

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Aero India 2025: Empowering Indigenous Aerospace Industry

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S*ummary*

Aero India has become a significant enabler of India's defence industrial transformation.

Introduction

Aero India has evolved from a modest air show in 1996 into Asia’s premier defence and aerospace exhibition, symbolising India's rise in the global defence and aerospace value chain. Held biennially, the event has matured into a dynamic platform that brings together the government, military, academia, media, manufacturers and international partners. With a strong focus on indigenisation, innovation and international collaboration, each edition of Aero India showcases India’s progress in defence R&D and production, while facilitating high-level engagements that shape the future of the aerospace industry. The 2025 edition, with its record-breaking participation and significant initiatives, further reinforced Aero India’s status as a catalyst for the vision of ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’ in the aerospace domain.

Aero India’s Evolution: Key Highlights

The first edition of Aero India was held in 1996 at Yelahanka airforce station from 3 December to 7 December.¹ It was jointly organised by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Department of Civil Aviation, the Indian Air Force (IAF), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and the Department of Space. It was proposed to be held every alternate year “to provide an opportunity to display our Aeronautical and Aerospace capability and enable our industry to meet the manufacturers from around the world”.² In the second edition, there was major participation from the UK, the US, Russia, France and Israel, among other countries. Over 100 companies from 12 foreign countries and 50 companies from India participated, including “renowned names in the Aeronautics and Aerospace industry”.³

Aero India became an ideal platform for showcasing the capabilities of Indian companies in design, development and production of aviation and ground systems, both for defence and civil sectors.⁴ Catering to the increased popularity, in 2003, a new hangar with annexes, an extended runway and other infrastructure was specially constructed at the air force station, for supporting the Aero India.⁵ The number of companies, delegates and common visitors kept growing through the years with increasing popularity of the event. By 2019, the revenue generated by

¹ “**Annual Report 1995-96**”, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1996, p. 51.

² Ibid.

³ “**Annual Report 1996-97**”, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1997, p. 53.

⁴ “**Annual Report 2000-01**”, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2001, p. 61.

⁵ “**Annual Report 2004-05**”, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2005, p. 95.

Aero India reached Rs 133.45 crore.⁶ The last edition of Aero India witnessed the signing of more than 250 MoUs worth more than Rs 75,000 crores.⁷ Growing in its scope and extent, Aero India has now become Asia’s biggest aerospace exhibition.⁸

The highlights of the year-wise editions of Aero India are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Aero India Year-Wise Highlights

Edition	Year	Highlights
1.	1996	First edition organised by DDP, MoD.
2.	1998	Models of all popular aircrafts displayed.
3.	2001	Schedule shifted permanently to February from December due to weather issues.
4.	2003	-
5.	2005	UAVs and aircrafts were special attractions.
6.	2007	-
7.	2009	Armaments display. China participated first time.
8.	2011	LCA flew in a formation first time. Last airshow of Surya Kiran using Kiran jets. First participation by Czech Republic.
9.	2013	1 st airshow by Russian airforce jets.
10.	2015	PM Modi called for a strong defence sector with public-private partnerships.
11.	2017	-
12.	2019	First combined defence and civil aviation segment with ministerial involvement.
13.	2021	First hybrid mode event.
14.	2023	First visit of F-35 to India.
15.	2025	Full-scale engineering model of HAL AMCA, CATS and TEDBF demonstrated. F-35 and SU-57—two stealth fighters participated.

Source: Compiled by the author from primary and secondary sources.

⁶ “[Annual Report 2018-19](#)”, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2019, p. 86.

⁷ “[Aero India 2023 Rewind](#)”, Ministry of Defence, Government of India.

⁸ “[Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh Calls for Enhanced Cohesiveness of the Global Community in view of the Current Security Environment](#)”, Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 10 January 2025.

Aero India: Key Roles

Support Innovation and Businesses

Aero India serves as a vital platform where businesses and innovators actively exchange ideas, showcase their products and services, and forge partnerships. Companies aiming to shape the aerospace industry's future use this venue to influence its trajectory.⁹ They secure business opportunities through direct meetings with potential customers and partners from both government and private sectors. The event also enables them to identify new growth areas that larger expos might miss.

Media Outreach and Public Engagement

Aero India offers unmatched media exposure, allowing companies to enhance the global visibility of their products and innovations. It facilitates direct engagement through productive B2B and B2G meetings, enabling interactions with potential buyers and government officials from multiple countries. Companies leverage this platform to amplify their brand's reach through widespread coverage in leading industry publications, websites and social media channels. With live aerial displays, showcasing the strength and precision of modern air power, the show stimulates national pride by highlighting India's defence capabilities. For the public at large, it serves as an educational experience, inspiring the youth and fostering interest in science, aviation and technology.

Stakeholders Engagements

Participating in a key event like Aero India enables stakeholders to stay updated on industry trends, innovations and business strategies. The event brings together a diverse ecosystem—including defence manufacturers, investors, start-ups, MSMEs, foreign collaborators, fabricators, academia, R&D organisations and suppliers from the military and space sectors. Its focused scale promotes meaningful engagement and fosters stronger industry relationships. By attending, participants gain valuable insights into the evolving aerospace landscape and remain at the forefront of technological and strategic developments.

Aero India 2025: ‘The Runway to a Billion Opportunities’

With the broad theme of ‘The Runway to a Billion Opportunities’, Aero India 2025 engaged 900 exhibitors which included 750 Indian companies and 150 international

⁹ [“Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh to Chair Ambassadors’ Round-Table in New Delhi in the Run Up to Aero India 2025”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 9 January 2025.

companies, making the event the biggest-ever Aero India till date.¹⁰ The focus of this Aero India was on bolstering international defence and aerospace cooperation by engaging in mutually beneficial partnerships. Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh termed the Aero India as “a significant driver of economic strength, contributing to the overall growth and development of the economy”.¹¹

The activities conducted and outcomes of Aero India 2025 are summarised below.

Defence Ministers' Conclave

With the theme ‘BRIDGE – Building Resilience through International Defence and Global Engagement’, this conclave aimed to bolster India’s defence cooperation with friendly foreign countries. The conclave engaged participants in discussions on joint-ventures, investments in joint R&D and collaborations in military training, artificial intelligence, and space technologies; maritime security cooperation; and the strengthening of strategic partnerships. The event reflected the shifting geopolitical landscape and emphasised how nations with shared visions of security and development can bridge gaps through collective engagement and cooperation.

CEOs' Roundtable

The CEOs’ Roundtable offered a platform for foreign and Indian Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to explore manufacturing opportunities in India.¹² Chaired by the Raksha Mantri under the theme ‘EDGE – Enabling Defence Cooperation through Global Engagement’, the event drew participation from over 100 OEMs and 116 global CEOs. During the event, Bharat Forge announced its joint-venture project to manufacture landing gear for specific commercial aircrafts entirely within India.¹³ Additionally, Safran (France) and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) declared a partnership to co-produce the Hammer missile domestically.¹⁴

India Pavilion

At Aero India 2025, the India Pavilion was organised into five zones, each showcasing home-grown expertise in aero aviation, land-based aviation, naval aviation, defence-space integration and advanced technology sectors.¹⁵ The HJT-36 now renamed as

¹⁰ [“The Runway to a Billion Opportunities: Aero India 2025 to be Held in Bengaluru from February 10 to 14”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 6 January 2025.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² [“Aero India 2025: CEOs Roundtable Receives Unprecedented Response with the Participation of 116 Global CEOs”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 11 February 2025.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ [“Aero Daily”](#), Directorate of Public Relations, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 10 February 2025.

YASHAS, the flagship jet trainer of HAL, was unveiled at this pavilion.¹⁶ The iDEX Pavilion displayed state-of-the-art, home-grown technologies and products, representing a significant step forward in India's pursuit of defence innovation and self-sufficiency.¹⁷ An indigenisation event on the theme ‘SAMARTHYA’ was held to acknowledge and honour the individuals and organisations behind the development of advanced indigenous technologies.¹⁸

Historic First Participation of Su-57 and F-35

For the first time in the history of the event, Aero India 2025 featured stealth fighter jets from Russia and the US. The presence of both aircrafts underscored India's rising prominence as a key centre for global defence and aerospace collaboration, offering a rare opportunity to directly compare Eastern and Western stealth fighter technologies.¹⁹ This convergence provided insights into their respective capabilities.

Policy Announcements

In a significant development at Aero India 2025, Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh unveiled a document on ‘Network Centric Multi Domain Operations’.²⁰ Prepared by the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS), the document outlines a strategic roadmap to prepare the Indian Armed Forces for future warfare, focusing on achieving decision superiority in an increasingly data-driven and tech-intensive battlefield.²¹

Several other important publications were also released during the event:

- The Compendium of Problem Definition Statements (CPDS) of 82 problem statements across 11 functional domains, designed to bridge operational challenges faced by the Indian Army with innovative solutions offered by academia, start-ups and research institutions.²²
- The iDEX Report 2024, iDEX Coffee Table Book and the iDEX Finance Manual were also released which collectively showcase the progress and milestones of

¹⁶ “[Aero Daily](#)”, Directorate of Public Relations, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 11 February 2025.

¹⁷ Ayushee Chaudhary, “[iDEX Pavilion at Aero India 2025](#)”, SP's SHOWNEWS, 12 February 2025.

¹⁸ “[DRDO Showcases Indigenously Developed State-of-the-art Technologies and Systems, Working Models and Innovations at Aero India 2025](#)”, Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 11 February 2025.

¹⁹ Soutik Biswas, “[India's Fighter Jet Battle: US v Russia in the Skies](#)”, BBC, 4 March 2025.

²⁰ “[CDS Gen Anil Chauhan Concludes a Significant Visit to Aero India 2025, Boosting India's Strategic Defence Partnerships and Capability Development](#)”, Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 15 February 2025.

²¹ “[India Moving Towards Becoming a Global Leader in Defence Innovation & Aerospace Technology: Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh at Valedictory Event of Aero India 2025](#)”, Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 12 February 2025.

²² Ibid.

India’s growing defence start-ups ecosystem.²³ The iDEX Finance Manual streamlines financial procedures to accelerate project execution and promote a more innovation-friendly environment for iDEX winners.²⁴

- The Defence Testing Portal (DTP) developed by the Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA) was launched during Aero India 2025. A booklet highlighting the Defence Testing Capabilities was also released.²⁵ The DTP is a one-stop easy access solution for any Indian defence company wanting to get its products tested in any of the test sites of the Government of India. Such a portal was needed due to increasing demands from the Indian defence industry for the streamlining of testing procedures, greater transparency in test scheduling and availability, and faster turnaround times to support accelerated product development and timely induction into service. The DGQA booklet released during this event serves as a practical guide for defence manufacturers, providing vital information for navigating procurement and delivery processes.

Conclusion

Aero India has thus become a significant enabler of India’s defence industrial transformation. By providing a strong interface between domestic and international stakeholders, the event bridges policy, production and innovation. The 2025 edition was important not only for its scale and high-profile participation, but also for its focus on futuristic warfare domains such as AI, space technologies, multi-domain operations and network-centric warfare. This has positioned Aero India as a vital node in India’s journey towards technological self-reliance. As India strengthens its position in the global defence and aerospace supply chain and boosts its indigenous ecosystem, Aero India will remain an essential force multiplier—driving innovation, partnerships and strategic depth in defence preparedness.

²³ [“Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh Inaugurates India, iDEX & Karnataka Pavilions at Aero India 2025 in Bengaluru”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 10 February 2025.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

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