

# Mixing it at Istres

Symbolic of the IAF's long reach, Su-30MKI with Il-78MKI enroute to France.



## Air Exercise 'Garuda'

The essentially Indo-French Air Exercise *Garuda* at Istres air base in southern France recently had the Air Forces of France, Singapore and India jointly exercising from 14 to 25 June 2010, with over 60 missions successfully flown.

The IAF contingent comprised 230 officers and men, who were flagged off from Air Force Station Bareilly by Air Marshal S Varthaman, SASO Central Air Command and comprised six Su-30MKIs of No.8 Squadron ('*Eighth Pursuit*'),

three Il-78 Flight Refuellers and an Il-76 Heavy Lift Transport aircraft. A team of *Garud* Special Forces personnel also participated, the Indian contingent's Team Leader being Group Capt J Mishra with Group Capt NN Sinha as the Exercise



Air Marshal S.Varthaman with air crew of No.8 Squadron before their departure from Bareilly.



Boeing KC-135 mid-air refuellers of the RSAF, at Istres.

Director, who planned, coordinated and executed different aspects of the flying and ground manoeuvres at the Exercise.

Addressing the contingent at the flagging off ceremony, Air Marshal Varthaman said “We have prepared well for the last 6 to 8 months and I am sure you will excel with your professionalism. So fly safe, fly well, make friends, win hearts and touch the sky with glory.”

The IAF aircraft landed at Istres on 12 June 2010, a large air base north of Marseilles in the *Bouches-du-Rhone* department of France, which houses some of the world’s finest fighter and helicopter types and serves multiple functions. The runway of this airbase is stated to be the longest in Europe. For Exercise *Garuda*, the French Air Force fielded Mirage 2000-5s and Rafales while the Republic of Singapore’s Air Force participated with F-16 Block 52 aircraft of much interest to India, with this variant recently inducted by the Pakistan AF.

The Indian and French Air Forces engaged in various missions ranging from close combat engagement of large forces, slow-mover protection, engaging high value aerial assets during the Exercise. According to Group Capt J Mishra, “The focus of the Air Exercise was learning from each other’s best practices. Air Defence Operations, central to our various manoeuvres took place in AWACS and non-AWACS environment. The intensity of the exercise gradually increased through its duration in order to learn and absorb the maximum from the exercise”.

Aircraft were also engaged in the implementation of “no fly zones” and large force engagements, both by day and night. Ilyushin Il-78s of the IAF and KC-135

mid-air refuellers of the French Air Force participated in various missions and also engaged in ‘cross refuelling.’

IAF Su-30s carried out ‘swing roles’, in which the same aircraft is simultaneously exercised for offensive as well as defensive roles. French Air Force E-3 AWACS provided radar coverage during the Exercise. The IAF’s Special Forces *Garuds* proactively participated with jumps along with French Special Forces from IAF Il-76 aircraft.

Air Marshal KK Nowhar, AOC-in-C Eastern Air Command, who visited the contingent involved in *Garuda-2010* said, “Our participation in the Exercise has reinforced the manner in which we conduct our operations. It has also helped us refine our doctrine. In future, there is less probability of a country operating in isolation especially in a co-operative

defence scenario. Thus being aware of each other’s best practices in terms of tactics, techniques and procedures is the main objective of this exercise, which is also part of the on-going Indo-French Defence Cooperation”.

Air Commodore SK Ghotia, chief coordinator of the IAF-FAF Cooperation and presently Air Attache in France stated, “*Garuda-2010* is a milestone in Indo-French defence cooperation. This has been the widest scope ever accomplished between the three nations. The Exercise brought together the best fighting machines of the world such as the Sukhoi Su-30s, F-16s, Rafales and Mirage 2000-5s. Our pilots flew in these aircraft and have gained tremendous learning experience. The engineers, technicians and all other members of the team have also benefited substantially from the exercise.”



Air Marshal S. Varthaman makes a point; Gp Capt J Mishra to his left.