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## Round the World Expedition comes full circle

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Wing Commander Rahul Monga & Wing Commander Anil Kumar being congratulated by Air Chief Marshal Fali H Major (Pic: Sanjay Sharma)

NEW DELHI: The Indian Air Force Round the World Expedition (RTW) landed at the Hindan air base near Delhi on Sunday after circumnavigating the globe for the past 79 days.

The IAF pilot duo, Wing Commander Rahul Monga and Wing Commander Anil Kumar have created a new world record by successfully flying a microlite aircraft around the world in 79 days.

It was a great moment, not just for the two Wing Commanders, but also for the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the entire nation, as the bravehearts landed at the Hindan Air Force Station.

As the pilots landed at the base, the duo was greeted with a thunderous applause. It was a proud moment for everyone, as Air Chief Marshal Fali H Major flagged in the pilots' landing.

The duo covered a total distance of 40,497 kms in 79 days flying over 19 countries. They achieved a speed of 21.092 kmph bettering the record of 16.53 kmph set by Colin Bodil of the United Kingdom (UK) in 2001.

Lauding the pilots, Fali H Major said, "We are thankful to the governments of all the nations who supported us. The successful completion could not have been possible but for their whole-hearted co-operation and goodwill."

The Air Chief also appreciated the manufacturers of the aircraft. Fali H Major said, "I compliment the manufacturers and designers of this wonderful advanced microlite."

Both the pilots were elated with the completion of the successful voyage.

Wing Commander Anil Kumar said, "We are very excited and are proud of creating the world record. We are not just proud of ourselves but more than us we are proud of the IAF, because without them we couldn't have done what we have done today. The IAF took this big initiative and made it happen with the co-operation of the nations that supported us."

The RTW microlite expedition was flagged off on June 1 by Major from Hindan as a part of the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations of the IAF. The pilots travelled through Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Russia, USA, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, UK, Germany, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, before reaching India.

The original plan was to complete the expedition in 64 days. Despite all the hurdles, the pilots accomplished the mission of circumnavigating the earth in the shortest period of time.

"Of course, weather was a problem for us, we had to train ourselves to handle all kinds of problems; imagine people talk of jet-lag, pulmonary vein disorder - so we were sitting in the cock-pit for nine-ten hours, moving from culture to culture, time zone to time zone. I think we are fortunate that we could cope up in all such situations," Kumar said.

Talking about the best part of the expedition, Wg Cdr Kumar added, "The feeling which the world has towards India in general and IAF in particular. It's very nice because you are looked at with respect from the Air Force of other nations. That gives you a big satisfaction."

Sharing some of their experiences of staying at various places, Kumar said, "Everywhere it was very nice. It's so beautiful that sign language in the world still works. In China, we had a little bit of problem with language, but we could communicate, people went out of their way to help us. We had gone in far-flung Canada where there was no place to stay. So we stayed in a co-operative hotel kind of a thing."

During the expedition, Monga added yet another feather to his cap. He successfully flew across the Atlantic in a single engine aircraft. One of the pilots had to make way for the machine to fly longer. Hence, Monga flew solo, and his co-pilot Wg Cdr Kumar took a commercial flight from Canada to UK.

Appreciating the design of the microlite, Kumar said, "It's a fantastic machine, very reliable - of course it got us home. There were no problems. We had good support from the manufacturers."

Hoping to go for another such expedition, Kumar said he hopes that the two (Monga and Kumar) become the lucky ones to be sent again by the Indian Air Force for an expedition as big as the one they have just completed.

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