

Make in India time for cockpit avionics

1,000 MFD units for Sukhoi Su-30 aircraft have been completed by a totaly Indian public-private partnership.

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India's defence technology sector is beginning to see the "Make in India" dream turn into reality. In a first, a public-private partnership in defence technology has delivered the first large indigenous high-technology consignment in cockpit avionics. Samtel, an Indian avionics and military electronics firm, in a joint venture with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), a public sector undertaking, has announced the completion of 1,000 multi-functional display (MFDs) units for the "Made in India" Sukhoi Su-30 aircraft, considered the backbone of the Indian Air Force's fighter fleet. Puneet Kaura, Samtel Avionics Ltd managing director and CEO, proudly told *The Sunday Guardian*, "It is definitely a big feat for us to be able to deliver the target of 1,000 MFDs for Sukhoi Su-30 aircraft. Sukhoi is the Indian Air force's flagship aircraft with 272 fighter planes in its fleet. We have provided MFDs for 145 of those aircraft. These were earlier being imported from Russia. It took us six years to complete the project. A lot of money, time and effort have gone into ensuring the quality of this product and it is at

par with international standards." The aim of the joint venture was to indigenise cockpit avionics.

The first block of Sukhoi aircraft came from Russia, but the second block came in parts which were assembled in India. However, with the third and fourth blocks of Sukhoi fighter jets, India started developing and manufacturing the technology.

In 2004, much before the "Make in India" campaign was launched, Samtel Avionics had signed an MoU with Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to develop "Ruggedisation" technology in India. "Ruggedisation" technology is needed for use in harsh environment defense and aerospace applications. India used to import "Ruggedisation" technology from France. In 2010, after the technology was developed in the country, the manufacture of MFDs started in collaboration with HAL for all kinds of aircraft. The joint venture chose Sukhoi as its technology demonstrator i.e. the aircraft the product was to be tailor-made for. Experts believe that the Indian defence industry is a huge foreign exchange earner and can lead India to its professed goal of self-reliance. The new Defence Procurement Proce-

dure (DPP) 2016 policy, in an attempt to advance the cause of the "Make in India" campaign, had added a new procurement category —Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured (IDDM) —which was accorded top priority and addressed the concerns of the MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) in particular.

Kaura said, "The Make in India campaign is doing what should have been done long back. The major challenges that Indian firms debuting in the defence sector face are lack of knowledge and human resource to develop the required technology."

An industry source said, "The benefits of developing indigenous defence technology are vast. The countries that are our friends now might not be so tomorrow. India's defence engineering cannot stay dependent on them. Moreover, home developed technology cuts 20-30% of the cost." Kaura said, "Apart from defence avionics, the civilian air buses used in India are not manufactured in India. Again, this sector has large untapped potential."

Samtel Avionics, a small-medium enterprise in the Indian defence sector, develops high-technology equipment for military and commercial platforms.