Promoting Indigenisation in IAF

What is the issue?

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IAF must stop ignoring domestic manufacturers and instead promote more indigenisation in the defence sector.

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What are the concerns with functioning of IAF?

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- The Indian Air Force (IAF) has long preferred to import rather than build its own aircraft through the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
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- This is done especially by delaying the placement of manufacturing orders to the HAL.
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- This has happened in the recent cases of the Tejas Mark 1A and the HTT-40 basic trainer aircraft that were to be made by HAL.
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- Hence, this is disrupting the smooth and uninterrupted flow of HAL's aircraft assembly lines.
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- The IAF cites the resultant delay and expense of these actions to further criticise HAL and argue for more imports to meet critical needs.
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- IAF also engages in non-payment of bills for aircraft and services already delivered by HAL, adding cash-flow issues to them.
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- This neglect of indigenous manufacturers, combined with the IAF's poor force planning, has resulted in its fleet consisting of seven different types of fighters so far.
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- This logistical nightmare in peacetime could become an operational nightmare during war.
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What should IAF learn from naval logistical operations?

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- In contrast, the navy has embraced indigenisation half a century ago and now operates mostly Indian warships.
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- It has systematically created the ecosystem needed for designing and building warships in the country.
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- It has instituted its own design bureau, a directorate of indigenisation, and ensures that carefully chosen admirals head the four DPSU shipyards that build its fleet.
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- Unlike the navy, which has taken ownership of the process of designing, developing and manufacturing warships, the IAF prefer to move away from HAL.
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- Hence, the IAF should ensure a steady flow of recently retired air marshals to head the organisation and make them conform to the its own requirements.
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What should be done?

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- India has long been the world's largest importer of defence equipment.
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- However, unlike other large importers such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, India has a well-developed industrial base, skilled workers and a large and well-qualified pool of scientific manpower.
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- As one of the world's largest automotive component manufacturers, and as a leading space power, India has demonstrated its ability to conceive, plan and achieve high-technology outcomes.
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- And as the navy has demonstrated, this can be done in the field of defence.
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- However, in the field of aviation, it has failed to leverage its large defence budget to build capacity within Indian industry.

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- The situation has changed now and India now actively promotes initiatives to boost indigenous production.
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- The defence ministry has ordained that Indian-designed, developed and manufactured weaponry will be top priority for procurement.
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- A "Defence Production Policy" has declared that India will become one of the world's top five defence producers by 2025, with defence exports multiplying 10-fold to $5 billion that year.
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- But this will remain on paper until the IAF follows the navy's lead and starts developing an ecosystem of domestic aerospace vendors by ensuring the flow of indigenous projects.
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- India holds a defence budget as high as the US, China, Russia or the European nations, yet ignoring its key domestic manufacturers.
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- Thus, the situation must change by reducing our reliance on defence imports and pave the way for more indigenisation.
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Source: Business Standard

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