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HAL Restarts Su-30MKI Production at Nashik: 12 Jets Against a Widening Squadron Gap

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HAL Restarts Su-30MKI Production at Nashik: 12 Jets Against a Widening Squadron Gap

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is restarting Su-30MKI fighter jet production at its Nashik facility to manufacture 12 additional jets under a Rs 11,000-crore contract signed in December 2024, with the aircraft, featuring over 50 percent indigenous content, intended to replace jets the Indian Air Force has lost in accidents, with deliveries running through 2029.

WHY HAL IS RESTARTING A PRODUCTION LINE IT HAD CLOSED

The Nashik facility's Su-30MKI assembly line had gone quiet after HAL completed its original licensed-production run of **222 Su-30MKIs** for the Indian Air Force, the full quantity contracted under India's Russia-origin licensed manufacturing programme, after which the division pivoted toward MRO (maintenance, repair and [overhaul](#)) work on the existing Su-30 fleet and, more recently, toward standing up new Tejas Mk1A production lines. The December 2024 contract, worth **Rs 11,000 crore**, reopens that dormant line specifically to build **12 new Su-30MKIs**, aircraft procured not to expand squadron numbers on paper but to replace airframes the IAF has lost to crashes over the years, a category of [attrition](#) that steadily erodes actual squadron strength even when no formal drawdown decision is ever taken. HAL expects the first of the new jets to roll out in 2027-28, with all 12 delivered by 2029, and the aircraft are required to carry **more than 50 percent indigenous content**, a marked increase in local manufacturing depth compared with the original licensed-production batches from the 2000s and 2010s.

THE SU-30MKI'S INDO-RUSSIAN ORIGINS

The Su-30MKI programme is one of the oldest and largest instances of Indo-Russian defence-industrial cooperation still in active production. India signed an initial \$1.462 billion agreement with Russia's Sukhoi in **November 1996** for Su-30 aircraft in phases, with development of the India-specific "MKI" variant, featuring French and Israeli avionics alongside Russian airframe and engine technology, beginning around 1995 and its first prototype flying in July 1997. The licensed-production arrangement that actually built the bulk of the IAF's fleet followed a further deal: in **October 2000** India and Russia's Irkutsk Aircraft

Production Association (now Irkut Corporation) signed a memorandum for India to licence-produce 140 Su-30MKIs domestically, formalised in a contract HAL signed with Rosoboronexport in **December 2000**, worth more than \$3 billion, under which HAL was to build the aircraft at its Nashik division over roughly two decades. That programme, expanded across subsequent orders, ultimately delivered 222 Su-30MKIs to the IAF, making the Su-30MKI the backbone of India's heavy fighter fleet and Nashik's single largest production undertaking in its six-decade history, a facility that has also built and overhauled the MiG-21 and MiG-27 in earlier decades.

THE SQUADRON-STRENGTH PROBLEM THIS ORDER SITS INSIDE

The IAF's sanctioned combat squadron strength has stood at **42 squadrons** since long-standing two-front-war planning assumptions against Pakistan and China, but actual strength has been sliding well below that figure for years. With the retirement of the IAF's last MiG-21 squadrons, its oldest and most accident-prone type, defence-affairs reporting through 2025 and into 2026 has placed the IAF's operational fighter squadron count at roughly **29 to 31**, widely described as the lowest level since the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Twelve replacement Su-30MKIs, while numerically small against that gap, matter disproportionately because the Su-30MKI remains the IAF's single largest fighter type by squadron count, meaning every airframe lost to an accident represents a direct, immediate subtraction from the force's most numerous and most capable multi-role platform, one that cannot be offset by inducting a different aircraft type without retraining, spares and basing adjustments.

ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT AND THE INDIGENISATION ANGLE

Beyond simply replacing lost airframes, the restarted line is being framed within the government's **Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India)** and **Make in India** defence-manufacturing push. HAL has separately flagged a much larger, roughly **Rs 60,000-crore** two-phase Su-30MKI fleet upgrade programme, covering new avionics, radars, electronic warfare systems and flight-control systems for the IAF's existing in-service Sukhoi, sometimes referred to as a "Super Sukhoi" upgrade, distinct from and larger in scale than the 12-jet new-build contract. Together, the two programmes are presented as evidence that HAL's Nashik division, rather than fading into a pure overhaul-and-upgrade role once its original 222-aircraft production run ended, is being repositioned as a continuing node in India's fighter-manufacturing base, alongside its newer role producing Tejas Mk1A light combat aircraft at a capacity of eight jets a year from a dedicated third production line inaugurated at the same facility.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3: Indigenisation of technology and developing new technology, Science and Technology developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence manufacturing; role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security, linkages of border areas with security.

Mains angle: “Import-dependent legacy platforms and indigenisation goals often run on parallel, not convergent, tracks in Indian defence procurement.” Discuss with reference to the Su-30MKI’s licensed-production history and the indigenous-content targets of its 2024 replacement-jet contract.

★ FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

NEW PRODUCTION CONTRACT:

Value: Rs 11,000 crore, signed December 2024

Quantity: 12 Su-30MKI jets, to replace aircraft lost in accidents

Indigenous content: over 50%

Timeline: first jet 2027-28; all 12 delivered by 2029

Facility: HAL’s Nashik division, Maharashtra

SU-30MKI PROGRAMME HISTORY:

Initial Sukhoi deal: November 1996 (~\$1.46 billion)

India-Russia licensed-production MoU: October 2000, with Irkutsk Aircraft Production Association (now Irkut Corporation)

HAL-Rosoboronexport production contract: December 2000 (~\$3 billion, 140 jets planned)

Total Su-30MKIs built at Nashik under licence: 222

IAF SQUADRON STRENGTH:

Sanctioned strength: 42 squadrons

Actual strength (2025-26, post-MiG-21 retirement): approximately 29-31 squadrons, described as the lowest since the 1965 India-Pakistan war

RELATED UPGRADE PROGRAMME:

Separate Su-30MKI fleet upgrade (“Super Sukhoi”): estimated Rs 60,000 crore, two-phase (avionics/radar, then flight-control systems)

Nashik also runs a Tejas Mk1A production line, capacity 8 aircraft/year

Sources: PIB, The Hindu, Business Today

Source: HAL Restarts Su-30MKI Production at Nashik: 12 Jets Against a Widening Squadron Gap — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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