

Government go-ahead for 70-140 seater Indian Regional Jet

Kasargod: After many a prod, including those from distinguished countrymen such as former president, Dr Abdul Kalam, to commence work on a regional jetliner, the Indian government has finally given the nod for such a project. State-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) has now been asked by the government to prepare a roadmap for the design and construction of a 70-100 seater Indian Regional Jet (IRJ).

According to reports, the defence and civil aviation ministries have also approved the plan.

The project will seek international participation with one of the two major manufacturers of similar aircraft. According to government sources, Canada's Bombardier or Brazil's Embraer are prospective partners. The foreign partner will be expected to provide technical expertise once the design and other basic plans for the aircraft are finalised.

Meanwhile an initial, limited series production of the National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL), 14-seater passenger aircraft, Saras, will be undertaken.

HAL's Kanpur division will handle production of the aircraft. The first of the series is expected to be flying by 2012.

According to government officials, the first IRJ is expected to fly within six to seven years. They also said that HAL is confident of meeting this deadline. Officials said that as soon as HAL submitted its blueprint, the government would initiate the next phase of activity. They said that a joint venture will enable the project to take off faster.

Officials said that India's focus so far has been on design and manufacture of different types of military aircraft including fighters, helicopters and transport. The country's technology has now matured enough to bid for a passenger aircraft programme.

According to HAL chairman, Ashok K Baweja, the aerospace giant would be designing and building hardware for the manufacture of the aircraft and would seek technological support from global players only in certain areas. He said that India will make the IRJ available on the global markets by 2012.