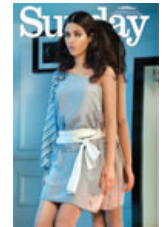


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Saturday, January 30, 2010



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Russia unveils stealth fighter to rival F-22 Raptor

** PAK FA aircraft can fly long distances above the speed of sound as well as simultaneously attack different targets*



MOSCOW: Russia on Friday unveiled a new fighter aircraft touted as a rival of the US F-22 stealth jet and developed amid the highest secrecy as part of a plan to modernise the armed forces.

The fifth generation fighter, manufactured by the Sukhoi company and known as the PAK FA, made a maiden flight of just over 45 minutes at the firm's home base of Komsomolsk-on-Amur in the Far East region. "The flight lasted 47 minutes during which all the aircraft's systems were tested. It was successful," Sukhoi spokeswoman Olga Kayukova told AFP.

"This is the first time it has been unveiled." Pictures broadcast on state television showed the fighter jet — which has been kept closely under wraps for years — flying at altitude and then landing on a snow-surrounded runway. "The aircraft performed well in all stages of the flight programme. It is easy and comfortable to pilot," said Sergei Bogdan, the pilot for the flight, in comments published on the Sukhoi website.

Speed of sound: The new plane can fly long distances above the speed of sound as well as simultaneously attack different targets, according to the Interfax news agency. It can also collate information from satellites and other planes in line with the demands of modern warfare. Until now, even Russian state television had only shown artist's impressions of the plane. Only the United States has such a fifth generation fighter in its armed forces — the F-22 — although it is also developing the lighter F-35.

China is also working to develop a fifth-generation model. "The PAK FA project is one of the most complicated technological projects realised in the post-Soviet era," said the daily Vedomosti. "Without PAK FA, Russia will not be able to independently assure its own security." Russia is currently embarking on a major programme to re-equip its military, not least the air force, which is still using largely Soviet-era equipment and suffers from frequent crashes.

The new fighter, which has been in development since the 1990s, is due to enter the armed forces in 2015, Russian news agencies said. The first flight of the PAK FA (Prospective Aviation System of Frontline Aviation) is being seen in Russia as a major boost for the military after the project was hit by repeated delays over the last years. "There is no doubt that the plane is needed," the ex-commander of the Russian air force, Anatoly Kornukov, told the Interfax news agency. "Our Su-27 and MiG-29 planes are good but have aged. They are 20 or more years old and it's time to have something as a replacement," he said. He said the new plane could easily stand comparison with the US F-22. "It's going to be no worse than an F-22. I've been in an F-22 and I know."

Russia's liberal Nezavisimaya Gazeta struck a more circumspect tone, saying the test version was only a prototype that did not yet contain an advanced engine and it was still unclear what weapons it would carry. Russia's campaign to modernise its military has been marred by repeated setbacks with new equipment, above all a string of failed tests of its new Bulava sea-based intercontinental nuclear-capable missile. Its main defence partner India has also been involved in the PAK FA project and will develop a two seater version of the aircraft under an intellectual property agreement made with Russia. [afp](#)

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