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WINGS INDIA 2026

28TH - 31ST January 2026
Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad, India

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DAY 2

THURSDAY
JANUARY 29, 2026

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FLYING DISPLAY

INSIDE

LEAD STORY

Wings India 2026 Takes Flight

Minister of Civil Aviation, Rammohan Naidu Kinjarapu inaugurated the Static Display Area at Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad, marking the formal beginning of Wings India 2026 - Asia's largest civil aviation platform. This landmark inauguration sets the tone for a week where government leadership, global industry players, innovators, and policymakers come together to shape the future of Indian aviation.

Photo: FICCI

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SPECIAL FEATURE

India as a Regional MRO Hub – Leveraging Policies & Incentives

India's drive to become a regional and global MRO hub signals more than industry growth — it reflects strategic economic planning, technological collaboration with global OEMs, and policy reforms designed to reduce dependence on foreign service providers, while boosting domestic capability. How is it unfolding?

MANISH KUMAR JHA

As aviation activity accelerates worldwide, Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) services have become a cornerstone capability for sustaining both civilian and military aircraft fleets efficiently and cost-effectively. As the Prime Minister Modi put forth his thrust on the sector recently said, "Our vision is clear. India must not just be a consumer in the global aviation supply chain—it must emerge as a leading provider of aviation services, especially in the high-value MRO sector."

India's drive to become a regional and global MRO hub signals more than industry growth — it reflects strategic economic planning, technological collaboration with global OEMs, and policy reforms designed to reduce dependence on foreign service providers while boosting domestic capability.

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We are the world's number one regional aircraft manufacturer. Connecting people, businesses and communities, safely and reliably. Offering the lowest emission regional aircraft and caring about the comfort and well-being of our passengers. Responsible, committed and passionate, we are here to make a difference. **We are ATR**.

ATR — ACCELERATING SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS

Wings India Takes Flight... *continued from page 1*

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MINISTER FOR CIVIL AVIATION RAMMOHAN NAIDU KINJARAPU VISITED THE EXHIBITS SHOWCASING INDIA'S GROWING STRENGTH AND INNOVATION IN THE AVIATION SECTOR

Union Minister for Civil Aviation, Rammohan Naidu Kinjarapu, inaugurated Wings India 2026, highlighting the sector's rapid growth, with India's aviation market becoming one of the world's largest. The sector has witnessed transformative expansion marked by a doubling of airports, aircraft fleet, and passenger traffic. This landmark inauguration sets the tone for a week where government leadership, global industry players, innovators, and policymakers come together to shape the future of Indian aviation. "Wings India 2026 is one of the biggest aviation events in Asia. Through this event, we are confidently showcasing India's strength in the civil aviation, especially in the manufacturing sector" said the Minister at the inauguration.

Spanning four impactful days, the event puts the Aam Aadmi at the heart of aviation growth, while driving business collaborations and progressive policy reforms, reinforcing India's rising stature on the global aviation stage.

PHOTO 1&2 – SAMIR KUMAR SINHA, SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, INAUGURATING THE EXHIBITION AT WINGS INDIA 2026;
PHOTO 3 – CIVIL AVIATION SECRETARY SAMIR KUMAR SINHA HOLDING A COURTESY MEETING WITH THE DELEGATION FROM OMAN, STRENGTHENING TIES AND AVIATION PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES;
PHOTO 4 – CIVIL AVIATION SECRETARY SAMIR KUMAR SINHA WITH THE DELEGATION FROM SINGAPORE, REAFFIRMING BILATERAL COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION IN THE CIVIL AVIATION SECTOR.

Boeing Projects Quadrupling India and South Asia's Aviation Market over Next Two Decades

Alongside domestic expansion, Indian and South Asian airlines are expected to significantly strengthen their long-haul networks

SWAATI KETKAR

Boeing has projected a dramatic expansion of commercial aviation across India and South Asia, with passenger air traffic expected to grow at an average rate of seven per cent annually over the next 20 years. According to the company's latest Commercial Market Outlook (CMO), airlines in the region will require nearly 3,300 new aircraft by 2044, driven by rising incomes, a rapidly expanding middle class, growing connectivity, and sustained investment in airport infrastructure.

The outlook highlights that single-aisle aircraft will dominate future fleet additions, accounting for nearly 90 per cent of total deliveries, as airlines expand domestic and short- to medium-haul international operations. These aircraft will play a critical role in strengthening point-to-point connectivity and enabling network flexibility across India and neighbouring South Asian markets.

Boeing estimates that the region's commercial fleet will grow from 795 aircraft today to approximately 2,925 by 2044, representing almost a fourfold increase. This growth will be underpinned primarily by India's booming domestic market, supported by a continued modal shift from rail to air travel and major investments in airport development and regional connectivity.

"As air travel becomes more integral to how people and goods move in India and South Asia, airlines will strengthen networks, scale fleets and invest in services and technical personnel to support long-term growth," said Ashwin Naidu, Managing Director of Commercial Marketing, Eurasia and Indian Subcontinent at Boeing. He added that more efficient and versatile aircraft will be central to unlocking growth opportunities for both established and emerging carriers in the region.

Alongside domestic expansion, Indian and South Asian airlines are expected to significantly strengthen their long-haul networks, positioning India as an increasingly important hub for international passenger and cargo traffic. Boeing projects that the region's wide-body fleet will more than triple by 2044, enabling millions of passengers to access key global markets across the Middle East, Europe, North America, and beyond.

Photo: Swaati Ketkar

ASHWIN NAIDU, BOEING MANAGING DIRECTOR OF COMMERCIAL MARKETING, EURASIA AND INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Cargo operations are also set for strong growth. Boeing forecasts that the region's fleet of new and converted freighter aircraft will grow fivefold over the next two decades, driven by the expansion of high-tech manufacturing in India, the rapid rise of e-commerce, and increasing demand for time-sensitive logistics solutions.

To support this unprecedented expansion, the aviation ecosystem in India and South Asia will require more than $195 billion in aviation services over the next 20 years. This includes spending on maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO), aircraft modifications, digital solutions, and training services. Boeing also estimates that the region will need approximately 1,41,000 new aviation professionals, comprising around 45,000 pilots, 45,000 technicians, and 51,000 cabin crew, to sustain fleet growth and operational readiness.

In terms of aircraft categories, Boeing projects deliveries of approximately 2,875 single-aisle aircraft, 395 wide-body jets, and 20 freighters, with regional jets accounting for fewer than 10 units during the forecast period.

BOEING'S 395 WIDEBODY PROJECTION REALISTIC, NOT MODEST

While India's commercial aviation sector is witnessing a notable expansion of widebody aircraft, Boeing's forecast of 395 widebody jets for the India and South Asia market over the next 20 years remains grounded in realism rather than modesty.

Speaking on Boeing's long-term outlook, Ashwin Naidu, Managing Director of Commercial Marketing, Eurasia and the Indian Subcontinent, reaffirmed that the 395-widebody figure in Boeing's Commercial Market Outlook reflects measured demand expectations, even as India scales up its long-haul capacity.

Over the past five years, Air India has consistently expanded its widebody fleet, inducting a mix of Airbus A350-900 and Boeing 787 Dreamliners as part of its post-privatisation fleet renewal. As of early 2025, Air India's fleet comprised roughly six A350-900 and 34 Boeing 787 aircraft alongside multiple Boeing 777 variants, illustrating a substantial widebody presence that underpins international connectivity.

Meanwhile, IndiGo has begun its widebody journey. The airline currently operates a handful of leased long-haul aircraft and has firm orders for 60 Airbus A350-900s, with deliveries starting around 2027, a bold strategic shift for a carrier traditionally focused on narrowbody operations.

Given these dynamics, experts feel whether Boeing's 395 widebody forecast might be conservative. But Naidu stressed that Boeing's outlook aims to balance optimism with pragmatism, accounting for regional infrastructure growth, airline fleet strategy, and delivery constraints. "While we would be delighted to see even greater widebody uptake, the figure reflects what we see as sustainable growth for the market over the long term," he noted.

As India's airlines continue to modernise and diversify route structures, the broad consensus is that widebody capacity will grow significantly, even if total numbers eventually exceed current projections.

India as a Regional MRO Hub...

continued from page 1

India's strategic position—providing easy access to major aviation markets across Asia, the Middle East, and Africa—gives it a natural advantage as a competitive MRO destination. The government seeks to convert this locational strength into economic value by developing integrated MRO hubs near major airports and established aviation clusters.

INDIA'S MRO MARKET — SCALE AND GROWTH POTENTIAL

The MRO industry — encompassing airframe maintenance, engine overhaul, component repair, and line service — has traditionally been dominated by facilities in Singapore, Europe, and the US. India, despite hosting one of the world's fastest-growing aviation markets, has historically exported much of this work overseas.

However, recent estimates show the Indian MRO market is already substantial and projected for strong growth. Some of the data speak volume about such projections over 1,500 planes on order.

In 2024, India's aircraft MRO market was valued at approximately $3.77 billion, driven by increasing fleet sizes, rising air traffic, and regulatory reforms. It is expected to grow to nearly $6.9 billion by 2033 at a CAGR of ~6–7 per cent.

Earlier industry forecasts projected the market could reach $4 billion by 2030–31, growing at ~8–9 per cent per year, with a significant portion of demand fuelled by domestic carriers and new facilities.

As of the early 2020s, only 15–20 per cent of India's MRO needs were serviced domestically, with the rest outsourced abroad — pointing to a large opportunity for localisation.

India's Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammohan Naidu highlighted the explosive growth of the MRO said India's MRO sector is expected to be worth $4 billion by 2031 at a growth rate of 8.9 per cent.

These figures underline India's rapidly expanding MRO economy — one that could contribute substantially to aviation services regionally if policy and infrastructure investments continue.

CIVIL AVIATION DEMAND

India's domestic airline fleet is surging, with major carriers ordering hundreds of new aircraft for the coming decade. As passenger traffic grows, so does the demand for scheduled maintenance, engine overhauls, and component services. Historically, airlines have spent up to 12–15 per cent of total revenue on maintenance, illustrating the cost implications and the opportunity for domestic sourcing.

Large MRO facilities under development are progressing, such as IndiGo's ₹1,100 crore facility in Bengaluru, capable of servicing multiple widebody and narrow-body aircraft, demonstrating industry commitment to scaling operations.

CIVIL-MILITARY AVIATION NEEDS

India operates an extensive and diversified military aviation fleet — from transport and trainer aircraft to complex platforms like the C-130J Hercules and P-8I Poseidon. Localised military MRO capability drastically improves operational readiness, reduces turnaround times, and enhances strategic autonomy. Partnerships such as the C-130J MRO hub developed by Lockheed Martin and Tata Advanced Systems in Bengaluru are early examples of military MRO localisation and civil-military convergence on facility capabilities.

Collaborations with global OEMs such as Airbus, Boeing, and Safran further integrate international technical standards into Indian MRO workflows, raising domestic technical proficiency across both civil and defence domains.

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

India's strength lies in its engineering talent pool and evolving infrastructure.

As of the early 2020s, only 15–20 per cent of India's MRO needs were serviced domestically, with the rest outsourced abroad — pointing to a large opportunity for localisation

Photos: AIESL, Air Works

(TOP AND ABOVE) AIESL AND AIR WORKS MRO CENTRES. THE COMBINATION OF MARKET POTENTIAL, TECHNICAL EXPERTISE, STRATEGIC OEM PARTNERSHIPS AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM POSITIONS INDIA AS A REGIONAL MRO HUB.

MRO providers — including Air India Engineering Services Ltd (AIESL), HAL, and private sector firms — hold certifications from the DGCA, FAA, and EASA, enabling them to service aircraft to global standards.

Safran Aircraft Engine Services India (SAESI) inaugurated a global LEAP-engine MRO facility in Hyderabad, a significant landmark as the first global engine MRO of its kind in India. The SAESI facility will be operational in 2026. The development is seen as the biggest investment so far in MRO, leading to indigenous capabilities in the upskilling of the sector.

Airbus and HAL are also collaborating on the A320 family MRO infrastructure.

US firm Boeing's local initiatives also include the Boeing India Repair Development and Sustainment (BIRDS) programme — tie global maintenance expertise to Indian providers, creating knowledge transfer and workforce skill enhancement.

These partnerships certainly enhance India's technical credibility, making it increasingly attractive for international carriers and defence fleets seeking cost-effective MRO solutions.

POLICY AND TAX INCENTIVES DRIVING EXPANSION

Recognising the strategic value of MRO services, the Indian government has introduced a suite of reforms and incentives to attract investment and improve competitiveness:

Tax rationalisation includes a uniform Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate of five per cent on aircraft parts, engines, and components (down from a range up to 28 per cent), which was implemented in mid-2024, eliminating prior disparities and reducing cost pressures for MRO operators.

Another key reform built up around customs duty exemptions for tools and toolkits, and streamlined import-export procedures for parts under repair, further boosting lower operational costs and accelerating Turn-Around Times (TAT).

India allows 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the MRO sector under the automatic route, enabling smoother entry and expansion for global players.

The government's priority and thrust on the sector is visible in terms of continuous reforms and policy rationalisation like the land lease policies, concessional charges at airports, and infrastructure support under the MRO Policy 2021 and National Civil Aviation Policy, which have made it easier for both Indian and international entities to establish facilities.

However, the focus is required to streamline the Initiatives to promote specialised training, including collaborations for workforce development and aviation education. It is vital to address the need for qualified technicians and engineers — a critical factor in sustaining high-quality MRO operations at this stage of the sectoral development.

So, despite significant progress, India's MRO ambitions must navigate ongoing challenges.

Firstly, the infrastructure scaling in terms of multiple hubs — in Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and emerging locations like Bhubaneswar and Assam — requires further investment and integration to achieve seamless capacity utilisation.

Another key area is the global certification consistency. The Continued alignment with FAA and EASA standards ensures Indian MROs can service foreign-registered aircraft without regulatory friction.

Most importantly, MRO is all about workforce expansion. Meeting the skilled labour demands of complex military and commercial MRO work will require sustained and scalable training programmes.

RISING AS A REGIONAL POWERHOUSE

India is at a pivotal moment in its aviation MRO journey. The combination of market potential, technical expertise, strategic OEM partnerships, and institutional reform positions the nation to transition from a net importer of MRO services to a regional — and increasingly global — MRO hub for both civilian and military platforms.

If India continues to harmonise policy, strengthen infrastructure, and nurture skilled talent, its MRO sector could not only capture a large share of domestic demand but also attract international fleets seeking cost-effective, world-class maintenance solutions — thus firmly establishing the country as a critical node in the global aviation services network. ●

In 2024, India's aircraft MRO market was valued at approximately $3.77 billion, driven by increasing fleet sizes, rising air traffic, and regulatory reforms. It is expected to grow to nearly $6.9 billion by 2033 at a CAGR of ~6–7 per cent

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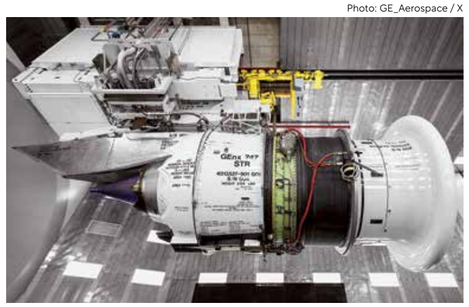
GEnx, the Preferred Engine for Long-Haul Flights

Fuel efficiency, reliability and sustainability define long-haul economics. The GEnx engine brings all three together, making it one of the most compelling propulsion choices in modern widebody aviation.

SP'S SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Photo: GE_Aerospace / X



THE GEnx HAS POWERED SOME OF THE WORLD'S LONGEST COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS, INCLUDING ULTRA-LONG-RANGE MISSIONS

In long-haul commercial aviation, the engine is far more than a source of thrust; it is a central determinant of route economics, operational resilience and environmental compliance. Fuel burn, reliability, maintenance intervals and sustainability performance directly influence profitability, fleet utilisation and network flexibility on flights that can exceed 15 hours in duration. Against this demanding backdrop, the GE Aerospace GEnx engine has emerged as one of the most widely adopted and trusted propulsion systems for long-range widebody aircraft, designed specifically for extended-range operations and combining high propulsive efficiency, operational durability and future-ready sustainability in a package that closely aligns with airline priorities in an increasingly volatile fuel-price and environmentally focused operating environment.

FUEL EFFICIENCY AND LONG-RANGE ECONOMICS

Fuel is the single largest variable cost in long-haul operations, and GE Aerospace has confirmed that the GEnx delivers up to 15 per cent lower fuel consumption and CO_2 emissions compared with the earlier CF6 engines it replaced. This efficiency advantage is driven by a combination of high bypass ratio design, advanced aerodynamics, lightweight composite structures, reduced engine weight and an optimised combustion system. For airlines operating intercontinental routes, even single-digit percentage reductions in fuel burn translate into substantial annual savings. The GEnx's improved efficiency enables longer non-stop operations without payload penalties, making previously uneconomical long-haul and thinner intercontinental routes commercially viable, while on ultra-long-haul sectors, marginal efficiency gains compound into significant operational and financial benefits over time.

RELIABILITY AND TIME ON WING

Long-haul networks demand exceptional engine reliability, as any unscheduled engine removal or in-service issue on a widebody aircraft can disrupt global schedules, strand passengers and trigger cascading operational and recovery costs. GE Aerospace data confirms that the GEnx delivers industry-leading dispatch reliability, supported by robust component design, advanced materials, conservative thermal margins and extended time-on-wing performance. Continuous engine health monitoring and predictive analytics further enable the GEnx to remain in service longer between shop visits, reducing maintenance interruptions and keeping aircraft in revenue service for extended periods. This high level of reliability is particularly valuable for airlines operating long-haul routes from geographically dispersed hubs or across remote regions where access to maintenance infrastructure may be limited.

MAINTENANCE INNOVATION AND LIFECYCLE VALUE

GE Aerospace supports the GEnx with a comprehensive services ecosystem aimed at lowering total cost of ownership, combining advanced on-wing solutions and digital maintenance technologies. Key among these is 360 Foam Wash, which enables effective, water-free compressor cleaning, improving on-wing fuel efficiency, reducing performance degradation, minimising environmental impact and cutting maintenance downtime. Complementing this, AI-enabled inspection tools, digital health monitoring and predictive analytics allow airlines to anticipate maintenance requirements rather than react to failures, enabling more efficient scheduling of interventions. These capabilities are particularly valuable for long-haul aircraft operating far from base maintenance hubs, as reduced unscheduled maintenance enhances aircraft utilisation, supports more predictable maintenance planning and improves overall fleet economics.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE AND SAF READINESS

Environmental performance has become inseparable from long-haul viability and is increasingly shaping airline strategy. The GEnx engine addresses this requirement through its TAPS combustor, which reduces NOx emissions well below regulatory limits, while its lower fuel burn directly cuts CO_2 output. GE Aerospace has also confirmed that GEnx-powered aircraft have successfully operated long-haul flights using approved Sustainable Aviation Fuel blends, demonstrating the engine's readiness for near-term decarbonisation. As regulatory frameworks tighten and airlines commit to net-zero targets, this ability to adopt SAF without hardware or structural engine modifications offers a decisive operational and strategic advantage, particularly as SAF availability expands and regulatory pressure intensifies.

OPERATIONAL FLEXIBILITY AND ROUTE EXPANSION

The GEnx has powered some of the world's longest commercial flights, including ultra-long-range missions that test propulsion efficiency and durability, demonstrating its ability to sustain consistent performance across extended cruise profiles and varied climatic conditions. For airlines and network planners, this capability translates into greater network flexibility, enabling the Boeing 787 to profitably serve thinner long-haul routes, open new city pairs, reduce reliance on intermediate hubs, and respond more flexibly to changing travel demand, while leveraging the engine's range, payload capability and reliability to reshape long-haul networks in an increasingly competitive market.

WHY AIRLINES CHOOSE GEnx

The enduring appeal of the GEnx lies in its balance, integrating advanced technology with proven engineering and operational maturity to deliver efficiency gains without compromising durability or reliability. GE Aerospace's confirmed service milestones, growing installed base, and accumulating flight hours reinforce the engine's reputation as a dependable, future-ready solution for global aviation. As the company continues to enhance the engine through service innovations and digital tools, the GEnx remains fully aligned with both current operational requirements and long-term sustainability objectives.

CONCLUSION

For long-haul airlines navigating rising fuel costs, stricter environmental mandates and increasingly competitive route structures, the GEnx represents a propulsion system optimised for reality—not theory. In an era where long-haul aviation must reconcile economic pressure with environmental responsibility, the engine's fuel efficiency, reliability, sustainability credentials, maintenance and lifecycle support, and SAF readiness collectively make it one of the most compelling propulsion choices for modern widebody fleets—and a cornerstone of long-haul aviation today. ●

India's Aircraft Leasing Market Poised for Take-off, but Structural Gaps Remain

SWAATI KETKAR

Photo: GIFTCity_ / X

GIFT CITY IS POSITIONING INDIA AS A PREMIER INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL HUB

India's aircraft leasing market is at a pivotal stage, with leaders calling for stronger domestic capability to match the country's rapid aviation growth. Nearly 85 per cent of India's commercial fleet is leased, significantly higher than the global average of about 50 per cent, highlighting both the scale of leasing activity and India's continued dependence on overseas lessors.

Speaking at the inaugural session of Wings India 226, Piyush Srivastava, Senior Economic Advisor at the Ministry of Civil Aviation, said that despite India's massive contribution to global aviation growth, the country captures little of the economic upside from leasing. "India should have a meaningful share in the proceeds of leasing, commensurate with what the country contributes to global aviation growth," he said.

Several speakers pointed to structural barriers holding back large-scale domestic leasing, including rolling taxation on non-residents, higher corporate tax rates, uncertainty over incentive sunset clauses, and lingering trust deficits among investors.

However, progress is being made. Dipesh Shah, Executive Director at the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA), said GIFT City has laid much of the groundwork for a leasing ecosystem. Between 2023 and 2026, around 370 assets, including aircraft, engines and infrastructure were leased from GIFT City by 38 lessors, with nearly 75 per cent of aircraft owned and leased from the IFSC. With 37 banks operating in GIFT City, he said, over 90 per cent of the required ecosystem is now in place.

Regulators and bankers stressed that smooth aircraft induction, deregistration and repossession, backed by effective implementation of the Cape Town Convention are critical to investor confidence. Banks also highlighted the need to address skill gaps in aircraft financing and explore rupee-denominated models.

Airbus noted that India will require close to $100 billion in aircraft financing over the next decade and confirmed plans to host an aircraft financier forum in Mumbai this year to help build local capability.The session concluded with consensus that India's aviation growth can only be fully realised if leasing and financing capabilities are firmly rooted at home. ●

ATR: Powering India's Regional Aviation Revolution

India is a market where turboprops are not only relevant, but indispensable for connecting communities efficiently and sustainably

SP'S SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Photos: ATR

(TOP) MORE THAN 90 PER CENT OF INDIA'S DOMESTIC TRIPS COVER LESS THAN 740 KM (400 NAUTICAL MILES), A DISTANCE WHERE TURBOPROPS OUTPERFORM JETS ON EFFICIENCY, ECONOMICS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT;
(ABOVE) AS INDIA'S AVIATION MARKET IS SET TO BOOM OVER THE NEXT DECADE, ATR FORECASTS A NEED FOR AROUND 210 ADDITIONAL TURBOPROPS OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS.

Over the past 45 years, ATR has built a unique expertise, providing 200 airlines in 100 countries the most fuel-efficient, cost-effective regional aircraft, ideally suited to serve short sectors profitably and deliver inclusive connectivity for communities.In India, our presence spans over 25 years, during which ATR aircraft have become an essential backbone of regional connectivity and a trusted choice for operators serving the country's diverse and fast-growing markets.

Throughout these decades, we have seen first-hand the strong demand for affordable and dependable regional air travel across India's vast network of tier-2 and tier-3 cities. And recently, the evolutions we've seen proved remarkable. India is undertaking one of the world's most ambitious expansions of aviation infrastructure. Under the government's UDAN scheme, more than $2 billion have already been invested to support the mission of "letting the common citizen of the country fly." And the results are absolutely impressive: over the past decade, this effort has more than doubled the number of operational airports and enabled the launch of nearly 650 new routes, with the scheme now extended for another decade.

Regional mobility is in our DNA. We want to contribute to that ambition, because we truly believe that everyone should have access to all the opportunities of a connected world, and regional aviation is crucial to offer just that. That's why we created the 'Mobility Monitor', a data-driven platform designed to map real mobility behaviour, using real travel patterns of over 20 million anonymous Indian travellers. Thanks to this platform, we can now quantify and visualise this demand with unprecedented clarity. The tool confirms what decades of operational experience have already shown: India is a market where turboprops are not only relevant, but indispensable for connecting communities efficiently and sustainably. Here are the main findings revealed by this brand-new analysis, which we'll unveil during the 2026 edition of Wings India.

UNLOCKING INDIA'S TIER-2 AND TIER-3 POTENTIAL

More than 90 per cent of India's domestic trips cover less than 740 km (400 nautical miles), a distance where turboprops outperform jets on efficiency, economics, and environmental impact. This makes ATR aircraft the natural choice for linking India's fast-growing tier-2 and tier-3 cities, communities that increasingly demand reliable, affordable, and frequent air travel.

Today, only around three per cent of India's domestic inter-city mobility market uses air travel, despite the country generating 4.6 billion journeys per year across all modes. This low penetration highlights just how much potential exists in these markets. Our MobilityMonitor, a platform designed to analyse real mobility behaviours, shows that approximately 425 million people currently live within 90 minutes of an airport, about 30 per cent of the population, and that when travellers fall within this access range, demand for air travel can increase up to threefold.

With the government planning to expand India's airport network to over 230 airports by 2030, regional routes are multiplying faster than ever. ATR forecasts up to 900 new city pairs emerging in this decade, overwhelmingly between tier-2 and tier-3 cities. For millions of Indians, expanded access will mean gaining a viable alternative to long journeys by road or rail, and in many cases, gaining convenient access to the national and international air network for the very first time.

A LONGSTANDING PARTNER TO INDIAN OPERATORS

ATR's story in India stretches back more than 25 years. Over this time, the manufacturer has built a robust local ecosystem that supports airline operations end-to-end; training, maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO), and fleet deployment.

Today, around 70 ATRs fly across India, representing approximately five per cent of the global ATR fleet, and making India ATR's second-largest market worldwide after Indonesia. Hyderabad alone saw 26,000 ATR flights in 2024, illustrating how deeply embedded the aircraft is in India's regional mobility fabric.

UDAN: A CATALYST FOR INCLUSIVE CONNECTIVITY

The UDAN Regional Connectivity Scheme has been transformative for India, and instrumental in elevating ATR's role in the country. The scheme has:

- More than doubled the number of operational airports in the past decade.
- Generated 425 new routes with hundreds more in the pipeline.
- Been extended for another ten years, signalling long-term commitment to regional mobility.

ATR turboprops are perfectly aligned with UDAN's ethos: inclusive, sustainable, and affordable connectivity. Their ability to operate from short runways, challenging airfields, and smaller airports makes them ideal for India's regional landscape.

India already has 39 airports under construction or completed but not yet fully operational, with at least seven more in advanced planning and 38 additional airfields that could be developed. Together, this yields a view of 85 potential additional airports.

If developed, these airports would expand the population with practical access to air travel by 175 million people, bringing the total to more than 600 million. This expansion also increases the mobility market accessible to airlines by a factor of 1.5, adding 1.25 billion inter-city journeys to the catchment areas already served by India's commercial airports.

As connectivity continues to structure itself around shorter routes, UDAN helps create the conditions in which airlines can open new city pairs with reduced exposure, since turboprops deliver the best economics and performance on these thinner markets. ATR aircraft therefore offer operators a practical way to serve new communities affordably and reliably, reinforcing the programme's goal of accessible, inclusive air travel.

ENGINEERING THE FUTURE: HYBRID-ELECTRIC AND THE ATR EVO

As airlines face growing pressure to decarbonise, ATR is accelerating its technological roadmap. Under the European Union's Clean Aviation programme, ATR leads two major projects, HERACLES and DEMETRA, to integrate hybrid-electric propulsion into future regional aircraft.

By 2030, ATR will fly a hybrid-electric ATR 72-600 demonstrator, making history once again.

Building on this research, the ATR EVO concept will redefine regional aviation for the mid-2030s, targeting:

- Significantly reduced CO_2 emissions
- Double-digit operating-cost savings
- 100 per cent SAF compatibility
- Eco-designed cabins and systems
- A renewed propulsion system optimised for hybrid capability

With the EVO programme, ATR aims to deliver the next generation of low-emission regional aircraft while retaining the versatility that operators value today.

ATR has also become a global leader in Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF):

- All ATR aircraft are certified to fly with up to 50 per cent SAF blends today.
- In 2022, ATR performed the world's first commercial flight using 100 per cent SAF in both engines.
- ATR is working with partners such as ATOBA Energy to improve SAF access, particularly for regional operators that currently lack direct supply.

By the second half of this decade, ATR aims for full 100 per cent SAF capability across its fleet.

ELEVATING PASSENGER EXPERIENCE: ATR HIGHLINE

While most regional flights are short, passenger expectations in India are evolving. In response, ATR developed HighLine, a premium cabin concept offering business-jet-like comfort on turboprops. Featuring elevated interiors, wider seats, connectivity solutions and enhanced comfort, HighLine has already been selected by carriers such as Air Tahiti and Berjaya Air.

A notable innovation, the X-Space Table, launching with Air Cambodia, allows operators to transform a dual economy seat into a single premium seat in minutes, offering flexible layout options for evolving markets like India.

A FUTURE SHAPED BY REGIONAL MOBILITY

As India's aviation market is set to boom over the next decade, ATR forecasts a need for around 210 additional turboprops over the next 20 years, a conservative estimate that could grow further as the airport network expands. With its unmatched economics and lowest emissions, ATR is uniquely positioned to be the aircraft of choice for India's regional future. ●

India's Helicopter Market has Tremendous Potential but Challenges Persist

Helicopters in India need to be integrated into mainstream mobility, emergency response, medical services, tourism and logistics

SWAATI KETKAR

Photo: Airbus

AIRBUS H160 HELICOPTER

Despite India's vast geography and diverse terrain which is considered ideal for helicopters, the country continues to lag far behind global peers in helicopter utilisation, industry leaders say.

According to industry data, India operates roughly 250–280 civil and para-republic helicopters across sectors including offshore, charter, VVIP, tourism and utility operations. This fleet size represents less than one per cent of the global helicopter fleet and remains low even relative to smaller developed markets, such as New Zealand, which had around 560 helicopters as of 2021.

Sunny Guglani, Head of Airbus Helicopters India and South Asia, underscores this contrast sharply, "Pune alone has more helicopters than the entire North East region put together." He attributes the sluggish helicopter market primarily to a lack of helicopter mindset, where both demand awareness and supportive policy frameworks have not kept pace with India's needs. Guglani emphasises that helicopters should be more than VVIP or niche assets; they need to be integrated into mainstream mobility, emergency response, medical services, tourism and logistics.

Industry experts point to multiple structural hurdles that dampen growth. Regulatory and infrastructure gaps, especially around heliport development, airspace access, and de-confliction of rotary and fixed-wing traffic continue to constrain operations. Authorities, such as the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), DGCA and the Airports Authority of India (AAI), need a coordinated push to build dedicated helicopter infrastructure and streamline procedures.

Safety perception remains another challenge. Experts stress the need for rigorous data collection and accident analysis to drive evidence-based policy and training reforms, noting that pilot error is not always the root cause of incidents.

Financial constraints also weigh heavily. Harsh Vardhan Sharma of Himalayan Heli highlights the underdeveloped helicopter financing ecosystem in India, which makes acquisition and fleet modernisation costly compared with global markets.

Unlocking India's helicopter market will require not just infrastructure and policy reform, but a broader shift in mindset, recognising the helicopter as a critical, versatile connector across the length and breadth of the nation. ●

HAL and ICATT Sign MoU to Develop Dhruv-NG for Air Ambulance and HEMS Missions

The partnership is to establish a structured framework for cooperation in the development, customisation and certification of the Dhruv-NG helicopter for medical operations

SP'S CORRESPONDENT

Photo: HAL

HAL'S ADVANCED LIGHT CIVIL HELICOPTER 'DHRUV-NG'

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and ICATT have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to jointly develop and deploy the Dhruv-NG helicopter for air ambulance and Helicopter Emergency Medical Services (HEMS) operations across India and beyond.

ICATT, a recognised air ambulance service provider specialising in critical patient air transfers, currently supports government, institutional and private clients using both rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft. Under the MoU, both parties will work together to create a dedicated medical configuration for the Dhruv-NG platform, enabling it to perform complex aeromedical evacuation and emergency response missions.

The core objective of the partnership is to establish a structured framework for cooperation in the development, customisation and certification of the Dhruv-NG helicopter for medical operations. This includes facilitating ICATT's operational deployment of the helicopter and exploring long-term commercial, technical and operational collaboration in the HEMS domain.

As part of the agreement, HAL and ICATT will jointly define medical mission requirements, including cabin layout, stretcher systems, medical equipment integration, power requirements, oxygen systems and life-support provisions. The scope also covers technical studies, ground and flight trials, and validation activities necessary to certify the helicopter for air ambulance use, along with regulatory approvals from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and other competent authorities.

The MoU further outlines plan for operational deployment, with ICATT exploring acquisition of Dhruv-NG helicopters through direct purchase and/or lease arrangements. The aircraft will be deployed under mutually agreed commercial, operational and regulatory frameworks, and both organisations may jointly participate in tenders, customer engagements and programmes related to air ambulance services.

Training and product support form a key pillar of the collaboration. The parties will cooperate in training flight crew, maintenance personnel and support staff specifically for air ambulance operations, while also establishing structured operational feedback loops to continuously improve platform capability and mission effectiveness.

The partnership reflects a broader push to strengthen India's indigenous helicopter ecosystem while addressing the country's growing need for rapid medical response and emergency transport, particularly in remote and underserved regions. By combining HAL's platform development expertise with ICATT's operational experience in critical care aviation, the collaboration aims to create a robust, certified, and scalable HEMS solution tailored for India's unique healthcare and geographic requirements. ●

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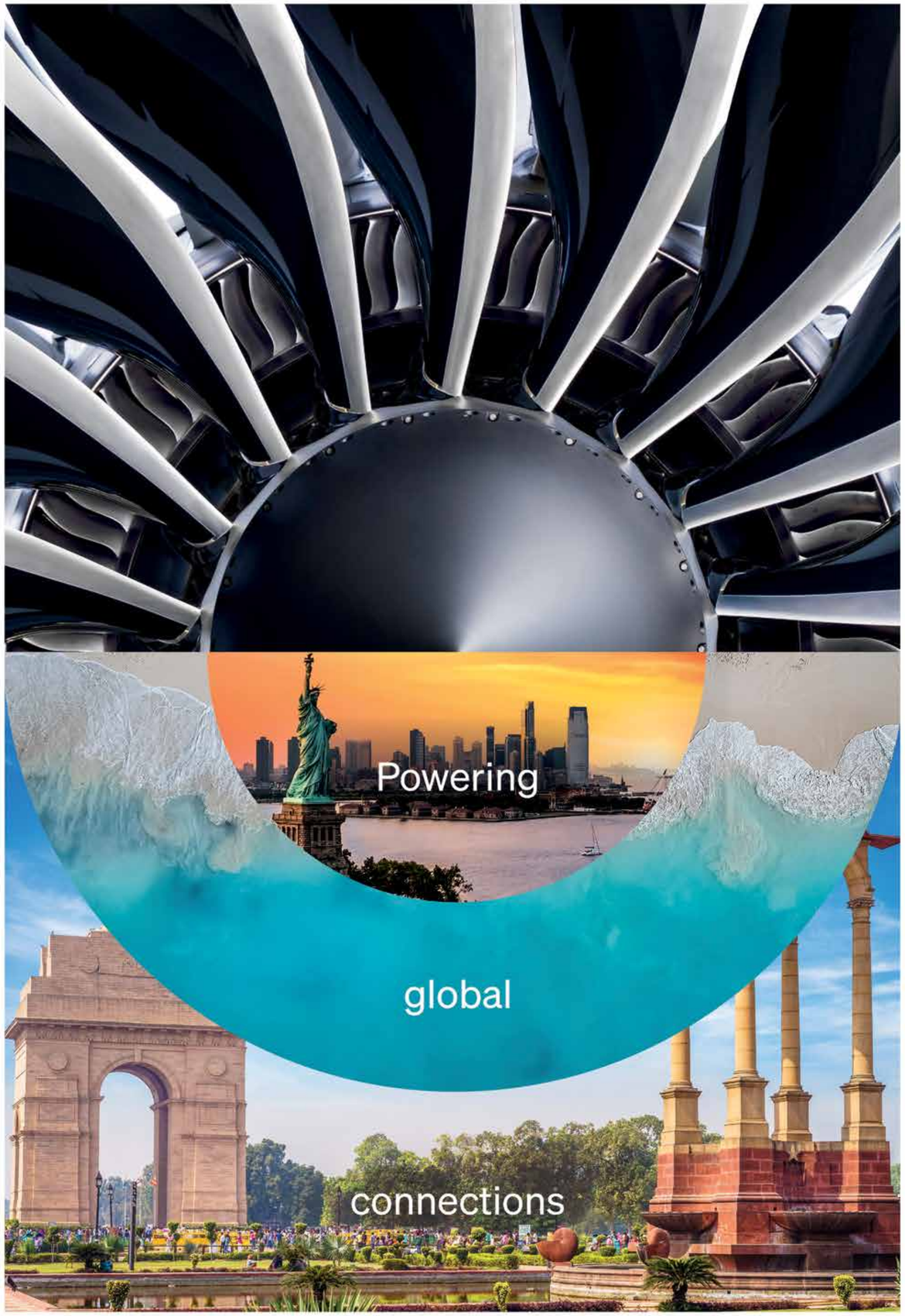

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