

Decommissioning Ceremony of the Indian Air Force MiG-21

“The legacy of the MiG-21 will live on in India’s pursuit of Aatmanirbharta in defence. The aircraft symbolises the continuity of courage, discipline and patriotism that will inspire the development of indigenous platforms such as LCA-Tejas and the upcoming Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA),” stated Raksha Mantri Mr. Rajnath Singh during the Decommissioning Ceremony of the Indian Air Force (IAF) MiG-21 in Chandigarh on 26 September 2025. The ceremony marked the final operational sortie of the MiG-21, bringing to a close an illustrious chapter of more than six decades in the history of the IAF. Raksha Mantri underlined that when the world looks at India tomorrow, it should see a nation that began with the MiG-21 and now leads with futuristic defence technologies.

Mr. Rajnath Singh saluted the valour and dedication of the air warriors of the IAF who have, through courage and sacrifice, safeguarded the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the nation. He paid glowing tribute to the MiG-21, describing it as more than just a machine, but rather a symbol of India’s rise in military aviation, a shield of national defence, and a faithful companion of the Armed Forces since its induction in 1963. Raksha Mantri pointed out that more than 11,500 MiG-21s were built worldwide, of which approximately 850 served with the IAF, which testify the aircraft’s popularity, credibility and multi-dimensional capabilities.

Raksha Mantri recalled how the MiG-21 proved its mettle in multiple theatres of war and conflict, from its decisive role in the 1971 war, where it attacked the Governor’s House in Dhaka under hostile conditions and hastened India’s victory, to its presence in the Kargil conflict, the Balakot airstrike and Operation Sindoor. “In every historic mission, the MiG-21 carried the Tricolour with honour. Its contribution has never been limited to a single event or battle, it has been a pillar of India’s air power for decades,” he highlighted.

Highlighting the aircraft’s versatility, Mr. Rajnath Singh described the MiG-21 as the “bird of all seasons” which excelled in every conceivable role as an interceptor deterring enemy aircraft, a ground attack platform displaying offensive capability, a frontline air defence jet protecting Indian skies, and a trainer aircraft that groomed countless pilots. “The foundation of our highly skilled fighter pilots was laid on the MiG-21. Standing on this legendary platform, generations of air warriors learned to fly, adapt, and succeed in the toughest conditions. Its role in shaping India’s air strategy cannot be overstated,” he stated.

The Defence Minister further stated that the MiG-21 performed far beyond expectations of both its designers and operators, evolving from a 1950s-era jet into a formidable, upgraded platform known by names such as Trishul, Vikram, Badal and Bison. He added that this adaptability is what kept the MiG-21 at the heart of the IAF’s inventory for so long. “The MiG-21 taught us never to fear change, but to embrace it with confidence. Today, India’s defence ecosystem, our research labs, academia, DPSUs, private sector, startups and youth is working in unison to take this legacy forward,” he underscored.

Raksha Mantri also addressed misconceptions regarding the age of the aircraft. He clarified that while the initial MiG-21s inducted in the 1960s and 70s were retired long ago, the aircraft in service until now were at most 40 years old, a lifespan considered normal for fighter jets worldwide. He underlined that the MiG-21 was continuously upgraded with advanced radars, avionics and weapon systems, thanks to the efforts of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). Commending HAL engineers and scientists, he stated that their relentless work kept the aircraft technologically relevant and battle-ready for decades.

Photos by Abhishek Singh Chauhan

