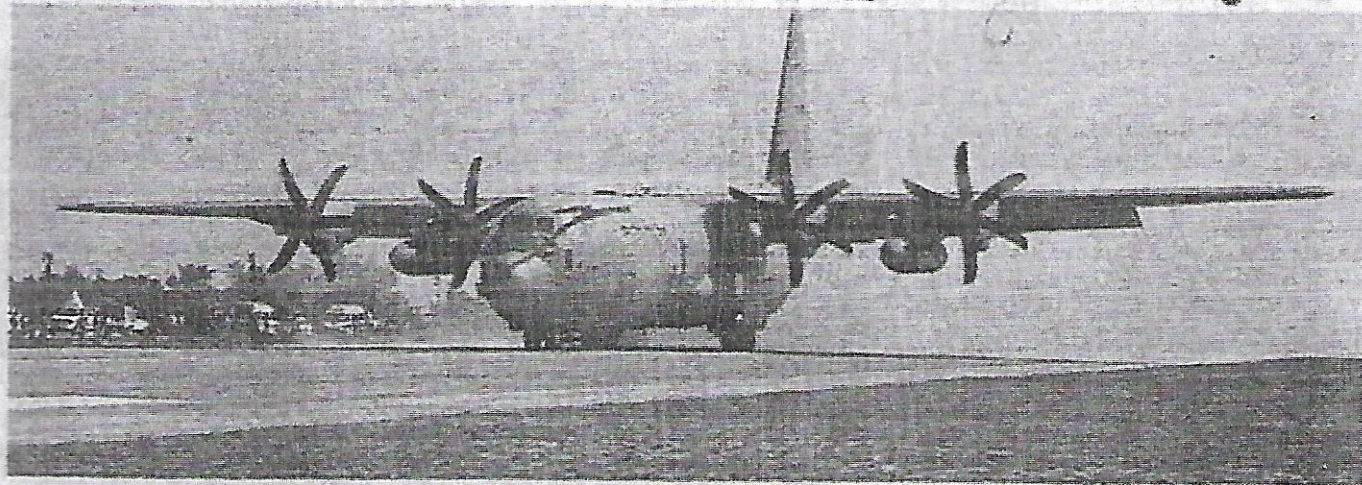


IAF jets carry out drill on Agra-Lucknow Expressway



The 35,000-kg C-130 Hercules transport aircraft lands on the Lucknow-Agra Expressway during an IAF drill near Bangarmau in Unnao district on Tuesday.

PHOTO: PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
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Fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) on Tuesday performed touch-and-go landings on a stretch of the Lucknow-Agra Expressway here, displaying the force's capability to use highways in case of an emergency.

Over a dozen IAF planes, including Mirage 2000s, Sukhoi-30 MKIs and C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft, weighing 35,000 kg, took part in the three-hour exercise near Bangarmau in the district, about 65 km from Lucknow.

The drill simulated an emergency situation when airbases, the first target of bombs

and missiles, would not be available for air operations, necessitating use of highways as landing strips.

Garud commandos, a wing of the IAF's special forces, first landed along with their vehicle in a Super Hercules, securing a landing zone as part of the exercise. The transport aircraft then took off.

The commandos took "positions" on either side of the expressway to secure "the airstrip" for fighter aircraft. The top-of-the-line Sukhoi 30 MKIs and Mirage 2000s took off after touching down on the highway.

As the exercise came to a close, a Super Hercules again landed on the highway and

took off with the commandos. This is the first time that a transport aircraft has landed on a highway, said PRO, defence (central command), Gargi Malik Sinha. Inducted into the Air Force in 2010, the plane can carry 200 commandos.

Mirage 2000 and Sukhoi 30 MKI — which form the backbone of the IAF's fighter — have landed on the Yamuna Expressway near Delhi in the past too. In 2015 and in May 2016, Mirage 2000 planes landed on the expressway.

Sinha said the exercise would test the readiness of the IAF for war or disaster relief operations during floods or any other natural calamity.