



Aero India 2025: The Runway to a Billion Opportunities



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Asia's Largest Air Show

Aero India, Asia's largest air show, is held biennially in Bengaluru, Silicon City, and India's aviation hub. The 15th edition of Aero India will be held at the Air Force Station, Yelahanka, from February 10 to 14, 2025. As has been the practice, the first three days of the air show (February 10, 11 & 12) would be reserved for the industry as business days, and the next two days (February 13 & 14) would be open for the public to attend. The broad theme for the air show this year would be the same as its last edition, '**The Runway to a Billion Opportunities**'. This would provide major opportunities for Indian original equipment manufacturers (OEM) to forge collaborations with foreign OEMs and become significant players in the global value chain, thereby enhancing the indigenous aviation ecosystem. The air show would also highlight India's growing indigenous aviation platforms, cutting-edge technologies, and defence innovations, and promote start-ups and display thrilling aerobatic displays.

Focus on Indigenisation

Aero India (the air show and aerospace exhibition) is planned, organised and managed by the Defense Exhibition Organisation (DEO), Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defense. The Indian Air Force (IAF), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Ministry of Civil Aviation (MOCA) and Department of Space provide the requisite support for the conduct of the air show. Over the years, Aero India has slowly but surely managed to capture the eye and the attention of the world's military and civil aircraft manufacturers by showcasing cutting-edge technologies by foreign and indigenous aviation OEMs, thought-

provoking academic seminars, business collaborations, and spectacular aerial displays. Since 2015, Aero India's main focus has been on 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbharta', which essentially translates to building an indigenous aviation industry and its associated ecosystem and achieving self-reliance.

Aero India's Global Standing

Since its humble beginnings in 1996, Aero India has gradually grown in significance as an air show, in Asia and worldwide. Some of the most well-known, prestigious and influential air shows of the world are the **Farnborough Air Show** (established 1948), the **Paris Air Show** (established 1909), the **Royal International Air Tattoo** — the biggest military air show — in England, the **ILA Berlin Air Show** (established 1909), the **Dubai Air Show** (established 1989), the **Zhuhai Air Show** (China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition), and the **Singapore Air Show** (established 2008). Though Aero India has some catching up to do with these renowned and established air shows, it has grown in importance and carved out a niche position on the global air show calendar. Over the years, Aero India has grown in size and significance and has become **Asia's largest air show and aerospace exhibition**. One interesting trivia is that the inaugural edition of both Zhuhai Air Show and Aero India was held in 1996. The highlights of the last edition of Aero India in 2023 were that it attracted over seven lakh visitors, high-level dignitaries from 98 countries, and a total of 809 exhibitors, including businesses, investors, start-ups, and MSMEs had put up their stalls in the air show. During the air show, more than 250 plus partnerships/MoUs were signed with technology transfers worth over INR 75,000 crore. The maiden iDEX Investor Hub (iIH) also saw INR 200 crores being pledged¹.

Schedule of Activities

Building on its past successes, Aero India 2025 would aim to focus on showcasing indigenous aviation platforms, highlighting India's progress in aerospace and defence technologies and fostering global partnerships. Aero India 2025 would have several significant activities, including a curtain raiser event, the Defence Ministers' Conclave, the CEOs' Round Table, the iDEX start-up event, spectacular air shows, and a large exhibition area comprising of the 'India Pavilion' and numerous aerospace companies².

As a prelude to Aero India 2025, DRDO, in association with the Aeronautical Society of India, will be organising the **15th Aero India International Seminar** at Bengaluru on February 8 to 9, 2025, which would help in fostering the exchange of innovative ideas, driving technological advancements and enabling inter-sector collaborations. The theme for the seminar this year will be “**Futuristic Aerospace Technologies: Challenges in Design Validation.**” The discussions on the first day would be focussed on ‘**Emerging Trends in Futuristic Aerospace Technologies**’, and on the second day, the focus would be on ‘**Military Airworthiness and Certification: Challenges in Design and Testing**’.³ Both topics of discussion are highly pertinent for the fledgling Indian aviation industry and would provide a platform for exploring collaborative research opportunities and forging strategic partnerships for developing futuristic aerospace technologies.

One of the major highlights of Aero India 2025 would be the **Defence Ministers’ Conclave** on the theme ‘BRIDGE - **B**uilding **R**esilience through **I**nternational **D**efence and **G**lobal **E**ngagement’. The conclave would aim to build strategic partnerships and enhance defence cooperation with friendly foreign countries (FFCs) with a shared vision of international security and development. Bilateral meetings of the Raksha Mantri, Raksha Rajya Mantri, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) and Defence Secretary would also be planned on the sidelines of the event. The meetings would focus on bolstering the defence and aerospace ties with the FFCs.

Another major attraction of Aero India 2025 would be the **CEOs’ Round Table**, which would provide the global OEMs and Indian defence and aerospace industry (public as well as private) leaders a platform for forging partnerships for technology transfers, joint designing, development, and manufacturing in India and exporting to the world.

Another key highlight of Aero India 2025 would be the **India Pavilion**, which would showcase India’s commitment to its ‘Make-in-India’ and ‘Atmanirbharta’ initiatives by showcasing our indigenously developed aviation platforms and cutting-edge technologies. There would also be a dedicated focus on the rapidly expanding start-up ecosystem in the aerospace domain. This would be through the **special iDEX start-up** event, featuring a diverse range of cutting-edge technologies and products developed by Indian start-ups. Focused on innovation, the event would be able to bring fresh ideas and solutions to the aviation industry.

Another important feature of Aero India 2025 would be the large number of **seminars** on critical themes, fostering discussions on defence policy, innovation in aerospace technologies, and

opportunities for international collaborations. Aero India 2025 is expected to provide networking opportunities to businesses, investors, and start-ups for forging new partnerships and exploring opportunities in India's growing aerospace and defence industry.

Aerospace Platforms and State-of-the-Art Technologies

Aero-India 2025 is likely to have all the major global and Indian aviation companies displaying their latest military and civil platforms or full-scale models, aiming to catch the eye of the IAF hierarchy and the Indian MoD. The main foreign OEM exhibitors are likely to be Airbus, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, United Aircraft Corporation (UAC), Rosoboronexport, Israel Aerospace Industry (IAI), Dassault Aviation, SAAB, Martin Baker, Safran, General Electric (GE) and Rolls Royce. It is expected that the decision for the co-design, **co-development and co-manufacture of the 110 kN high-thrust jet engine** with an established international engine manufacturer with IP rights will be made during the Aero India 2025. Amongst the Indian defence industry, the major exhibitors are likely to be HAL, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bharat Forge Limited, Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), Adani Defence and Aerospace, Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL), Brahmos Aerospace, IdeaForge and Zen Technologies. As of date, more than 700 exhibitors have registered for Aero India 2025. However, in the coming days, this number is expected to surpass 809 exhibitors that were there in Aero India 2023.

Aerobatic Displays

Aero India 2025 will be having its eagerly awaited aerobatic displays twice on all the days. This would be once each morning and afternoon. The star attraction of the aerobatic displays this year would be the fifth-generation Russian Su-57 stealth fighter (Felon). This would be the first time that the Su-57 would be performing its aerial display in India, just a month after its stunning aerial display at the Zhuhai Air Show. One question that has constantly perplexed all aviation enthusiasts is how the Su-57 manage to achieve its stealthiness while having its famed manoeuvrability. Though intimated earlier that the American F-35 (Lightning II) and the F-16 (Fighting Falcon) would be part of the aerial displays at Aero India 2025, the latest inputs are that they might not be there.⁴ If that happens, it would indeed be disappointing for the aviation enthusiasts, eagerly looking forward to seeing them perform in Bengaluru. Apart from these major flying attractions, the indigenous flying display composition would consist of the Light Combat Aircraft Mk 1A Tejas, Light Combat Helicopter

(LCH) Prachand, Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) and Hindustan Turbo Trainer-40 (HTT-40). The IAF nine aircraft **Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT)** would mesmerise the audiences with its scintillating aerobatic displays. Unfortunately, the IAF five helicopter **Sarang's** aerobatic displays are uncertain due to the temporary grounding of the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) for flight safety reasons. The aerial displays would be the most eagerly awaited event of each day as the performances would entertain the public and demonstrate the capabilities of the platforms to aviation enthusiasts.

Static Displays and Technology Demonstrations

Apart from the flypast, the other major attraction of Aero India 2025 would be the static displays and technology demonstrations of various military and civil platforms.

HAL would be showcasing the prototype along with its potential configuration of the **Combat Air Teaming System (CATS)** - Warrior wingman, of which they had achieved the successful engine ground run on January 13 this year.⁵ They would display the **Optionally Manned Combat Aircraft (OMCA)**, based on the modified Kiran Mk 2 aircraft. This would be a part of the Manned Unmanned Team (MUMT) with the LCA Tejas as the mother-ship platform. The OMCA is proposed as a decoy to open the enemy air defence systems.

Amongst the most significant foreign OEM participants in Aero India 2025 would be **Lockheed Martin**, which would be showcasing the Vast™ Experience System, which claims to offer an immersive, interactive 3D visualisation system that would bring multi-domain systems to life. Lockheed Martin would be showcasing a number of products, which would include the C-130 Super Hercules Tactical aircraft, F-21 fighter aircraft, MH-60 "Romeo" Seahawk helicopter, Javelin anti-tank weapon system and S-92 Multi-role helicopter.⁶

Another foreign OEM, **MBDA** will showcase its cutting-edge missile systems, like the Meteor Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air missile, the SCALP deep-strike cruise missile, and the versatile MICA missile.

Aero India 2025 would also have a large number of indigenous companies like IdeaForge, Garuda Aerospace, Daksha Unmanned Systems, Zen Technologies and NewSpace Research and Technologies manufacturing drones, loitering systems and Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-UAS), which would be displaying their products. The drone sector is one where indigenous aviation companies have made tremendous progress and operationalised their platforms in the recent past. Apart from these, there would be a large number of MSMEs and start-ups showcasing their products at Aero India 2025.

Conclusion

Aero India 2025 would showcase the vibrant and rapidly improving domestic Indian aerospace industry and aviation ecosystem. The Indian Government has acknowledged the huge potential and strategic importance of the aerospace industry and has designated it as one of the core sectors for achieving 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. Though Aero India has grown significantly over the years with the number of visitors and the foreign OEM participation, the test of its success would be when one of the indigenously developed aviation platforms is acknowledged as a contemporary and potent platform and bought by the Air Forces of the FFCs.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes:

- ¹ Department of Defence Production, "Aero India 2023 Rewind", <https://www.aerolandia.gov.in>. Accessed on January 26 2025.
- ² Press Information Bureau, "The Runway to a Billion Opportunities: Aero India 2025 to be held in Bengaluru from February 10 to 14," <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2090516>. Accessed on January 26 2025.
- ³ Aeronautical Society of India, "Aero India 2025 15th Biennial International Seminar," <https://www.aerosocietyindia.co.in/News/Show?code=AESINEWS121>. Accessed on January 27 2025.
- ⁴ Smruti Deshpande, "Russian fifth-generation fighter Su-57 to be on display at Aero India 2025," *The Print*, January 28, 2025, Defence section, <https://theprint.in/defence/stage-set-for-russian-american-5th-generation-fighters-faceoff-at-aero-india-2025/2467272/>. Accessed on January 29 2025.
- ⁵ Bhaswar Kumar, "CATS Warrior: HAL completes key test of loyal wingman for deep-strike ops," *Business Standard*, January 13, 2025, External Affairs Defence Security section, https://www.businessstandard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/cats-warrior-hal-completes-key-test-of-loyal-wingman-for-deep-strike-ops-125011300631_1.html. Accessed on January 26 2025.
- ⁶ "Lockheed Martin: Pioneering Advanced Technology Solutions for India's 21st Century Needs," *Indian Aerospace and Defence Bulletin*, January 28, 2025, Defence section, <https://www.iadb.in/2025/01/28/lockheed-martin-pioneering-advanced-technology-solutions-for-indias-21st-century-needs/>. Accessed on January 28 2025.