

UAVS BOOST ARMY WATCH IN EASTERN SECTOR

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“Army Aviation got control of the UAVs in August this year from Artillery. There are certain advantages of UAVs or remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) being with Army Aviation,” an officer said.

The Army Aviation Brigade at Missamari was raised in March this year to enable better command and control of aviation resources, the officer said, adding that in the future battlefield, manned and unmanned aircraft teaming will reap huge dividends. The Brigade operates the Cheetah and Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) Dhruv utility helicopters, Rudra weaponsied ALH and Heron-I UAVs.

Three RPA flights are working under the Army Aviation squadrons which consists of around 14 UAVs, according to the officer.

With the UAVs being under the Army Aviation, the receipt capability has become seamless and more responsive, officials said. All aerial assets are under one umbrella which allows optimised employment of RPAs during operations in conjunction with other aviation assets.

“It also helps in upgradation of flight safety management and practices and also boosts training infrastructure for RPA aircrew,” the first officer cited above said. “It also ensures better maintenance and serviceability by optimising the supply chain and spares management,” the officer said and added, “It smoothens out the command and control process especially during operations.”

Talking to a group of visiting journalists on the new inductions, Lt. Col. Amit Dadwal posted at the base said it has given them round the clock capability for surveillance as well as operations. He said the ALH has become the backbone of the main operations of the Army as of now. “With the ALH we have been doing night casualty evacuation,” he added.

The Army has 90 ALH and 75 Rudra helicopters in service, which are indigenously designed and developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). The Army Aviation is also very soon slated to induct a surveillance downlink system, anti-aircraft missiles, countermeasures against missile systems, new generation surveillance pods among others which will enhance the existing role to manifold.

In the last few years, the Army and Air Force have significantly upgraded their defences in the eastern sector, including induction of new equipment, as part of efforts to match China's build up and infrastructure development on its side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The Israeli Heron-I UAVs are in the process of being upgraded and officials said they will also be deployed in this sector in due course.

In addition, the Army has recently leased four Heron-TP Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) from Israel Aircraft Industries which are much more capable than the Heron-1s. These are expected to be deployed in eastern Ladakh.

During the standoff in eastern Ladakh, the Army Aviation had seen a quantum jump in the employment of helicopters along the northern borders.

However, a major issue of concern is the ageing fleet of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters and

their delayed replacement. The technical life of these helicopters will wind down from 2023, which will further exacerbate the deficiencies. The Ka-226T utility helicopter deal with Russia along with the indigenous Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) are meant to replace them but the Ka-226T deal has been stalled for several years over the percentage of indigenisation.

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