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<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/lca-gets-a-friendly-morale-lift/article20445635.ece>

## Light Combat Aircraft gets a friendly morale 'lift'

Home-made Light Combat Aircraft Tejas got a much-needed morale lift on Tuesday when the Southern Air Command's Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief R.K.S. Bhadauria flew the fighter aircraft solo for 30 minutes in Bengaluru.

Much to the LCA programme's comfort, Air Marshal Bhadauria, who took charge of the Southern Air command in March, has a 15-year-long association with it: he has flown 100 sorties on it as an experimental test pilot with the National Flight Test Centre.

The sortie from the HAL defence airport comes at a time when the LCA's worth has been purportedly maligned or doubted afresh in air force circles ostensibly in comparison with imported single-engine fighters. The LCA is currently undergoing final sets of trials, with weapons and devices that add it punch. Thereafter, it will go in for certification to get the FOC, or final operational clearance, as battle-ready.

The flight from the HAL airport gives "a fresh impetus to the induction and operationalisation of the indigenous fighter jet into the Indian Air Force," said a release from the Ministry of Defence.

After taking charge of the Southern Air Command, the release said, Air Marshal Bhadauria has been pushing the LCA's developer,

the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), and its manufacturer, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), to speed up the way to operationalise the fleet.

HAL and ADA appreciate the flight as a major gesture by the IAF to endorse their efforts and re-affirm its continued support to the programme, the release said.

₹1300 crore ramp-up

So far, the IAF has placed orders for 40 LCAs in the first version and a subsequent ₹300 crore order for 80 more in the upgraded Mark-1A configuration.

Public sector manufacturer HAL said with a second assembly line in place, it is ramping up production from eight LCAs a year to 16. IAF and HAL have shared the cost of ₹1,300 crore to meet the delivery schedule.

Designers at ADA, the release said, are completing all activities that are pending for the FOC. They have also taken up design activities on the improved version, Tejas Mk IA.

The IAF last year formed The No. 45 Squadron, or The Flying Daggers, which has a few early flying versions of the fighter. The squadron's air and ground crew are getting trained in Bengaluru. They will move to its designated base, at Suler near Coimbatore, next year.