

an>

Title: Need to strengthen Air Force War Capability.

PROF. SAUGATA ROY (DUM DUM): At a time when South Asia is seeing induction of advanced fighter aircraft in large number, as per senior Air Force Officer the current fighter strength of the country is inadequate to handle a two front war. "Our aircraft numbers are not adequate to execute an air campaign in a two-front scenario", Air Force Vice-Chief Air Marshal B. S. Dhanoa Said. He was speaking at a media briefing on the upcoming Iron Fist Air Force exercises later this month at Pokhran test range. He said steps are being taken to address the issue and the government-to-government agreement for 36 Rafale aircraft was agreed to in this regard. The Air Force has a sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons but the numbers are steadily dropping with the MIG series being phased out and the squadron strength is at its lowest, especially the SU-30s, 272 of which will eventually be fielded by IAF. This, at a time when Pakistan is inducting JF-17 fighters and set to receive eight more F-16 fighters from the US, China, meanwhile, is likely to received the first of the 24 SU-35 jets from Russia by year end even as its fifth generation aircraft programmes make progress. However, the Air Force has something to cheer as the indigenously developed Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) is expected to get Final Operational clearance in the next six months. The IAF has 120 LCA on order, of which 100 will be an improved variant. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which is manufacturing them, is ramping up production to 18 aircraft per year and the first aircraft with improvements is scheduled to be ready by 2018.