

# Vayu Shakti through the lens of Himanshu Dhingra

The desert ranges of Pokhran once again reverberated with the thunder of jet engines and precision firepower as the Indian Air Force conducted Vayu Shakti 2026, its flagship firepower demonstration in February 2026. The exercise was witnessed by the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, along with the top leadership of India's defence establishment, senior military officials and invited dignitaries. Designed to showcase the Indian Air Force's operational readiness and technological edge, the event brought together an impressive array of aerial platforms, weapons systems and coordinated combat scenarios that closely mirrored real battlefield conditions.

The demonstration opened with a dramatic start as Rafale fighters streaked across the grandstand at supersonic speed, sending a wave of excitement through the audience. Moments later, Jaguar aircraft performed low level reconnaissance runs, simulating battlefield surveillance while capturing high fidelity imagery of the grandstand. The pace intensified as frontline fighters including the Su-30MKI, MiG-29 and Mirage 2000 joined the combat sequence.

Across the three hour demonstration, a total of 120 aerial platforms took part, comprising 77 fighter aircraft and 43 helicopters. The exercise involved the employment of 277 weapons with a cumulative explosive weight of nearly 11,835 kilogrammes, underlining the destructive capability and accuracy of the Indian Air Force. In one of the most striking moments of the day, a formation of Su-30MKI fighters released 44 OFAB-100-120 bombs on designated targets, creating a powerful visual display of coordinated strike capability.

Air dominance was further demonstrated when a Su-30MKI engaged an aerial target using an R-73 missile. The missile successfully intercepted and destroyed a MEAT (Manoeuvrable Expandable Aerial Target), a system designed to simulate realistic enemy aircraft behaviour, providing a dramatic representation of air to air combat capability.

The helicopter fleet added another dimension to the battlefield scenario. The indigenous Light Combat Helicopter Prachand demonstrated its combat prowess by firing air to ground missiles, while Mi-17 helicopters

