

## President Patil elated with flight in fighter jet

President Pratibha Patil, who made history Wednesday by becoming the world's first woman president to fly in a fighter jet, descended from an Indian Air Force (IAF) Sukhoi-30 MKI in a G-suit instead of her trademark sari.

An elated Patil flashed a victory sign and a beaming smile as she alighted after a nearly 30-minute subsonic (less than the speed of the sound) flight. Then a confident-looking president shook hands with all the air warriors present at the Lohegaon Air Base here.

'There was not any sort of apprehension, but there was excitement. I was, right from the beginning, very confident. I'm confident even now,' Patil said at a press conference after the flight.

The president, who almost always wears saris, looked strikingly different in her olive green G-suit and IAF cap.

'Today I had a wonderful and unique experience. I am reassured that we are well equipped and they (the armed forces) have the strength to protect our border. I feel proud at this moment... The aircraft was very sophisticated. I was instructed by the pilot how to manoeuvre and I could do that.'

'Today I am proud and every Indian should be proud of the ability and the spirit of sacrifice and the talent and capability of our defence forces. I have all admiration for them,' said Patil.

The flight commanded by Wing Commander S. Sajan went off smoothly in the slightly chilly but sunny winter morning.

During the sortie, the aircraft flew at an altitude of 10,000 feet at a speed of around 800 kmph or 0.9 Mach (speed of sound), but did not go up to the supersonic levels of around 1,100 kmph, an IAF spokesman said.

The Su-30 MKI carrying Patil, 74, took off at around 10.55 a.m. after the president was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour by a smartly-turned out contingent of air-warriors donning the IAF colours of sky-blue shirts and black trousers.

Prior to the flight Patil had breakfast and underwent a mandatory pre-flight medical test and was found fit to undertake the flight.

After the medical test, she donned a G-Suit (anti-gravity suit) which helps the flier withstand high gravitational pressure by preventing excessive blood from flowing to the brain.

Besides the aircraft in which Patil travelled in the rear seat, two other Sukhois flew alongside to enable her to experience what fighter jets look like in flight at that altitude and at such high speeds.

Just before the flight, the president asked for a glass of water, but later declined to drink, indicating her state of nervous excitement.

She stepped inside the aircraft at 10.35 a.m., assisted by some airmen, even as the national and international media was present in large numbers to cover the historic event.

Present to witness the epoch-making occasion were Maharashtra Governor S.C. Jamir and Air Chief Marshal P.V. Naik.

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