

## IAF's new Hawk trainers reach Bidar airbase

The first of the 66 Hawk advanced jet trainers (AJTs) the Indian Air Force (IAF) has contracted for arrived here Monday to signal a paradigm shift in the way rookie pilots will be readied for graduating to supersonic fighters.

The two aircraft arrived five weeks after the IAF Oct 8 brought the curtains down on its platinum jubilee celebrations. Four more Hawks will arrive next month, when the aircraft will be formally inducted into the IAF.

This will be the IAF's first induction of new aircraft after the frontline Sukhoi Su-30MKI combat jets a decade ago.

The IAF currently trains its rookie pilots on the sub-sonic Kiran-Mark II aircraft at the Bidar flying school, from where they are catapulted to the MiG-21 fighters and other combat jets.

Some 60 IAF pilots have already undergone training in batches at RAF Valley in Britain to operate the Hawk and will, in turn, train other pilots at the Bidar airbase.

Britain's BAE Systems that builds the Hawk will supply 24 aircraft in flyaway condition and state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) will manufacture the remaining 42 under license at its [Bangalore](#) complex.

Six more Hawks are expected by mid-February and the entire fleet of 66 aircraft will be inducted by 2010-11.

The two aircraft that arrived Monday had departed from BAE Systems' Warton airfield on Nov 8.

Flown by Wing Commander Pankaj Jain and Squadron Leader Tarun Hindwani, the aircraft first landed in India at the Jamnagar airbase in Gujarat after a flight from Muscat, their previous stopover.

Air Commodore R.K. Sharma, Air Officer Commanding, Jamnagar, and the officers and aircrew of the air force station (AFS) accorded the Hawks an enthusiastic welcome on their maiden touchdown at an IAF airbase.

After a stopover for refuelling, turn-around-servicing and a brief ceremony to mark their arrival, the Hawk pair took off for Bidar.

'The Hawk's arrival at AFS Bidar, their designated main operating base, was marked with great excitement and enthusiasm,' an IAF release said.

'The AJT pair was escorted into Bidar airspace by the Suryakirans (aerobatic display team) streaming the national colours. They landed in pairs and taxied-in into the designated apron area amidst a rousing welcome by the air warriors of the airbase and their families,' the release added.

Air Marshal G.S. Chaudhry, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Training Command, and Air Commodore Ramesh Rai, who heads AFS Bidar, oversaw the arrival of the aircraft here in 'a simple but well orchestrated ceremony', the release said.

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