



## EDITOR'S NOTE

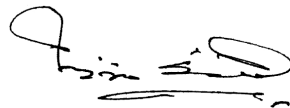
This issue (with the cover picture of the MiG-21 taking off) comes to you just short of the eve of the MiG-21 completing 50 years of service with the IAF. The aircraft's latest version is likely to remain in service for another 5-7 years. There is probably hardly a pilot or airman who has not flown and worked on the aircraft. When the first MOU was signed with the Soviet Union in early 1961 (a major factor that upset Mao Zedong), the aircraft that was offered, the MiG-21F, was based on the original design as a pure interceptor for defence against high altitude nuclear bomber threat faced by the Soviet Union. The only armament it had was the early version of K-13 air-to-air missile of which two were carried under the wings. However only eight aircraft were acquired and the MiG-21FL with the RD-13 engine entered squadron service by mid-1964.

At least 14 variants were in service with more than 32 countries and over 7,000 aircraft were manufactured (without counting the Chinese manufactured MiG-21F, re-designated by the PRC as the F-7 and its variants). HAL manufactured nearly 700 of three versions of the aircraft till it stopped its manufacture in late 1980s with the manufacture of the MiG-21bis. IAF later upgraded the aircraft with modern avionics and these are still in service. The MiG-21 actually became far more successful than its early competitors like the Lockheed F-104 *Starfighter* and British Electric *Lightning*. By mid-1980s IAF had 21 squadrons (out of 35) equipped with MiG-21FL/MF/M/bis. It served as the workhorse as well as the mainstay of frontline combat squadrons for five decades. Considering the comparatively low TBO (Time Before Overhaul) especially in the earlier versions it has been remarkable that the aircraft with numerous variations completing half a

century of service in the IAF with quite a few years' service ahead of it. Much of the credit goes to the technical officers and airmen.

The aircraft kept on being modified and finally upgraded essentially based on IAF requirements where a Mach-2 plus (2,125 kmph) of pure interceptor quite early on by the time of 1971 war had been transformed into a multi-role combat aircraft. Till now no other combat aircraft has served the IAF for half a century. Its flight safety record was one of the best --- a mere 1.7 per 10,000 hours in the 1970s, much lower than the famous Gnat and other combat aircraft.

The earlier version, the MiG-21FL (Indian name Type-77) which had an obsolete "ring and bead" sight for firing air-to-ground rockets and guns earned great credit during 1971 war providing it a remarkable finale when a four aircraft formation led by then Wing Commander (later Air Vice Marshal) BK "Bhup" Bishnoi achieved direct hits (without collateral damage) on the room where the East Pakistani Governor and the Cabinet were they were meeting in the Governor's house to discuss future course of action. Immediately after the strike the Governor knelt down to say his prayers and the Cabinet decided to surrender East Pakistan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bishnoi', with a horizontal line underneath.