader competitiveness of the GA industry.

Career Days and training initiatives once again attracted strong participation, reflecting the industry's ongoing need to address workforce shortages and build the next generation of aviation professionals.

The expanded airshow programme on the final day provided a fitting conclusion to the event, featuring aerobatic displays, formation flying and helicopter demonstrations and reinforcing the event's role not only as a trade platform but also as a showcase for aviation to a broader audience.

CONCLUSION

AERO Friedrichshafen 2026 ultimately stood out not just for its scale, but for what it revealed about the direction of the aviation industry. Three key trends were evident throughout the show. First, business aviation is no longer a niche segment but a central pillar of the global aviation ecosystem, driven by demand for flexibility, privacy and efficiency. Second, sustainability is moving from aspiration to implementation, with tangible technologies now entering the market. Third, innovation across propulsion, avionics and digitalisation is reshaping how aircraft are designed, operated and maintained.

More importantly, it highlighted a clear shift in industry dynamics. Business aviation has emerged as a primary growth engine, sustainability has moved closer to operational reality and innovation continues to reshape the competitive landscape.

As the industry looks ahead, AERO Friedrichshafen has firmly established itself as a critical platform where these trends converge—reflecting not just the current state of aviation, but its future trajectory. www.sps-aviation.com

MILITARY

JOINT STATEMENT ON GE F414 ENGINE CO-PRODUCTION



"GE Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) are pleased to announce significant progress regarding F414 co-production, having reached agreement on technical matters. This agreement marks a significant step forward in strengthening economic growth and advancing cooperation for both India and the US and expands the 40-year partnership between GE Aerospace and HAL." — GE Aerospace and HAL spokespersons

GE AEROSPACE-IAF F404 DEPOT

GE Aerospace has signed a contract with the Indian Air Force (IAF) to establish an in-country depot facility for F404-IN20 engines powering the IAF's Tejas Light Combat Aircraft fleet. The facility will be owned, operated, and maintained by the IAF, with GE Aerospace providing technical inputs, training, support staff, spares, and specialised equipment. Once operational, the depot will eliminate dependence on overseas repair centres and significantly improve turnaround times.

IAF MAINTENANCE CONCLAVE 2026

The Maintenance Command Commanders' Conclave was held at Vayusena Nagar, Nagpur on April 10-11, 2026, presided over by Air Marshal Yalla Umesh, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Maintenance Command. Themed 'Maintenance Command in Mission Mode to Support Operations', the conclave reviewed maintenance strategies and future initiatives for operational preparedness. Emphasis was placed on enhancing efficiency, optimising resource utilisation, modernisation, indigenisation of systems, technological integration, and personnel training.

HAL'S LCH PRODUCTION LINE INAUGURATED

Sanjeev Kumar, Secretary (Defence Production), Ministry of Defence, in-

APPOINTMENTS



WILLIE WALSH TO LEAD INDIGO

IndiGo, India's largest airline by market share, has appointed aviation veteran Willie Walsh as its new CEO, with him expected to take charge by August 2026. Walsh previously led British Airways (2005–2011) and International Airlines Group (IAG), and most recently served as Director General of IATA.



PROUST NAMED ATR ENGINEERING HEAD

Damien Proust has been appointed Senior Vice-President Engineering and Head of Design Organisation at ATR, effective May 1, 2026. He reports directly to CEO Nathalie Tarnaud Laude.



EMBRAER NAMES NEW CFO

Embraer's board has appointed Felipe Santana Santiago de Lima as Executive Vice President, Finance and Investor Relations, effective April 13. Santana, who currently serves as Embraer's global director of treasury, has spent 18 years at the company.



DEUTSCHE AIRCRAFT PROMOTES KUHL

Deutsche Aircraft has appointed Wolfgang Kuhl as Vice President Programs & Innovation. Kuhl joined Deutsche Aircraft as Director Program D328eco in 2023.

augurated the Prachand Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) structure assembly line and an Automated Storage & Retrieval System (ASRS) at HAL's new helicopter factory in Tumakuru, Karnataka. The greenfield facility is established for the production of the Light Utility Helicopter and Prachand LCH, and will also support future programmes including the Indian Multi Role Helicopter and Deck-Based Multi Role Helicopter.

MOD-BEL ₹1,950 CRORE RADAR DEAL

The Ministry of Defence signed a capital acquisition contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for the procurement of two Mountain Radars, including associated equipment and infrastructure for the Indian Air Force, at a cost of approximately ₹1,950 crore. The radar was designed by DRDO's Electronics & Radar Development Establishment and will be manufactured by BEL, boosting India's air defence and reducing dependence on foreign equipment.

KC-390 COMPLETES GLOBAL DEMO TOUR

Embraer's KC-390 Millennium completed its most recent world tour, flying over 47,000 nautical miles across 54

flights in 11 countries over 70 days, accumulating approximately 140 flight hours with 100 per cent mission accomplishment. Operating under extreme conditions ranging from Arctic cold to hot and humid Asian climates, the aircraft demonstrated its versatility across cargo, medical, and vehicle transport operations. The campaign began at the Singapore Airshow in January 2026 and concluded at FIDAE in Chile.

INDONESIA ORDERS TWELVE PC-24S

The Indonesian Ministry of Defense has selected the Pilatus PC-24 to support the Indonesian Air Force's transport pilot training, air transport, and liaison missions, signing a contract for 12 aircraft with PT E-System Solutions Indonesia. The contract includes an option for additional aircraft, along with ground support equipment, spares, training, and technical support. The PC-24's ability to operate from unpaved runways was a decisive selection criterion, given Indonesia's 17,000-island geography. A Letter of Intent was also signed for the supply of 24 PC-21 trainers, including ground-based training equipment and technical support.

CIVIL

BCAS-RRU MOU FOR AVIATION SECURITY



The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) and Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU) signed an MoU to establish a dedicated indigenous testing centre for evaluating and certifying Full Body Scanners and other security screening equipment used at Indian airports. Signed in the presence of Civil Aviation Minister Rammohan Naidu, the centre will independently evaluate and certify equipment from OEMs and submit impartial assessment reports for regulatory consideration. State-of-the-art testing laboratories will be set up at RRU aligned with global standards, supporting the development of an institutionalised accreditation framework for aviation security equipment.

DGCA-GSV MOU FOR AVIATION TRAINING

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya (GSV) signed an MoU to promote quality manpower for the aviation and MRO sector, with the primary initiative being a three-year undergraduate B.Sc. in Aviation Maintenance Engineering, to be implemented from the 2026-27 academic year. GSV will also function as a research and knowledge partner for DGCA in Sustainable Aviation Fuels, aircraft maintenance, and parts manufacturing.

PILATUS ACQUIRES AIR ALLIANCE



Pilatus has acquired German Air Alliance GmbH, founded in 1993 and an authorised Pilatus Sales & Service Centre since 2014, which provides sales, maintenance, and flight training for the PC-12 and PC-24 in Germany and Austria. All

NOIDA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT INAUGURATED



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI INAUGURATED PHASE I OF NOIDA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AT JEWAR, UTTAR PRADESH, DEVELOPED AT AN INVESTMENT OF APPROXIMATELY ₹11,200 CRORE. THE AIRPORT WILL SERVE A WIDE REGION INCLUDING AGRA, MATHURA, ALIGARH, GHAZIABAD, MEERUT, AND FARIDABAD. THE FOUNDATION STONE OF AN MRO FACILITY WAS ALSO LAID AT JEWAR

INDIAN AIR CHIEF VISITS NELLIS AFB, CEMENTS INDIA-US STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP



INDIAN AIR FORCE AIR CHIEF MARSHAL AMAR PREET SINGH AND USAF MAJOR MATTHEW BENSON, AN F-15EX EAGLE II AIRCRAFT PILOT ASSIGNED TO THE 85TH TEST AND EVALUATION SQUADRON, POSE FOR A PHOTO BEFORE AN F-15EX FAMILIARISATION FLIGHT AT NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, NEVADA ON APRIL 9, 2026. THE FAMILIARISATION FLIGHT GAVE ACM SINGH A FIRSTHAND LOOK AT ONE OF THE PLATFORMS ESSENTIAL TO THE COLLABORATIVE DEFENCE OF THE INDO-PACIFIC.

approximately 120 employees will be retained, with current Managing Director René Petersen remaining as CEO. The acquisition aims to expand Pilatus's market presence and strengthen service quality and consistency in Europe.

KOREA'S SUM AIR ORDERS ATR 72-600S

ATR announced that SUM Air, Korea's newest regional airline, has placed an order for four ATR 72-600 aircraft, with four additional purchase rights, with de-

liveries from 2028. The agreement was signed at the France-Korea Bilateral Economic Forum in Seoul. Founded in 2022, SUM Air received its Air Operator Certificate on March 10, 2026, and began commercial operations the same month. The airline aims to connect Korea's underserved regions, including island airports and short-haul international routes to Japan and China. ATR forecasts a fleet of 25-30 ATR 72 aircraft in Korea within the coming years. ●

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