FLANKER AND TYPHOON DOGFIGHT ABOVE BRITAIN

On 27 July it was reported that Royal Air Force and Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft were dogfighting in a major airpower training exercise in the skies above Britain.

For Exercise Indradanush (Rainbow) the IAF has flown their Russian-built Flanker jet fighters, along with transport and tanker aircraft, across three continents to train with their RAF counterparts. Designed to reinforce the strategic relationship and enhance the mutual operational understanding between the two air forces, pilots and ground forces from both nations are participating in a series of increasingly complex training scenarios. The two week exercise concludes on 31 July.

The visiting IAF personnel are commanded by Group Captain Astiu. He said: ‘Every Air Force has got some plusses and some minuses. We are here to take plusses from the Royal Air Force and we expect they will take a lot of plusses from our side. We are complimenting each other and as far as the Indian contingent is concerned it is action packed and we are enjoying it.’

RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire is hosting four Su-30MKI Flanker fighters whose crews are training with the Typhoon FGR4 equipped 3(Fighter) Squadron.

Officer Commanding 3(F) Sqn is Wing Commander Chris Moon commented: ‘This is an exciting exercise for us. In the Typhoon Force we deploy around the world on various exercises so to have an air force as respected as the IAF with their Su-30 Flankers is a huge experience for us and we are really enjoying flying with them. It is only through doing different things that we really learn. We are working together on the ground, we are planning and briefing together, flying together in the air and then debriefing and we are learning a lot from each other.’

The RAF Typhoon Force’s primary role is securing UK and Falkland Islands airspace. Aircraft, pilots and ground crew remain on alert all day every day to scramble to intercept any aircraft which requires identification or threatens our security.

Over the course of two weeks the complexity of the training sorties is increasing, starting from one-v-one dogfights to sorties involving up to 20 fighters.
Speaking shortly after his first encounter with the thrust vector equipped Su-30, RAF Typhoon pilot Flight Lieutenant Mike Highmoor had no doubt about the value of the bilateral exercise: ‘This is fantastic. It is the first time I have flown against a Flanker this morning and it is fascinating to see another air force do its thing in a different aeroplane. Flying against an aircraft which is equally comparable to the Typhoon is not something we get to fight against on a regular basis in the UK. It is very exciting. It is an incredibly impressive fighter but the Typhoon is a good match for it.’

The IAF Exercise Director is Wing Commander Joarder who said: ‘This is a good way to exchange our experience, share our thoughts and go ahead with working together as a team. The IAF used to be the Royal Indian Air Force so we have a lot of commonality in terms of structure, organisation and training. Aviation is not in itself very different, so we also have similar missions, concepts, strategies and tactics as the RAF. So we gain tremendously when we share our experiences together.’

The IAF transport aircraft, a C-17 and C-130J, and Il-78 air-refuelling tanker are training with their RAF counterparts at RAF Brize Norton. The ground element of the exercise is centred on RAF Honington where IAF Garud Commandos are working with their RAF Regiment counterparts including a series of parachute jumps from both nations’ Hercules tactical transport aircraft.

**Long history**
The RAF and IAF share a proud heritage which dates back to the First World War where ten Indian pilots flew with the Royal Flying Corps and RAF. Most recently the IAF hosted RAF elements delivering aid to Nepal following the earthquake earlier this year. Approaching the 70th anniversary of VJ Day, the RAF recognises the contribution and sacrifices made by Indian pilots during the Second World War.

**Picture caption**
*For Exercise Indradanush the IAF has flown their Russian built Flanker jet fighters, along with transport and tanker aircraft, across three continents to train with their RAF counterparts. Designed to reinforce the strategic relationship and enhance the mutual operational understanding between the two air forces, pilots and ground forces from both nations are participating in a series of increasingly complex training scenarios.*

© Crown copyright 2013.