

Exclusive

An Air Chief's Last Flight – And Why They Do It

Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria flew his last sortie as Chief of Air Staff (CAS) on the morning of 13 September 2021. He was, as he had done many times during his tenure as Chief, flying a frontline fighter solo – in this case a MiG-21 Bison. The type of aircraft had more to do with history than familiarity or leading by example, although the latter is inevitable when any senior commander flies an operational jet, particularly one as controversial as the venerable MiG-21. This choice was about coming full circle – Bhadauria's flying career in the IAF began with MiG-21s of No. 23 Squadron 'Panthers' at Halwara, and so it ended, in a Panthers MiG-21 at the same station.

The Chief flew more or less like any line pilot would – a morning brief covering the flight profile, safety, weather, diversion airfields and so on, followed by a preflight check and climbing into the Bison. He took some time to re-familiarise himself with the cockpit before closing the canopy,



ACM Bhadauria just prior to taxi out for the last time in a fighter (photo: Angad Singh)



The CAS getting airborne from Halwara (photo: Angad Singh)