



# Aero India 2011

Article and Photos  
by Pieter Stroobach

## The Airshow

The Aero India 2011 was a very rare opportunity to see equipment of the Indian Air Force. Basically, the show could be separated in three different parts. First there was the show itself, which is an event that is held every two years. Secondly, there was the MMCRA (Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft) competition for 126 jets to replace the elderly MiG-21 in IAF service. The third part was the daily airlift of military personnel into and out of the show, which brought many IAF aircraft to the airport.

If you think airshows are crowded affairs, you haven't seen anything until you've been to Aero India. An immense crowd comes to the show early each morning. Crowds on weekdays were just as large as the weekends! The goal of the show is basically to show achievements of the local aviation industry. The static displays were incredibly interesting, but hard to photograph because of the tape and crowds. During the show, many types of aircraft made by local manufacturer HAL (Hindustan Aircraft Ltd) were displayed, such as the licence-built Chetak, and



the locally developed and built HAL Dhruv helicopter, several versions of which are operated by worldwide.

Undoubtedly, the local stars of the show were the Sarong helicopter team and the Surya Kiran display team. During the show we

learned that this was the last time the Surya Kiran team would be flying. Because of a shortage of HAL Kiran trainer jets, the team will be forced to give up its aircraft. It will be reformed in the coming years with BAE Hawks or the new HAL HJT-36 trainers. There was also a

demo of HALs Tejas light combat aircraft, which will be entering service within several years. The real highlight was the Su-30MKI, which put on a very impressive demonstration. It had been a while since I last saw a Cobra maneuver!

There were other civilian and military demos during the show as well. The Zlins of the Red Bull team were a real crowd pleaser. The departure of an HAL HUL-26 Pushpak brought a sense of Indian aircraft history. This small prop plane was celebrating the silver jubilee of the Army Aviation Corps. It was scheduled for a month-long tour of air observation bases. The flying program was about two hours long and was performed twice a day. All in all a very impressive show.







### The MMCRA Contest

In 2006, India made a request for proposals to replace its elderly MiG-21 fighters. Entries for the competition came from all over the world. Lockheed Martin proposed a variation of the tried and true F-16, the F-16IN. French company Dassault submitted the Rafale, EADS the EF2000 Typhoon, Boeing the F/A-18E, and Saab offered the JAS 39 Gripen. The sole Russian entry was MiG with its new MiG-35. The winner will be determined sometime this year. At stake is an order for 126 airframes in the first batch, and the potential for an additional order of a naval variation. It is one of the largest recent competitions for fighter aircraft, and everyone in the industry is paying close attention. All of the MMCRA entrants but one showed up with very crowd-pleasing demonstrations for the spectators. Strangely enough MiG was absent. Given its long relation with India, that didn't bode well for them. A personal favorite was the F/A-18 Super Hornet, which gave by far the most impressive demo. Saab, Boeing, and Lockheed Martin each brought a dual-seat version of their aircraft and offered demonstration rides during the breaks in the show. Various VIPs, from a local soap star to high ranking military officials, were allowed a flight. At the end of April it became clear that the flights didn't help - the contenders had been narrowed to just the Typhoon and the Rafale.



### Coming and Going

India has a very long tradition of license-building airplanes. With some minor exceptions, most of them are built to do their service domestically, and will never be

out of the country. Each morning and evening, all kinds of staff and officials were flown into and out of the show with Avro, Il-76, Do-228, Mi-8, HAL Chetak and An-32 transports. Happily, this happened mainly during times with

more forgiving light conditions then during the show. Coming early to the show and leaving late was not only a way to avoid the crowds, but also a nice opportunity to catch some of these planes.

