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Via Email

Dated: 27th May 2021

To

Shri, Narendra Modi Ji

Hon'ble Prime Minister of India

South Block,

New Delhi. 110001

Subject: Request to Discontinue MIG 21 aircraft from Indian Air Force

Dear Prime Minister Sir,

MiG series fighter aircraft have been the backbone of the Indian Air Force for the last 50 years. The Indian Air Force has received more than 850 MIG fighter aircraft since the year 1960. Not only this, these aircraft have played a decisive role for the country in the 1965 India-Pakistan war, the 1971 war, and the 1999 Kargil war. The lifespan of these aircraft may have exceeded 50 years, but even today an upgraded MiG-21 can hit any modern aircraft in the sky. The proof of this has been seen all over the World in the year 2019

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when Wing Commander Abhinandan Vardhaman of the Indian Air Force shot down Pakistan's fifth-generation modern aircraft F-16 with a MIG-21 Bison. In simple words, the fighting ability of these aircraft of the MIG series is still intact and it is unmatched, but the record of this aircraft is not very good in terms of safety. More than 400 MiG-21s have been involved in accidents that have claimed the lives of 200 pilots during the last six decades, earning the fighters ominous epithets such as "Flying Coffin" and "Widow Maker". Experts say that more MiG-21s have crashed than any other fighter because they formed the bulk of the fighter aircraft in the IAF's inventory for a long time. IAF had to keep its MiG-21 fleet flying longer than it would have liked because of delay in the induction of new fighters.

The MiG-21(Mikoyan-Gurevich), whose NATO reporting name is 'Fishbed', was designed as supersonic jet interceptor aircraft by the Mikoyan-Gurevich Design Bureau (OKB) of the erstwhile Soviet Union. The aircraft, which made its maiden flight on 16 June 1955, holds the record of being the most produced supersonic jet in aviation history. The MIG 21 has had a long production run from 1959 to 1985 and underwent updates and modification thereafter in many countries including India. The first single-engine MIG 21 aircraft came into the Air Force in 1963 and since then a total of

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874 of them have been inducted, including various variants. The Soviet-origin supersonic fighters had become the mainstay of the Air Force over the years, because of sheer numbers, even as they force more modern aircraft like the Mirages and the other. The aircraft first underwent an upgrade in 1970s and the variant was known as the MIG-21 Bis. With the Light Combat Aircraft Tejas, nowhere in the horizon, the IAF decided to upgrade 125 of the MIG-21 Bis to MIG-21 Bison in 2000, despite a spate of crashes in the 1990s that claimed lives of many pilots. **According to the database of Bharat Rakshak, an aviation website works closely with the IAF, 290 pilots lost their life till now in accidents of MIG-21. (<http://www.bharatrakshak.com/IAF/Database/Accidents/catchcount.php>)**

The aircraft is a single engine aircraft which means it is always under threat. The chance of a plane crash increases when a bird collides or the engine fails. In October 2014, the Air Force Chief said that India's security is threatened by the delay in removing the old aircraft, because some part of the fleet is out of date. Experts believe that the absence of any more fighter jets in the Indian Air Force for a long time is also one of the reason for the accidents. For a long time, with the inclusion of no new fighter jets in the Air Force, the entire weight is on the MIG-21

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The crash of a MIG-21 Bison in the early hours of Friday, which killed Squadron Leader Abhinav Choudhary, has once again led to questions on the safety that have dogged the Soviet-era aircraft for decades now. Just this year alone, there have been three accidents involving the MIG-21 Bison, Which was originally supposed to be replaced by the Tejas. **In 2012, former Defence Minister A.K. Antony had said in Parliament that more than half of the 872 MIG aircraft purchased from Russia had crashed. Due to which, more than 200 persons, including 171 pilots, 39 civilians, and 8 other services people, had lost their lives.** There is a widespread demand to phase out MIG-21 which has clearly outlived its utility. According to an IndiaSpend report, the MIG aircraft, which joined the Indian Air Force in the 1960s, completed their retirement period in the mid-1990s. It is interesting to know that in 1985, Russia removed the aircraft from service, after which Bangladesh and Afghanistan have also removed it from service.

We look forward to your response and action on this vital issue of national interest.

Yours Sincerely

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COPY TO

1- TO THE SECRETARY, DEFENCE MINISTRY

2- TO THE AIR CHIEF MARSHAL, INDIAN AIR FORCE