

The IAF's Suryakiran Aerobatic Team



The Suryakiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT), a distinguished demonstration ensemble of the Indian Air Force (IAF), epitomises precision, skill and the spirit of aviation excellence. Established in 1996, SKAT swiftly ascended to become an emblematic representation of India's aerial prowess. Comprising the adept aviators of the 52nd Squadron of the IAF, the team has consistently dazzled audiences across the globe with their breathtaking aerobatic displays. Renowned for their flawless coordination and daring maneuvers, the Suryakiran team executes their performances with finesse and flair, captivating spectators with each meticulously choreographed sequence. As ambassadors of Indian aviation, they continue to inspire admiration and awe, showcasing the prowess and professionalism of the Indian Air Force on both national and international stages. We asked them a few questions and they answered.

Interview with the CO of SKAT

VAYU: *Can you describe the exhilaration and challenges of flying in aerobatic formations, and what drew you to become an IAF aerobatic pilot?*

Ans. Aerobatic maneuvers at their very core, are combat maneuvers used to describe a geometry by trading height for speed or vice versa in order to gain an edge in combat. Thus, every fighter pilot must gain proficiency in aerobatics in order to exploit the manoeuvrability of the airplane in combat and thus gain an edge. Close formation too has its combat applicability be it air to air refuelling or flying a tight formation hoping to deceive enemy radars into underestimating the number of aircraft.

Suryakiran team is different as they are expected to

execute aerobatics in formation. Add to this, the fact that there are 9 aircraft in formation (the only team in Asia to do so) and often with members maintaining references with respect to another member maintaining formation to the leader. Thus, in any maneuvers, the outer members traverse a larger path that requires much larger power and control inputs that the others, while the inners have to balance the need to be steady for the sake of the outers, vis a vis the need to give corrections to stay in formation with the leader. Doing this for 30 minutes, in turbulence at just 100 meters of the ground, is both exhilarating and nerve wracking at the same time. It boils down to being professional and being focussed, which all IAF fighter pilots are trained to be since day 1.

The everlasting impact that an aerial display or even