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28TH - 31ST January 2026
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INSIDE

LEAD STORY

Wings India 2026 opens with call for Collective Lift in Aviation Growth

The convergence of global and domestic stakeholders reflect the sector's collective commitment to innovation, growth, and excellence

SWAATI KETKAR

Union Civil Aviation Minister Rammohan Naidu Kinjarapu inaugurated Wings India 2026 at Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad, describing the biennial event as one of Asia's most significant aviation summits and a powerful platform for shaping the future of Indian aviation.

Drawing an analogy from flight, the Minister said, "No aircraft can soar in isolation. It needs the right pressure, atmosphere and steady lift, just like Wings India, which creates a collective lift where industry, innovators and government come together. We want to fly together, not just fly high." His remarks underlined the importance of collaboration in building a strong, resilient aviation ecosystem.

Highlighting India's demographic advantage, he pointed to the country's rapidly expanding middle class of nearly 500 million people, a population equal to the combined size of the United States and Russia. This, he said, represents the scale and depth of opportunity for aviation growth across passenger travel, manufacturing, and services.

The Minister emphasised that over the next decade, the government's focus will be on strengthening India's manufacturing ecosystem, expanding MRO capabilities, and developing indigenous aircraft, with a strong emphasis on the 'Make in India' vision. Hosted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation with the support of the Telangana government, Wings India 2026 aims to showcase India's rising role in civil aviation manufacturing and its growing demand across the sector. ●

Photo: Swaati Ketkar

CIVIL AVIATION MINISTER RAMMOHAN NAIDU KINJARAPU AT THE OFFICIAL INAUGURATION OF WINGS INDIA 2026

SPECIAL FEATURE

3 New Airlines, One Tough Sky

India's approval of three new airlines reflects long-term policy intent to reduce market concentration, but success will depend on disciplined strategies, niche focus and financial resilience in one of the world's most competitive, high-risk aviation markets

SWAATI KETKAR

India's aviation regulator has cleared three new domestic airlines, Shankh Air, Alhind Air, and FlyExpress, marking the first such approvals in years. On paper, this signals confidence, confidence in demand, confidence in policy reform, and confidence in India's long-term aviation growth story. But behind the optimism lies a far more complex reality.

The approvals come at a time when India's airline market is under visible strain. A recent operational breakdown at IndiGo, led to thousands of flight cancellations due to crew shortages and scheduling failures. It exposed how dependent India's aviation system has become on a few dominant players, and how vulnerable the ecosystem is when one falters.

So, was this decision driven by strategic foresight or by urgency following the IndiGo crisis? And more importantly, what chance do these three new airlines really have in one of the world's most competitive aviation markets? Let us deep dive beyond headlines to examine the policy intent, market structure, operational realities, and survival prospects of India's newest airline hopefuls.

IS IT A POLICY PUSH OR QUICK FIX?

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) have issued No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to Shankh Air, Alhind Air, and FlyExpress, allowing them to proceed to the next regulatory stage, the Air Operator Certificate (AOC) before they can launch commercial flights.

Officially, this is part of India's broader push to expand domestic capacity, improve regional connectivity, reduce over-dependence on few large carriers and strengthen competition in underserved routes. This aligns with the government's long-standing goals under UDAN and the National Civil Aviation Policy, which envision a more geographically balanced, accessible air transport system.

Story continued on page 2...

3 New Airlines... *continued from page 1*

However, aviation is not a sector where approvals translate into impact overnight. From NOC to first flight, the process typically takes 12 to 24 months, involving fleet induction, crew hiring, safety audits, route approvals, and financial clearances.

So, while the timing may appear reactive, following IndiGo's operational crisis the approvals themselves reflect long-term policy thinking and not a short-term crisis response.

TWO GIANTS CONTROL THE MARKET

India today is effectively a duopoly with IndiGo controlling over 60 per cent of domestic market share and Air India Group, post-merger with Vistara and AIX Connect, holding another 25 per cent+. Together, they command nearly 90 per cent of the market, leaving all other carriers, SpiceJet, Akasa Air, Alliance Air, IndiaOne Air, Fly91 to fight over the remaining single-digit shares.

Even after years in the market SpiceJet continues to operate under financial stress and fleet constraints. Akasa Air, despite strong backing and a promising start, has grown cautiously due to aircraft supply delays and cost pressures while regional carriers like IndiaOne Air and Fly91 are expanding, but carefully and selectively. This is not a market that rewards aggressive growth without deep capital, strong cost discipline, and flawless execution. Against this backdrop, the entry of three new airlines is not just ambitious but more of high-risk.

So, who are the newbies planning to enter Indian skies? Shankh Air is expected to focus on full-service or hybrid operations, potentially targeting business and premium leisure routes. Alhind Air, backed by the Alhind Group, which already operates charter and cargo services, is likely to leverage its existing aviation infrastructure and experience, possibly with a regional or medium-haul focus and FlyExpress is being positioned as a low-cost or regional carrier, potentially serving underserved routes and secondary airports.

Primary focus of the above players will be on regional connectivity, employment generation, affordable travel plans and overall strengthening India's aviation ecosystem. These are commendable goals and they align well with national policy objectives. But good intentions alone do not guarantee commercial viability.

Photos: Alhind Air, FlyExpress, Shankh Air

THE PRESENCE OF MORE PLAYERS LIKE ALHIND AIR, FLYEXPRESS AND SHANKH AIR WILL HELP ENHANCE THE OVERALL STABILITY OF THE MARKET

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

- **Wafer-Thin Margins:** Indian airlines operate on some of the thinnest margins globally, often between 1–3 per cent, and sometimes negative. High costs come from aviation turbine fuel (ATF), which remains heavily taxed by states, aircraft leasing and maintenance, largely dollar-denominated, airport charges, navigation fees and currency fluctuations. Even large carriers struggle to remain profitable consistently. For new entrants, the margin for error is almost non-existent.
- **Aircraft Supply-chain Woes:** Globally, aircraft delivery delays have almost become the norm due to engine issues at major OEMs, supply chain bottlenecks and production slowdown. IndiGo and Air India, with their massive order books are already competing for limited delivery slots. As against this, smaller, new airlines will find it harder to secure timely aircraft at competitive lease rates. Delayed aircraft deliveries mean delayed revenue but fixed costs continue.
- **Lack of Skilled Labour:** India is facing an acute shortage of pilots, AMEs, cabin crew and flight dispatchers. This shortage is not just about numbers combined with experience. New airlines will need to attract trained professionals away from established carriers, often at higher cost. And without experienced operational leadership, early-stage airlines are more vulnerable to safety, compliance, and reliability risks.
- **Airport Congestion and Slot Constraints:** Metro airports like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad are already operating near or at peak capacity during key hours. New airlines will obviously struggle for prime slots, parking bays and maintenance hangar space. This will in turn limit their ability to build profitable schedules, especially on high-demand trunk routes. Regional and secondary airports offer opportunities, but yield levels there are lower, and passenger volumes are less predictable.
- **Brand Trust:** Passengers in India are known to prioritise increasingly on reliability, network depth, frequent flyer benefits and brand familiarity. IndiGo and Air India dominate not just routes, but also distribution channels, corporate contracts, global alliances, and loyalty ecosystems. New airlines will have to invest heavily in marketing, partnerships, and customer trust, all before turning profitable.

SO WHY ALLOW NEW AIRLINES AT ALL?

Because consolidation is not resilience. The IndiGo operational crisis proved a crucial point. When one dominant carrier stumbles, the entire system feels the shock. With limited alternative capacity, disruptions cascade across the network. From a policy standpoint, the government needs more operators, competition, redundancy with plenty of choice for travellers.

Hence even if not all new entrants survive, the presence of more players will, to some extend improve pricing discipline along with encouraging service innovation, strengthening route diversification and will also help to enhance the overall stability of the market. In aviation policy, not every airline needs to succeed for the ecosystem to benefit.

WHAT MUST THESE AIRLINES DO DIFFERENTLY?

Survival will not come from scale alone, it will come from strategy, focus, and discipline. India's aviation history is littered with airlines that expanded too fast and collapsed just as quickly. Learning from their mistakes, the new airlines must launch with limited fleet, focus on newer, unexplored routes and build on operational reliability before network size. Thus, for them "Growth must follow profitability, not precede it" must be their mantra.

The newbies should understand that they cannot out-run IndiGo or Air India any time soon. Instead, they can focus on point-to-point connectivity targeting very specific and niche customer segments like business, pilgrimage, tourism, cargo, charter, or regional mobility and offer differentiated service or scheduling advantages. A strong niche just might protect them from price wars and margin erosion.

The new airlines can also play around short-term discounts, free services and heavy promotions to build customer loyalty and build traffic, but this will also lead to major cash burn. The airlines will have to lock in favourable leasing rates, use fuel-efficient aircraft, optimise crew productivity and very tightly control the overheads. Sustainable cost discipline is more valuable than rapid market share.

India's aviation regulator is strengthening safety oversight, compliance requirements, and operational audits. New airlines will need to build strong safety cultures from day one, invest in training, systems, and processes and avoid shortcuts in maintenance, scheduling, or crew rest. Operational reliability will build customer trust faster than marketing ever can.

The airlines need to partner smartly with airports, MROs, ground handlers and lessors and technology providers to cut costs, improve reliability, and speed up market entry.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY FAIL?

Failure is not a policy failure, it is a market reality. Globally, aviation sees a high rate of airline exits, mergers, and restructurings. What matters is not whether all three survive, if India will gain additional capacity in the medium term, addition of more viable routes, regional connectivity overtime leading to market becoming less fragile.

All-in-all the approval of Shankh Air, Alhind Air, and FlyExpress is not a guarantee of success but an invitation to prove relevance. For policymakers, this is a test of whether India can balance market freedom with regulatory discipline, encourage competition without destabilising incumbents and support growth without encouraging reckless expansion.

For the airlines, this is a test of strategic clarity, financial resilience, operational discipline and leadership maturity. And for the market, it is a reminder that aviation is not just about aircraft and routes, it is about systems, structures, and sustainability.

HOPE WITH CAUTION, OPTIMISM WITH DISCIPLINE

India's aviation story is one of remarkable growth, ambition, and resilience. Passenger traffic continues to rise. Airport infrastructure is expanding. Fleet orders are among the world's largest. The demand is real and long-term. But aviation is also unforgiving.

The entry of three new airlines should be welcomed, not as saviours of the system, but as participants in a complex, high-stakes ecosystem. If they grow wisely, operate responsibly, and choose strategy over speed, they can carve meaningful roles in India's skies. If they chase scale without sustainability, they will become another chapter in aviation history's long list of well-intentioned but short-lived ventures.

Either way, their arrival marks a turning point, one that will test not just these airlines, but India's entire aviation framework. ●

INDIA DEEPENS GLOBAL AVIATION PARTNERSHIPS AT WINGS INDIA 2026

Photos: MoCA_GoI / X

ON THE SIDELINES OF WINGS INDIA 2026, MINISTER FOR CIVIL AVIATION, RAMMOHAN NAIDU, HELD BILATERAL MEETINGS WITH MINISTERIAL DELEGATIONS FROM THE UAE, SAUDI ARABIA, RUSSIA, AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, STRENGTHENING INDIA'S INTERNATIONAL AVIATION ENGAGEMENT. THE PARTICIPATION OF 20 COUNTRIES AT INDIA'S FLAGSHIP CIVIL AVIATION EVENT REFLECTS STRONG GLOBAL CONFIDENCE IN INDIAN AVIATION. INDIA IS RAPIDLY EVOLVING FROM BEING A LARGE AVIATION MARKET INTO AN INTEGRATED AND INFLUENTIAL AVIATION ECOSYSTEM, ALIGNED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT VISION OF BUILDING SELF-RELIANCE ACROSS CRITICAL SECTORS.

How is Boeing Partnering India's Aviation Growth

SALIL GUPTE, PRESIDENT, BOEING INDIA & SOUTH ASIA VICE PRESIDENT, BOEING GLOBAL

India is set to remain the world's fastest-growing aviation market, and Boeing sees this as a defining opportunity. "Over the next two decades, India is poised to remain the world's fastest-growing aviation market, with passenger traffic projected to rise by an average of seven per cent annually through 2044," says Salil Gupte, President, Boeing India and South Asia. This growth will require nearly 3,300 new aircraft, with single-aisle airplanes like the 737 MAX connecting Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, and widebodies such as the 787 Dreamliner and 777X positioning India as a global long-haul hub.

For Boeing, India is far more than a market. "Our partnership has evolved from a supplier-customer relationship into a deep industrial integration," Gupte explains. Boeing is expanding local manufacturing through over 325 suppliers, including Tata Boeing Aerospace Limited (TBAL) in Hyderabad, which now produces Apache fuselages and 737 vertical fins for global deliveries. India also contributes to Boeing's engineering innovation, with the Boeing India Engineering & Technology Center in Bengaluru driving digital analytics and sustainable aviation solutions.

Talent development remains central to Boeing's strategy. "We are supporting this growth through a $195 billion services market opportunity and a $100 million investment in pilot training and infrastructure to address the regional need for 1,41,000 new aviation professionals," says Gupte. Initiatives like the Sukanya Program for women in STEM and the Kaushal program for aircraft maintenance exemplify this commitment.

With manufacturing, innovation, and workforce development aligned, Boeing is ensuring India is not only ready to meet soaring demand but also positioned as a global aerospace leader for decades to come. ●

Wings India 2026 MRO Roundtable Pushes for Scale, Standards and Self-reliance

The MRO roundtable at Wings India 2026 placed a sharp focus on strengthening India's maintenance, repair and overhaul ecosystem under the theme "Local Capability for Global Credibility: Elevating Indian MRO through Scale, Standards and Solutions." As part of Asia's largest civil aviation event, the session brought together global leaders, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to chart a roadmap for the sector's next phase of growth.

Discussions centred on scaling up domestic MRO capabilities to global standards, reducing dependence on overseas facilities, and integrating Indian firms into international supply chains. With India's MRO market projected to grow from $1.7 billion in 2021 to $4 billion by 2031 at a CAGR of nearly nine per cent, panellists stressed the urgency of building world-class infrastructure, including mega MRO facilities such as the upcoming hubs in Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

The roundtable also highlighted the need to adopt advanced technologies to support next-generation aircraft such as the Airbus A350 and Boeing 787, while expanding military and defence MRO capabilities. Strategic partnerships with global players, including Safran's engine MRO facility in Hyderabad, were cited as key enablers in strengthening India's global credibility. Regulatory reforms were another major focus, with speakers welcoming the government's move to unify GST slabs for MRO components and services, a long-standing industry demand aimed at improving cost competitiveness. However, capacity constraints remain a concern. S.K. Dash, Head of Engineering at Air India, pointed out that India currently lacks sufficient widebody hangars with global certification, a gap that must be addressed urgently to support the country's growing widebody fleet and reduce maintenance abroad.

Overall, the discussions reinforced the role of MRO as a cornerstone of India's Atmanirbhar aviation vision, with stakeholders calling for coordinated action across policy, infrastructure, technology, and skills development to position India as a global MRO hub. ●

Ministerial Plenary at Wings India 2026 Highlights Growing Global Aviation Cooperation

The Ministerial Plenary at Wings India 2026, held at Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad, reaffirmed the growing strength of international collaboration in civil aviation, with ministers and senior officials from across the world engaging in high-level discussions on fleet expansion, manufacturing, sustainability, and long-term partnership with India.

The session underscored India's rising stature as a key player in the global aviation ecosystem, with ministers highlighting new partnerships aimed at fleet growth and the establishment of aircraft assembly lines. These initiatives reflect increasing confidence in India's aviation market, industrial capabilities, and long-term policy direction.

Deliberations focused on addressing shared challenges, particularly in the areas of aviation security and supply chain resilience, while also identifying opportunities to unlock sustainable growth. Panellists emphasised the importance of deeper cooperation across aviation, tourism, trade, and broader economic development, positioning India as a preferred partner for future global aviation collaboration.

The plenary brought together ministers from the Dominican Republic, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Cambodia, Rajasthan, and Sikkim, along with senior officials from Singapore, Mongolia, Mozambique, Oman, Qatar, Maldives, the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and Germany. Their collective participation highlighted the truly global character of Wings India 2026 and the shared commitment to advancing safe, secure, and sustainable air transport.

The discussions reflected a common vision of strengthening international partnerships, enhancing connectivity, and building resilient aviation ecosystems that support economic growth and development. As India continues to evolve from a large aviation market into an integrated global aviation hub, the Ministerial Plenary served as a strong signal of the country's expanding influence and leadership in shaping the future of civil aviation. ●

EMBRAER E195-E2 OF HUNNU AIR, MONGOLIA IS THE CENTRE OF ATTRACTION AT THE SHOW

Photos: Sarthak Baranwal / SP Guide Pubns

AIRCRAFT EXTERIOR: HUNNU AIR'S EMBRAER E195-E2 ON THE RAMP, REFLECTING EMBRAER'S COMMITMENT TO COMBINING ADVANCED ENGINEERING WITH TAILORED CABIN SOLUTIONS THAT SUPPORT REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY AND AIRLINE BRANDING

CABIN INTERIOR: EMBRAER'S E195-E2 CABIN FOR HUNNU AIR SHOWCASES A SLEEK, CUSTOMISED INTERIOR WITH PREMIUM SEATING, AMBIENT LIGHTING, AND A SPACIOUS SINGLEAISLE LAYOUT DESIGNED TO ENHANCE PASSENGER COMFORT AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

CABIN VIEW FROM REAR: THE EMBRAER E195-E2'S CUSTOMISED INTERIOR FOR HUNNU AIR FEATURES MODERN SEAT DESIGN, OPTIMISED OVERHEAD BINS, AND MOOD LIGHTING, DELIVERING A REFINED PASSENGER EXPERIENCE ACROSS REGIONAL AND MEDIUM-HAUL ROUTES

Bracing for Take-off, Short on Captains

India's aviation expansion faces a critical bottleneck as rapid fleet growth outpaces the supply of experienced captains, exposing limits in training capacity and highlighting the need for better retention and long-term pilot development

MANISH KUMAR JHA

India's civil aviation sector is entering a phase of unprecedented expansion. Domestic airlines are preparing for one of the largest aircraft induction cycles anywhere in the world, driven by surging passenger demand, favourable demographics and aggressive fleet orders. Yet beneath this growth story lies a structural constraint that could become a serious bottleneck, a widening gap between the demand for pilots and the capacity of the training ecosystem to supply them—most acutely at the command, or captain, level.

According to CAPA, Indian carriers will require around 10,900 additional pilots by 2030, translating into roughly 1,600 new pilots every year. On paper, this may appear achievable for a country with a vast talent pool. In reality, the challenge is far more complex. Becoming a commercial airline captain is not a matter of quick certification. It typically requires between 2,500 and 6,000 flying hours, which in turn demands six to ten years of continuous flying experience. This long gestation period has created a structural lag, one that is now colliding with ballooning fleet sizes and aggressive route expansion.

Photo: Airbus

AIRBUS AND AIR INDIA INAUGURATE ADVANCED PILOT TRAINING CENTRE IN A BOOST TO 'SKILL INDIA' INITIATIVE

THE BIG DEMAND

The demand for skilled pilots is immense, explains Shelka Gupta of Redbird Aviation on the evolving landscape of pilot training in India. She says that within five years, Red Bird acquired a robust fleet of more than 50 training aircraft, which are the latest in the world of aviation. She further elaborates that Redbird's presence across five training bases within the geographic location of India, along with one international base in Sri Lanka, enables greater operational flexibility, improved aircraft utilisation, and continuity of student flying throughout the year.

India is at the threshold of such an opportunity, as aviation policy is undergoing continuing reform. As Gupta also explained, the standard that is being followed is the best in the world. She explained that flying abroad is often more complex than commonly perceived, with challenges related to unfamiliar operating environments, varying training standards, airspace differences, and administrative procedures. She further adds, "These factors can sometimes affect training continuity and create uncertainty around the timely completion of the mandatory 200 flying hours."

In contrast, she noted that training in India offers better regulatory alignment, structured supervision, and clearer visibility on training progress, which helps students remain compliant with DGCA requirements throughout their course.

"The conversion challenges faced by students returning from overseas training include documentation gaps, examination requirements, aircraft-type variations, and extended approval timelines. Such issues, she added, often make foreign licence conversion a lengthy, expensive, and demanding process," Gupta puts forth the India-advantage.

The imbalance is particularly stark at the command level. While first officers can be inducted relatively faster through flight schools and simulator-based training, captains cannot be produced on demand. They must accumulate real-world experience across aircraft types, weather conditions and operational environments. As airlines induct hundreds of new aircraft over a short span, the availability of suitably experienced Commanders risks falling well short of requirements. The result could be higher costs, operational constraints, and increased dependence on expatriate pilots — an option that is neither cheap nor sustainable in the long run.

Recognising this looming risk, airlines and aviation groups have begun investing heavily in training infrastructure. Air India, in partnership with Airbus, inaugurated a pilot training centre in Gurugram in September 2025, with the stated aim of training around 5,000 pilots over the next decade. Separately, the Tata Group airline is setting up what it describes as South Asia's largest flight training academy in Amravati, backed by an investment of about ₹200 crore. With a planned capacity of 180 pilots a year and a fleet of 34 trainer aircraft, the facility signals a serious attempt to build domestic training capability at scale.

These initiatives are welcome, but they also highlight the limits of infrastructure-led solutions. Training academies can expand the pipeline of entry-level pilots, but they do not solve the immediate shortage of captains. Nor can they compress the time needed to gain experience without compromising safety. Aviation, by its very nature, demands conservatism in progression, and any attempt to fast-track command upgrades carries risks that the industry—and regulators—cannot afford.

What is needed, therefore, is a more holistic approach. Airlines must improve retention, particularly of mid-career pilots who are most likely to leave for better-paying overseas opportunities. Structured career progression, competitive compensation and predictable rosters will matter as much as new simulators. Regulators, meanwhile, need to ensure that licensing processes are efficient without diluting standards, and that India's training ecosystem aligns with global best practices so that experience gained domestically is fully valued.

The current pilot shortage is not merely a cyclical mismatch, it is the predictable outcome of long training timelines meeting sudden, large-scale growth. India's aviation boom remains real and robust, but its sustainability will depend on whether the sector can think beyond aircraft orders and airport terminals. Without enough captains in the cockpit, the country's ambitious expansion plans may find themselves grounded—not by lack of demand, but by the slow, unforgiving arithmetic of experience.

In a nutshell, India's growing aviation market must address the importance of strengthening domestic training infrastructure and streamlining regulatory processes to support India's rapidly growing demand for skilled commercial pilots. ●

MAKE-IN-INDIA TRAINER AIRCRAFT

Photo: Sakthi Aircraft

As India's pilot training ecosystem scales up, access to modern trainer aircraft is emerging as a critical constraint. Sakthi Aircraft Industry, a joint venture between the Sakthi Group and Diamond Aircraft, is setting up domestic production of advanced trainers such as the DA40 NG. By enabling local manufacture, the initiative aims to improve aircraft availability for flying schools and support the expansion of India's entry-level pilot pipeline. ●

HAL and Indocopters Partner to Strengthen Dhruv-NG Maintenance and Training Ecosystem

SP'S SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indocopters Pvt Ltd to develop a comprehensive maintenance, training and technical support framework for the Dhruv-NG helicopter fleet in the civil aviation sector.

Indocopters, an Indian-registered company approved by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Ministry of Civil Aviation, provides helicopter maintenance services across the country. The company currently supports Airbus and Leonardo helicopter platforms from its main maintenance base in Greater Noida (NCR) and through 17 sub-bases nationwide.

The objective of the MoU is to establish structured cooperation between the two organisations in several key areas. This includes training Indocopters technicians on the Dhruv-NG platform, enabling the company to offer maintenance, repair and after-sales technical support services to operators, and building a sustainable maintenance support ecosystem for the Dhruv-NG fleet in India and abroad.

Under the agreement, HAL and Indocopters will jointly develop structured training and skill development programmes for technicians from both organisations. These programmes will include theoretical and practical training modules, on-the-job training at certified facilities, familiarisation with maintenance manuals and technical publications, tooling and ground support equipment, and exposure to quality, safety and regulatory compliance practices applicable to civil helicopter operations.

Indocopters will nominate suitable technicians for training, ensuring that all personnel meet eligibility criteria, regulatory requirements and aptitude standards prescribed by HAL and aviation authorities. Upon successful completion of training and subject to regulatory approvals, Indocopters will be authorised to provide maintenance and after-sales support services to operators and buyers of Dhruv-NG helicopters, either independently or under contractual arrangements with HAL. The partnership also emphasises the adoption of best practices in civil helicopter maintenance, strengthening safety, reliability and operational readiness of the Dhruv-NG fleet.

This collaboration represents a significant step toward building a robust domestic helicopter MRO ecosystem, reducing reliance on overseas support, and enhancing customer confidence in India's indigenous helicopter platforms. By combining HAL's manufacturing expertise with Indocopters' established maintenance network, the MoU is expected to improve fleet availability, lower lifecycle costs, and support the long-term growth of civil helicopter operations in India and overseas. ●

Thales Reaffirms Commitment to India's Aviation Growth

ANKUR KANAGLEKAR, VICE-PRESIDENT - INDIA, THALES

Thales has reaffirmed its long-term commitment to India's aviation ecosystem as the Official Avionics Partner for Wings India 2026, strengthening its role as a trusted technology partner to airlines, airports, and aviation authorities across the country.

"Thales is proud to be the official Avionics Partner for Wings India 2026, reaffirming our long-term commitment to advancing India's aerospace ambitions," said Ankur Kanaglekar, Vice-President, India, Thales. The company continues to support leading carriers such as Air India and IndiGo, while working closely with airport operators and regulators to drive innovation, safety, and operational reliability.

Thales' focus spans the entire passenger journey, from the ground to the air. The company is enabling seamless airport experiences through solutions such as DigiYatra 'Fly to Gate' biometrics and advanced Airport Operation Control Centres, while delivering next-generation inflight entertainment and avionics systems that enhance efficiency and safety for operators. Looking ahead, Thales is also bringing advanced capabilities in drones and counter-drone systems, Unmanned Traffic Management (UTM), and Air Traffic Management (ATM), partnering closely with Indian stakeholders to help build a secure and future-ready airspace.

Localisation remains central to Thales' India strategy. The company continues to innovate at its engineering competence centres in Bengaluru and Noida, is scaling its MRO facility in Gurugram, and is strengthening its supply chain partnerships across the country. These efforts are aligned with India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision and aimed at nurturing a robust, self-reliant aviation ecosystem. Through sustained investment in technology, talent, and partnerships, Thales is positioning itself as a key enabler of India's aviation transformation, supporting the country's journey toward becoming a global aviation hub. ●

ATR and Fly91 Sign New Eight-Year Global Maintenance Agreement

ATR and Fly91 have signed an eight-year Global Maintenance Agreement (GMA), reinforcing the strong collaboration established since the airline's launch in 2024. Fly91 currently operates four ATR 72-600s, with two more arriving in early 2026, and the extended agreement is designed to support this next phase of growth as the airline expands its fleet.

Photo: ATR

(L-R) JEAN-PIERRE CLERCIN, HEAD OF THE REGION - APAC, ATR AND HARSHA RAGHAVAN, CHAIRMAN, FLY91 ALONG WITH THE TEAM FROM ATR AND FLY91 AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY OF THE MOU

Fly91 has been a GMA customer since May 2024, benefitting from a comprehensive suite of support services, including Lease Stock, Standard Exchange and Repair of Line Replaceable Units (LRUs), as well as propeller availability and maintenance services. After almost two years of operations, and with aircraft utilisation exceeding 2,500 flight hours per year, the airline has decided to update the scope of its agreement to secure long-term cost visibility and operational performance as its fleet expands.

Building on Fly91's confidence in ATR's support, this renewed partnership also reflects the wider momentum of regional aviation in India. As the country continues strengthening air links between smaller cities, turboprops are increasingly recognised as the most efficient way to open new routes and extend connectivity. In this fast-evolving landscape, long-term, cost-predictable maintenance solutions like the ATR GMA will play an essential role in supporting operators such as Fly91 as they help shape the next chapter of India's regional mobility. ●

SADSPL and OMNIPOL Group Announce L 410 NG Partnership

Sakthi Aviation and Defence Systems Pvt Ltd (SADSPL) and OMNIPOL Group announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bring the world-renowned L 410 NG 19-seater aircraft to India. The modern, next-generation 19-seater turboprop from the Czech manufacturer Aircraft Industries (member of OMNIPOL Group) is expected to significantly strengthen India's regional connectivity ambitions. As per the collaboration, OMNIPOL Group and Sakthi are assessing the modalities to set up a final assembly line in India, thereby enabling Transfer of Technology (ToT) and boosting the local aviation ecosystem.

The MoU was formalised by Dr M. Manickam, Chairman, SADSPL and Artem Movsesyan, Chairman of the Board of Directors & CEO of OMNIPOL Group, and was formally announced in the presence of Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu, Minister of Civil Aviation, during the inaugural session of Wings India 2026. This strategic association aims to bolster the government's UDAN scheme by offering airlines an efficient and cost-effective platform for point-to-point regional operations.

The L 410 NG's ability to operate from short and unprepared runways makes it ideally suited for connecting remote areas and unlocking new routes across the country. With a spacious cabin, enhanced payload capacity, long range, and modern avionics, the L 410 NG enables safe, efficient and uninterrupted regional operations—even in remote and underserved areas. By offering airlines an efficient, cost-effective aircraft tailored for India's geography, this partnership will help bring more people, communities, and opportunities into the national aviation network. ●

TimeTooth Makes History with India's First DGCA-certified Aircraft Seating Systems

TimeTooth's announcements at Wings India 2026 reflect the growing maturity of India's aerospace manufacturing ecosystem, particularly in the interiors and systems segment

SWAATI KETKAR

TimeTooth Technologies Pvt Ltd achieved a major milestone for India's aircraft interiors and manufacturing ecosystem by receiving the country's first Indian Technical Standard Order (ITSO) approval for seating systems from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The announcement was made at Wings India 2026.

The ITSO approval positions TimeTooth as a certified domestic manufacturer of aviation seating systems, marking a significant step forward for India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision and strengthening the country's capabilities in aircraft interiors design, certification, and production.

Alongside the ITSO approval, TimeTooth signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the development and supply of pilot and co-pilot seating systems. The partnership is aimed at supporting indigenous aircraft programmes and defence aviation platforms, reinforcing India's self-reliance in critical aerospace components.

The collaboration brings together HAL's extensive aircraft manufacturing and integration expertise with TimeTooth's advanced seating design, certification, and manufacturing capabilities, enabling the development of safety-compliant, ergonomically optimised seating solutions for military and civil aviation applications.

Photo: TimeTooth

TIMETOOTH TECHNOLOGIES RECEIVING THE DGCA ITSO CERTIFICATION

TimeTooth also announced a separate MoU with Fly91, India's regional airline, focused on seating systems for the carrier's fleet. The agreement supports the expansion of regional connectivity under the Government of India's UDAN scheme and reflects growing confidence among Indian airlines in domestically certified aviation products.

This partnership aligns with the broader objective of strengthening India's regional aviation ecosystem while reducing dependence on imported aircraft interior components.

The ITSO approval represents a landmark achievement not only for TimeTooth but also for the Indian aircraft interiors sector. Until now, aviation seating systems used by Indian airlines and OEMs were predominantly sourced from international suppliers. With DGCA ITSO certification now in place, Indian manufacturers are positioned to play a larger role in the global supply chain for aircraft interiors.

Commenting on the achievement, TimeTooth Technologies described the development as "a defining moment for Indian aviation manufacturing," highlighting the importance of regulatory certification in unlocking both domestic and international market opportunities.

TimeTooth's announcements at Wings India 2026 reflect the growing maturity of India's aerospace manufacturing ecosystem, particularly in the interiors and systems segment. The company's progress underscores the impact of regulatory reforms, industry collaboration, and policy support under initiatives such as Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat.

With DGCA ITSO certification, strategic partnerships with HAL and Fly91, and increasing recognition across the industry, TimeTooth Technologies is positioned to contribute meaningfully to India's aviation manufacturing and MRO supply chain, supporting both civil and defence aviation growth. ●

Airbus Projects India's Commercial Fleet to Triple to 2,250 Aircraft by 2035

Airbus forecasts passenger traffic in India to grow at 8.9 per cent annually through 2035, the fastest rate among major global economies and well above the long-term global average

SWAATI KETKAR

India's commercial aircraft fleet is set to triple to 2,250 aircraft over the next decade as the country moves towards becoming the world's third-largest civil aviation market by 2035, according to Airbus. Addressing the media on the sidelines of Wings India 2026, Jürgen Westermeier, President and Managing Director, Airbus India and South Asia, said the expansion will be driven by strong domestic market growth and Indian airlines' increasing ambitions to expand their international networks.

"India is witnessing a structural shift in aviation demand. The combination of resilient economic growth, rising middle-class consumption and expanding airline networks is driving sustained fleet expansion," Westermeier said.

Photo: Swaati Ketkar

JÜRGEN WESTERMEIER, PRESIDENT & MANAGING DIRECTOR, AIRBUS INDIA & SOUTH ASIA

PASSENGER TRAFFIC GROWTH OUTPACES GLOBAL AVERAGES

Airbus forecasts passenger traffic in India to grow at 8.9 per cent annually through 2035, the fastest rate among major global economies and well above the long-term global average. This growth will be underpinned by a unique blend of the fastest economic growth among G20 nations, increased government investment in aviation infrastructure, and a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour, with per capita air travel expected to rise from 0.13 to 0.29 over the next decade. As a result, the demand for new aircraft in India is projected to remain among the strongest globally, positioning the country as a key battleground for global aircraft manufacturers.

AIRBUS TO DELIVER OVER 1,250 AIRCRAFT TO INDIAN AIRLINES

Of the projected 2,250 aircraft required over the next decade, Airbus expects to deliver more than 1,250 aircraft to Indian carriers. "As many as 120 aircraft will be inducted into India every year, and this could peak at up to 150 aircraft annually during periods of maximum delivery," Westermeier said, underscoring the scale and pace of fleet induction. Airbus currently holds a market share of approximately 72 per cent in India's civil aviation market.

WORKFORCE DEMAND SET TO SURGE

The rapid expansion of India's airline fleet will require a parallel increase in aviation manpower. Airbus projects that the number of pilots in India will rise to 35,000 by 2035, up from approximately 12,000 today, while the technical workforce — including maintenance engineers and technicians, will need to grow to 34,000, tripling from the current base of around 11,000.

"To keep this scaled-up fleet airborne, workforce development must accelerate at the same pace as fleet growth," Westermeier said. "The next chapter of Indian aviation must ensure that operating models evolve alongside fleet and network expansion."

INDIA'S GROWING ROLE IN AIRBUS' GLOBAL ENGINEERING AND SUPPLY CHAIN

Beyond fleet growth, Airbus sees India playing an increasingly strategic role in its global engineering, design, and manufacturing ecosystem. The company's annual procurement from India currently stands at $1.5 billion and is expected to rise to $2 billion before 2030. Airbus is also planning to deepen its integration into the Indian supply chain by sourcing raw materials such as aluminium, steel, and titanium locally, a move that could significantly multiply the value of procurement from the country.

"We are looking at the next level of engagement with India by integrating the country further into the supply chain and moving up the value chain," Westermeier said. "It makes sense to machine raw materials into components here rather than exporting them in raw form. Titanium, for instance, is used in landing gears, while aluminium is the backbone of fuselage structures."

NEW AIRBUS CAMPUS IN BENGALURU TO STRENGTHEN ENGINEERING CAPABILITIES

As part of its long-term investment in India, Airbus will establish a new 5,000-seater campus in Bengaluru, housing an engineering centre, a digital centre, and an innovation centre. The facility will play a key role in supporting the development of next-generation single-aisle aircraft, which are expected to enter service in the second half of the next decade.

"India has an exceptional talent pool," Westermeier said. "We see our engineering teams here playing a critical role in designing the next generation of single-aisle aircraft." He added that India-based engineering centres are expected to contribute to future airframe redesigns associated with next-generation propulsion technologies, including larger-diameter open-fan engine architectures that will require significant changes in wing positioning and aircraft configuration.

C-295 AND HELICOPTER ASSEMBLY PROGRAMMES

Airbus also highlighted its expanding manufacturing footprint in India, particularly in defence and rotary-wing segments. The company will deliver the first Made-in-India Airbus C-295, a twin-engine medium tactical transport aircraft, in the third quarter of 2026. "We will be building an entire aircraft in India," Westermeier said. "We are establishing final assembly lines for the Airbus H125 helicopters, which will be launched next. A major milestone will be the delivery of the first Indian-origin C-295 from India in Q3 2026, made in India for India and for the world."

INDIA-EU FTA SEEN AS MAJOR CATALYST FOR AVIATION GROWTH

Westermeier, who also serves as President of the Federation of European Business in India, sees the proposed India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as a significant catalyst for investment and travel growth. "The deal between two large democracies with a combined market size of $24 trillion will be a game-changer in terms of investments," he said. "The direct impact will be a significant increase in travel between India and Europe."

GLOBAL AVIATION CENTRE SHIFTING EASTWARD

Summing up Airbus' outlook, Westermeier said the centre of gravity of global aviation is shifting toward the East, with India playing a central role in that transformation.

"India's fleet expansion will not only enhance domestic mobility but will also position the country as a dominant international transit hub. The next phase of growth must therefore ensure that operational models, infrastructure, and workforce readiness evolve at the same pace as fleet and network expansion," he said. ●

India's Business and General Aviation Sector Poised for Strong Growth

SP'S SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

India's business and general aviation sector is entering a period of sharp expansion, driven by rising demand across the travel spectrum and a growing role in regional connectivity. However, industry experts caution that sustained long-term growth will depend on how effectively infrastructure and skill gaps are addressed.

Speaking at a panel discussion on business aviation and small aircraft at Wings India 2026 on January 29 at Begumpet Airport, Asangba Chuba Ao, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Civil Aviation, said the country's aviation ecosystem has undergone a fundamental shift in recent years. "There is now a clear distinction between helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, regional transport aircraft and business aviation," he noted. The DGCA has begun recognising these segments separately, reflecting a growing understanding within government of how business and general aviation differ from scheduled commercial operations.

Chuba Ao described India's aviation growth trajectory as "highly exponential," pointing to expansion at both ends of the market. At the lower end, the UDAN scheme has enabled large numbers of first-time flyers and strengthened regional connectivity. At the upper end, the increasing induction and use of business jets reflect growing demand from corporate and private users. "When there is growth, it is visible both at the top and bottom," he said. Manufacturers, operators, and prospective entrants are now actively engaging in this segment, with more small aircraft being deployed to improve regional connectivity.

However, panellists highlighted several challenges that could slow momentum if left unaddressed. C.M. Ananda, Chief Scientist and Programme Director for Civil Aviation at the National Aerospace Laboratories, emphasised that pilot availability remains a critical bottleneck. "If you want an aircraft flying, pilot availability is fundamental," he said, noting that serviceability, ease of maintenance, and aircraft-specific training must be prioritised by both manufacturers and operators. He also underlined the importance of aircraft design reflecting India's regional requirements, suggesting that considerations around maintenance and operational support should be embedded during the design stage rather than addressed after the aircraft enters service.

The panel also explored the growing overlap between business aviation and advanced air mobility (AAM). Kanika Tekriwal, Chairperson of the FICCI Advanced Air Mobility Taskforce and CEO of JetSetGo, said electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft (eVTOLs) are expected to see early adoption among private jet users. However, she acknowledged that timelines have shifted. "We had earlier envisioned eVTOLs in India by 2026–27, but realistically we are now looking at operations around 2029," Tekriwal said. She added that large-scale adoption at costs comparable to ride-hailing services may only be feasible by 2030–31, but interest in the segment remains strong and represents the future of aviation.

In conclusion, the discussion highlighted both the tremendous potential and the critical challenges facing India's business and general aviation sector. While demand is growing rapidly, targeted policies, robust training programs, and infrastructure development will be essential to ensure the sector's sustainable growth. As India continues to build its aviation ecosystem, experts agree that strategic planning today will shape the sector's trajectory for decades to come. ●

IBAC MEETS SP GUIDE AT WINGS INDIA

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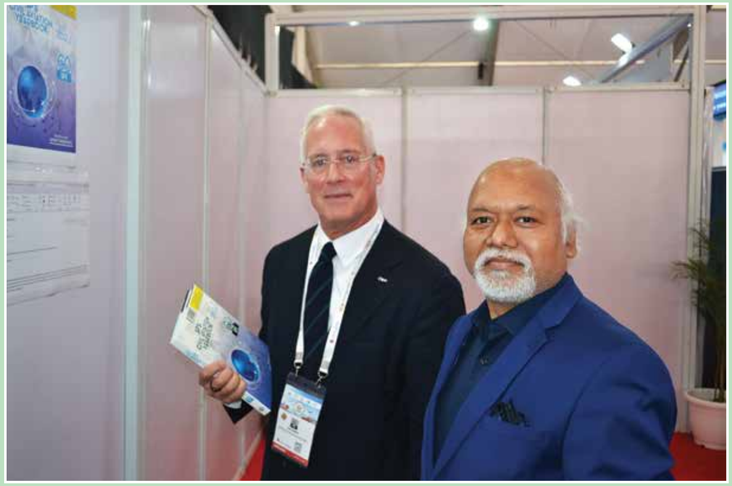

KURT EDWARDS, DIRECTOR GENERAL, INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AVIATION COUNCIL (IBAC) MEET JAYANT BARANWAL, CMD, SP GUIDE PUBLICATIONS AT THEIR BOOTH AND SHOWED KEEN INTEREST IN THE COMPANY'S PUBLISHING PORTFOLIO

STATIC DISPLAY

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1. AIR INDIA B787-9; 2. PILATUS PC-24 OF ADANI; 3. AIR BALTIC A220-300; 4. AIRBUS H160 HELICOPTER; 5. SUPERJET SJ100; 6. MARK JEFFERIES GLOBAL STARS AEROBATIC TEAM FROM UK; 7. BOEING DREAMLINER.

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(Opposite Defence Colony)
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Owned, published and printed by Jayant Baranwal on behalf of SP Guide Publications Pvt Ltd.

Printed at Kala Jyothi Process Pvt Ltd, Hyderabad

www.spguidepublications.com

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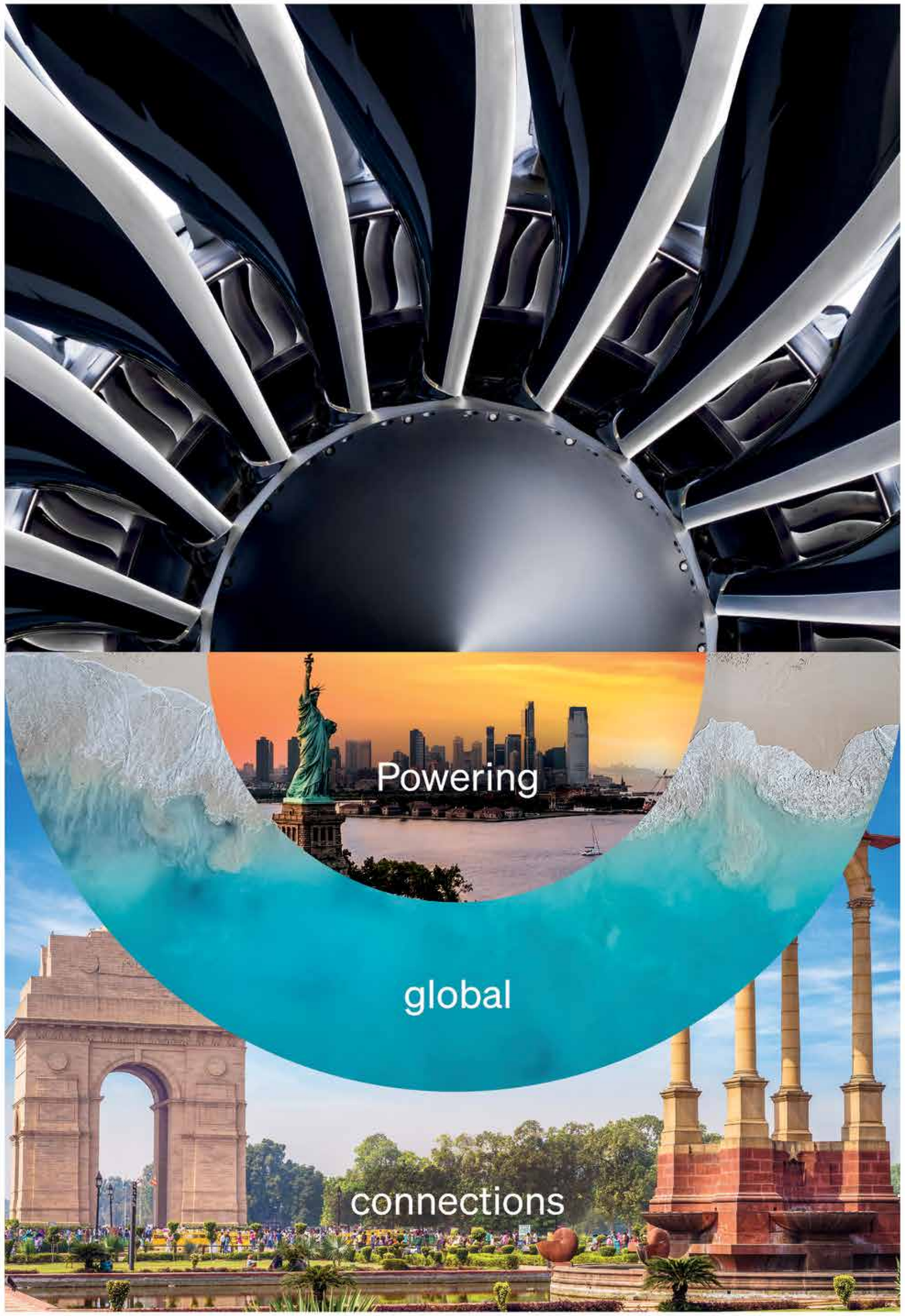

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