

#MISSION LADY

Trailblazer in the Sky

Sqn Ldr Priya Sharma from Jhunjhunu Joins IAF Chief for the last, 'good bye Historic MiG-21' Sortie



On a defining day for Indian military aviation, Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, took to the skies in a MiG-21 from Nal Air Force Station, Bikaner - marking one of the final ceremonial sorties for the iconic jet. Flying alongside him was Squadron Leader Priya Sharma, one of the Indian Air Force's pioneering women fighter pilots. The flight symbolized not only the farewell to an aircraft that shaped IAF history but also the emergence of a new generation of pilots - with Sqn Ldr Sharma standing tall as a representative of India's evolving air combat landscape.

What Happened at Nal - And Why It Mattered

With the IAF preparing to formally retire its last two MiG-21 squadrons, the Air Chief's tribute sortie at Nal was both ceremonial and symbolic. Flying in formation with Sqn Ldr Priya Sharma, he honored the aircraft's six-decade legacy while spotlight-

ing the future - embodied by pilots like Sharma now leading the next chapter. The formal de-induction ceremony is slated for late September in Chandigarh, where the MiG-21 was first inducted into IAF service in 1963.

MiG-21: A Legendary Farewell

First introduced in the 1960s, the MiG-21 was a mainstay of Indian air power, participating in major conflicts including the 1965 and 1971 wars, the Kargil conflict, and numerous peacetime

operations. While upgrades like the Bison variant extended its operational life, the MiG-21 is now set to be replaced by more modern platforms such as the indigenous HAL Tejas Mk-1A.

Who is Squadron Leader Priya Sharma?

Commissioned in December 2018, Priya Sharma was India's 7th woman fighter pilot - and the third from Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu district. A B.Tech graduate from IIT-Kota, Sharma was inspired

by her father, an IAF veteran, to pursue a career in combat aviation. Her commissioning drew national attention and marked a significant milestone in the IAF's integration of women into fighter roles.

Why This Sortie Was Historic

- **A Powerful Symbol of Transition:** Flying alongside the Air Chief during the MiG-21's farewell represents a bridge between eras - bidding goodbye to a legendary aircraft while welcoming a new generation of pilots who reflect the IAF's growing diversity.
- **An Inspiration for Future Aviators:** Sharma's journey from aspiring pilot in 2018 to co-piloting this historic flight - offers a compelling example for young women across India considering a career in the skies.

Notably, she once expressed a dream to fly the MiG-21. Seven years later, she helped write its final chapter.

Women in Combat Aviation: A Rising Force

Since the commissioning of the first three women fighter pilots in 2016, the IAF has steadily expanded opportunities for women in combat roles. Priya Sharma's prominent participation in this milestone sortie reflects a shift toward normalization rather than exception. For today's cadets, the path she helped carve is broader, more

accessible, and emblematic of a force in transformation. The image of Sqn Ldr Priya Sharma flying in formation with the Chief of the Air Staff on the MiG-21's final operational day captures a moment that is both nostalgic and forward-looking. It honors an aircraft that defined an era - and highlights the aviators poised to define the next.



Almost Not So Sporting Davis Cup

On the same weekend that India was playing the quarterfinals against Israel, the United States was playing West Germany in a relegation tie. Boris Becker complained about the 'pro-American frenzy' in Hartford, Connecticut, and how his teammates felt like 'political prisoners in a foreign court.' The Los Angeles Times compared the atmosphere in Hartford with that in India. "Boom Boom, you should have seen New Delhi," the newspaper said. "At New Delhi, site of the India-Israel Davis Cup quarterfinal, there were stun guns, sub-machine guns, sharpshooters posted on buildings, and blockades at every entrance."



Ajay Kamalakaran

In March 1987, New Delhi hosted one of the most thrilling Davis Cup ties of all time. The odds were against India. It was down two matches to one against the visiting Argentines, and its ageing superstar Vijay Amritraj was facing

match point in the fourth set of the fourth match against Martin Jaite, who had defeated German sensation Boris Becker a year earlier.

Somehow, Amritraj, 33, mustered enough calm and strength to overcome his highly favoured 23-year-old opponent to win the fourth set 8-6 and then the fifth set and match. After that, Ramesh Krishnan took care of business, clinching India one of its most famous tennis victories and sending it into the quarterfinals. But where there should have been unequalled joy, there was some anxiety. India's next adversary was Israel.

At the time, India was one of the staunchest supporters of the Palestinian cause and many Indians opposed letting Israelis take part in the Davis Cup in India. The government too was unsure. Apart from its principled political stand on the Palestinian cause and its ties with the Arab world, the administration was worried about maintaining law and order in Delhi. In the past, India had taken a principled stand even when it came at a heavy cost. In 1974, it had reached the final of the Davis Cup but forfeited the match, and ceded the trophy to protest against its opponent South Africa's repressive Apartheid policies. Should it do the same? That was the question.

Amritraj summed up India's dilemma when he told reporters: "As soon as we beat Argentina, everybody thought there was no

way the tie against Israel was going to be played. It was kind of disheartening. As soon as you have a big win, everybody keeps writing, 'Well, too bad. We've come up against Israel after such a great win.' All the world over, it was said "That match won't be played."

Amritraj, who helped the 1974 team reach the Davis Cup final, had supported the boycott of Apartheid South Africa, saying, "It was absolutely the right decision." But in 1987, nearing the end of his sporting career, he voiced support for India's participation.

The government too switched its stand. Threatened with a \$10,000 fine and a three-year suspension, it allowed Israeli players to travel to India to take part in the quarterfinals.

Angry protests

India had a complex relationship with Israel in its early independent years. On one hand, it officially recognised the state of Israel in 1950, but on the other, it steadfastly refused to establish full diplomatic relations with the country. In the sporting arena, too, the boundaries could be blurry for decades.

In 1962, when Indonesia barred the Jewish state, along with Taiwan,

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from participating in the Jakarta Asian Games, the veteran Indian sports administrator Guru Dutt Sondhi, who founded the Asian Games Federation, was among those who spoke out against the decision. He proposed that the title 'Asian Games be withdrawn from the meeting' and added, "I am fighting for a principle and I will uphold

it even if I have to resign from sports for the rest of my life." Sondhi's comments made him extremely unpopular in Jakarta. Angry protests broke out against him, necessitating police protection, and when the mobs attacked the Indian embassy, he was forced to flee Indonesia.

Two years later, India was one of the four participating teams when Israel hosted the Asian Cup football tournament, Israel won that competition, with India finishing second.

By the 1970s, though, India's position hardened. Israel was not allowed to participate in the World Table Tennis Championship in Calcutta in 1975. Six years later, it was barred when the Asian Games Federation was reorganised into the Asian Olympic Council, which meant Israel could not take part in the 1982 Asian Games in Delhi. In 1986 again, India supported not letting Israel participate in the Seoul Asian Games. And the next year, it barred Israelis from competing in the World Table Tennis Championship in New Delhi.

Cold welcome

It was Vijay Amritraj who swung the needle in 1987. He convinced the Rajiv Gandhi government that the

#SPORTING



1987 Davis Cup team members.



\$10,000 fine and three-year suspension were too high a price for India to pay, and therefore, the Israeli tennis team should be allowed to participate in the Davis Cup tie in Delhi.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization, which represented

Refreshing Vibes on National Lemon Juice Day

celebrated on August 29, National Lemon Juice Day honours the zesty, tangy essence of one of nature's most versatile fruits. Whether used in refreshing summer drinks, salad dressings, marinades, or detox routines, lemon juice adds a vibrant kick to everyday life. This day encourages people to celebrate the simple power of citrus, packed with vitamin C and natural cleansing properties. From a chilled lemonade to a warm honey-lemon tea, it's a reminder of how one small fruit can bring big flavour and health benefits. Raise a glass of something citrusy and toast to the zing of lemon!



Vijay and Anand Amritraj.

lounge of the Delhi airport as their visas were revoked and they were denied entry a week ahead of the match. Israel's Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, called the action 'scandalous.'

Another group of 13 Israelis, comprising sports journalists and fans, chose not to attend the Davis Cup as their local contact in Delhi told them that India's Foreigners Regional Registration Office was withholding landing permits for Israeli groups, pending a blanket approval from the Home Ministry.

Heightened security

Security was stepped up across Delhi before the Davis Cup quarterfinals. The authorities were worried about potential attacks by Palestinians as well as student protests. At a time when this was not the norm, spectators were frisked at the stadium and had to pass metal detectors.

On the same weekend that India was playing the quarterfinals against Israel, the United States was playing West Germany in a relegation tie. Boris Becker complained about the 'pro-American frenzy' in Hartford, Connecticut, and how his teammates felt like 'political prisoners in a foreign court.'

But this was hardly the case. India's real motivations were well known to the Israeli authorities. "The Indians are simply afraid of the stiff punishment imposed by the Lawn Tennis Association," Zvi Meir, director of Israel's tennis governing body, told the Associated Press. When the Israeli tennis players landed in India, they found the welcome less than warm. The players were given restricted visas that were valid for two weeks and had to practice on grass courts in Britain before coming to India. India also did not allow Israeli fans to come and watch the matches in Delhi.

the Palestinian people, protested Israel's decision. Its leader, Yasser Arafat, made fervent appeals to not allow the tie, but it had no effect.

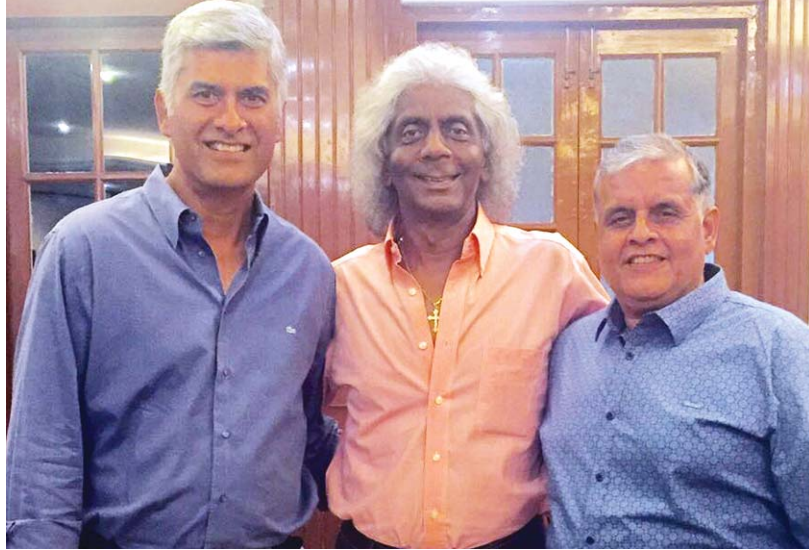
The Jerusalem Post claimed in July 1987 that Arafat was 'concerned that the tournament could be the first move in a thawing of the chill that has characterized Israeli-Indian relations for almost 40 years.'

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Fourteen Israeli tourists who were on a tour of the Far East were forced to spend a night in the transit

The Los Angeles Times compared the atmosphere in Hartford with that in India. "Boom Boom, you should have seen New Delhi," the newspaper said. "At New Delhi, site of the India-Israel Davis Cup quarterfinal, there were stun guns, sub-machine guns, sharpshooters posted on buildings, and blockades at every entrance."



Vasudevan Srinivasan, Anand Amritraj and Ramesh Krishnan.

#SADHANA GARG

Not Today- Some Other Day

The Kaddu Saag, that is traditionally had with dal stuffed Bedwi, was served with masala Puri.



he Purvanchal food festival, currently in full swing at Monarch, the world cuisine restaurant at Holiday Inn City Centre, is a happy mix of Awadhi, Mughlai, Bhojpuri, Bihari food specialties, as is always the case in 'mixes,' not without drawbacks. Broadly speaking, the food could be divided into vegetarian and non-vegetarian categories. The Handi mutton and Biryani need special mention, tender and flavoursome and it was cooked to perfection in a rural style. The Champaran mutton, well marinated in mustard oil and ginger onion garlic paste, slow down cooked in an earthenware pot, locked in all the flavours.

Said Mandar Sharma, an upwardly mobile digital nerd, "The mustard fish was an absolute revelation I have searched for the flavour done right for a while and this was it, tender, flaky with perfect kick of mustard balanced with the right amount of spices."

The mutton curry was rich, hearty with tastes that layered and lingered on palate.

The mutton seekh had that smoky char, juicy and soft, every bite felt like an indulgence.

In the snacks, kesari chicken was a real surprise, warm note of saffron with thickness of cream, on the sweeter side with gentle spices.

Absolutely loved the tava shallow fried tomatoes, tangy, caramelizes and bursting with



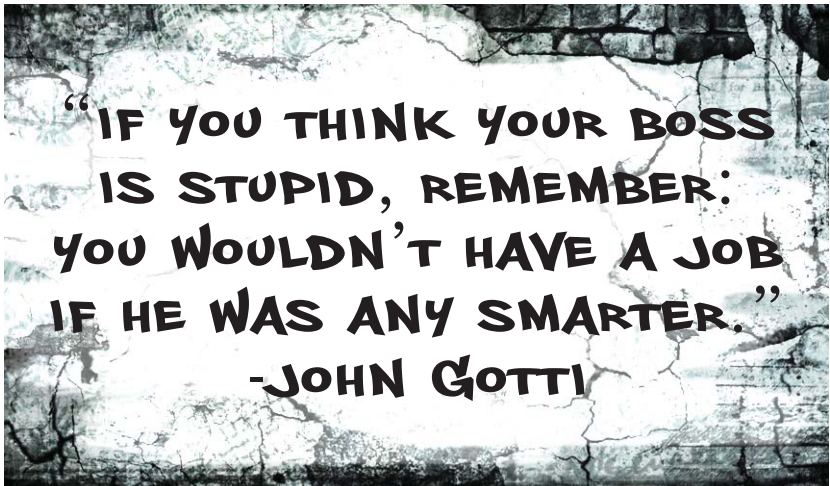
gravy with a tad too much of the sweet flavour.

The Kaddu Saag, that is traditionally had with dal stuffed Bedwi, was served with masala Puri. The Mirchi Panantha was a pleasant surprise.

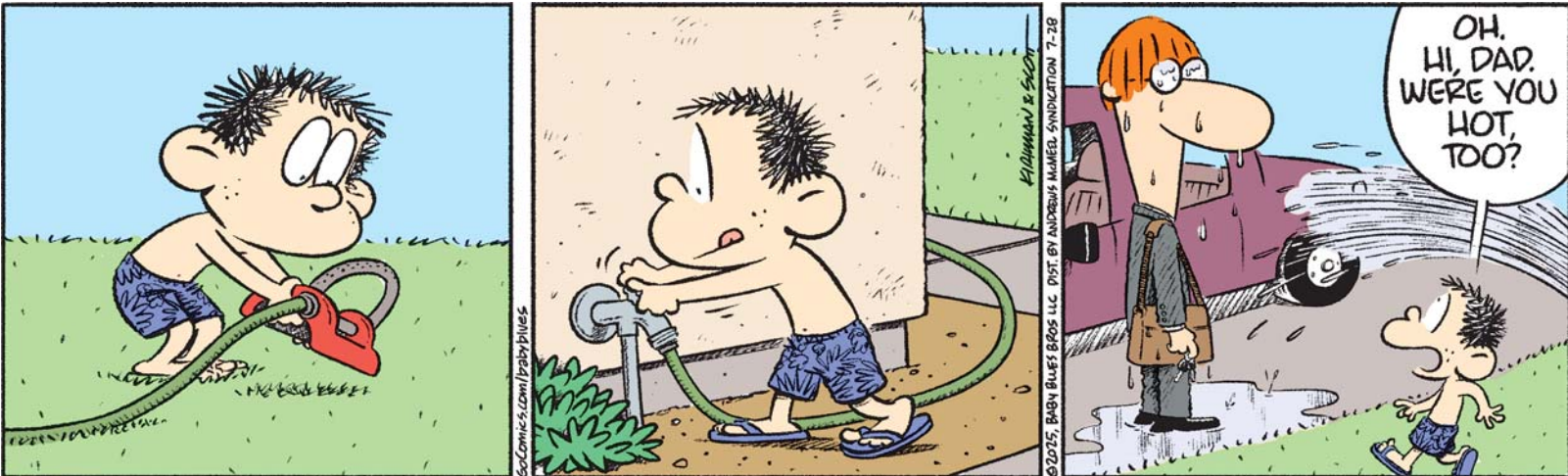
The Lucknow Kesar Pista Zarda left much to be desired. The vermicelli were too thick. The original way is to use the hair thin, handmade vermicelli, which when boiled in milk, till it gets a silky smooth texture, is what makes a good zarda and not something that feels chewy. The Thekua, too, were like Shakarpara and not the size or the taste that an authentic Thekua is, a sweet dish iconic of Southern Nepal, Bihar and Purvanchal.

So, if you do want to savour the Purvanchal cuisine, you might get lucky, if you go on another day as they normally have dynamic menu.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman