

Reliving IAF History

20 years after Kargil 1999



sub-conventional to nuclear,” the Air Force Chief said.

“In 1999 (precision bombing capabilities) were operationalised only on the Mirage 2000 aircraft. Now all aircraft, Mirage 2000, Su-30, Jaguar, MiG-29 and MiG-27 have the capability for precision bombing. Not only that, in case we have correct coordinates we can do all-weather bombing through clouds very accurately,” the CAS said. He continued with the statement that the “Balakot strike (on 26 February 2019) demonstrated the IAF’s ability of precision bombing, asserting that it is capable of taking part in full spectrum of conflict, ranging from sub-conventional to nuclear”.

20 years later, the *Vayu Aerospace Review* recalls that it was the only journal to have covered that war, virtually as it took place, with its Issue IV/1999 publishing the war diary, day-to-day from 26 May 1999 till the ceasefire on 16 July 1999, the date set by India for all Pakistani intruders to withdraw well north of the Pakistani side of the Line of Control.

VAYU and ‘Op Safed Sagar’

On 16 July 2019, the Government of India and its armed forces marked the 20th anniversary of what has become known as ‘Kargil 1999’, the Indian Army referring to those actions in the high mountains as *Operation Vijay* while the Air Force remembers as this as *Operation Safed Sagar* which perhaps is a haunting reminder as to many differences of perspective. Present Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, who was then commanding No.17 Squadron with MiG-21Ms forward-based at Srinagar addressed a special Seminar (*20 years of Op Safed Sagar*) at Subroto Park, New Delhi and recalled that there were then operational limitations but innovative ways adopted by the IAF overcame difficulties during that conflict.

“Over a period of time, the Air Force has evolved in a manner that we have through a process of long long planning and induction. Slowly, we got our ability to take part in operations across the spectrum of the conflict. It is now a force that is capable of full spectrum conflict, from



(Left to Right) : Then Wg Cdr Birender Singh Dhanoa, CO No.17 Squadron, Wg Cdr KT Sebastian, Air Cdre Mohinder Khanna, Gp Capt DN Ganesh, Gp Capt Jitinder Singh Dhillon and Wg Cdr NK Tandon, CO No.51 Squadron at Srinagar airfield, 16 July 1999