

Bridging the Gap: IAF Plans to Induct 350+ New Jets by 2035



The Indian Air Force (IAF) is embarking on a massive modernization effort, planning to induct over 350 new fighter jets by 2035 to address a critical squadron shortfall and replace its aging fleet. This ambitious roadmap includes a mix of indigenous and foreign-procured aircraft, with the goal of bolstering India's air defense capabilities and enhancing operational readiness against regional adversaries. The plan encompasses the induction of the indigenous Tejas Mk2, the Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA), and the future Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

The strategic vision is to replace nearly 150 legacy aircraft, including the Jaguar, MiG-29, and Mirage-2000 fleets, which are nearing the end of their service lives. The IAF's current squadron strength stands at approximately 31, significantly below the sanctioned strength of 42. By retiring older platforms and simultaneously inducting new ones, the IAF aims to prevent a further decline and eventually restore its desired operational strength. This phased approach is designed to ensure a seamless transition and avoid any critical gaps in air power.

A cornerstone of this modernization is the Tejas Mk2, a more advanced version of the Tejas Mk1A. The IAF plans to induct 120 of these 4.5-generation fighters, which are a key part of the "Aatmnirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) initiative. The Tejas Mk2 will feature advanced avionics, an indigenous Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar, and a more powerful engine, making it a formidable multi-role platform. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is on track to roll out the first prototype by late 2025, with production aiming for an initial rate of 16-18 aircraft per year.

Complementing the indigenous efforts is the planned acquisition of 110 Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA), a program designed to procure advanced 4.5-generation fighters from foreign vendors. This procurement, possibly through a government-to-government deal to expedite the process, will provide a quick and effective boost to the IAF's combat strength. Looking further into the future, the plan also includes the induction of 160 Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), India's indigenous fifth-generation stealth fighter. While the first squadron is not expected until after 2035, the AMCA is central to India's long-term strategy for achieving technological self-sufficiency and air superiority. The combination of these three programs is intended to equip the IAF with a future-ready, multi-layered fighter fleet.