IAF goes full throttle to turn into an 'aerospace power'

Collaborating With Govt, Pvt Cos To Develop Niche Technologies

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New Delhi: The Indian Air Force has gone full throttle to rename itself as the Indian Air and Space Force (IASF) as part of its ongoing overall drive to transform from "a potent air-power" to "a credible aerospace power" in the years ahead.

After formulating a new doctrine that focuses on effective exploitation of the "air and space continuum" and a "Space Vision 2047", IAF has now explained to the government in detail the rationale of being renamed as IASF. "We expect the proposal to be cleared soon," a source told **TOI**.

Concomitantly, IAF has cranked up efforts to fully exploit the final frontier of space rather than restricting it to the existing ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), communication and navigation capabilities.

IAF is collaborating with Isro, DRDO, IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre) and the private industry to develop niche space-related technologies in a major way now.

"Work is underway in areas like PNT (positioning, navigation and timing), advanced ISR and communications, space weather prediction, space situational awareness, space traffic management and the like," he said.

The anti-satellite missile was successfully tested in 2019. The IAF is planning to rename itself as the Indian Air and Space Force

IAF, in fact, is looking at India having over 100 big and small military satellites with the help of the private sector in the next seven to eight years, while the tri-Service Defence Space Agency set up in 2019 also evolves into a full-fledged Space Command.

"Space has been incorporated in the training for officers and airmen, which includes exercises for space-related contingencies. It's a natural progression from air to space," the source said.

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IAF chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari in recent months has also repeatedly stressed the need for India to develop both defensive and offensive capabilities in the space domain by building on the success of `Mission Shakti' in March 2019. DRDO had then tested an anti-satellite (A-Sat) interceptor missile to destroy the 740-kg Microsat-R satellite at an altitude of 283-km in low earth orbit.

"Near space, at an altitude from 20 to 100 km, and outer space will be the ultimate high-ground in the battles of the future. Advanced winged bodies are being built to operate seamlessly between air and space. India has to be prepared for all this," the source said.

China, of course, is rapidly developing and deploying A-Sat weapons from "kinetic" ones like direct ascent missiles and co-orbital killers to "non-kinetic" high-powered lasers, electromagnetic pulse weapons, jammers and cyberweapons, as was earlier reported by **TOI**.

If China has the People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force for the space domain, the US created a full-fledged Space Force (USSF) as a distinct branch of its armed forces in 2019. Several other countries like the UK, Japan, France and Russia also have space commands or wings in their air forces.

Consequently, IAF has no option but to gradually transcend from existing OCA (offensive counter air) and DCA (defensive counter-air) air-superiority missions to OCS and DCS operations also in the future.

Eventually, IAF's existing fully-automated aid defence network called integrated air command and control system (IACCS) will also have to evolve into IASCCS. Space will have to be harnessed for the battlespace of the future.