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**Top IAF official flies LCA Tejas, says 'all is well'**

Amidst speculation that the Indian Air Force (IAF) will dump Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas advanced version and instead opt for single-engine fighter jets, a senior air officer flew the aircraft here on Tuesday.

Air Marshal RKS Bhadauria, Air Officer Commanding in Chief, Southern Air Command, took to the skies in a solo flight which lasted about 30 minutes.

Following the sortie by Bhadauria, the Ministry of Defence stated that the induction and operationalisation of the indigenous fighter jet Tejas into the IAF attained a fresh impetus.

Bhadauria has in the past been a test pilot of the Tejas aircraft with over 100 test flights to his credit.

"Ever since he took over the reins of the Southern Air Command of IAF in March this year, Bhadauria has been pushing both Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) as designer and Hindustan

Aeronautics Limited (HAL) as manufacturer of Tejas for early operationalisation of the fleet," the ministry said.

The ministry also said that the LCA's Squadron, the Flying Daggers, is expected to move to its permanent location at Sullur near Coimbatore next year and that it is presently involved in training of air and ground crew, formulation of procedures and realisation of the operational potential of the aircraft.

As reported earlier, with the induction of an additional assembly line, HAL is all set to ramp-up the production rate in order to make good the promised delivery schedules. The ministry also said that the design activities on the improved version, Tejas Mk IA, are already underway. Meanwhile, HAL said that it is ramping up the production capacity of eight LCAs per annum to 16. The ramping-up cost is being shared equally by HAL, IAF and Navy.