

Solar plane pilots urge India to support clean energy drive

March 11 2015, byAjit Solanki



Swiss pilots and founders of Solar Impulse 2 Bertrand Piccard, left, and Andre Boschberg acknowledge the media after landing at an airport in Ahmadabad, India, Wednesday, March 11, 2015. The Swiss-made solar powered aircraft landed in western India on Tuesday night, completing the second leg, and its first sea crossing, of its historic round-the-world trip. The aircraft's wings are covered by more than 17,000 solar cells that recharge the plane's batteries. It flies ideally at around 25 knots, or 45 kph (28 mph). (AP Photo/Ajit Solanki)

The Swiss pilots of a solar-powered airplane on a historic round-the-world journey said Wednesday that they want the people of India to support their campaign for clean energy, a day after the aircraft landed in the country.

Bertrand Piccard and Andre Borschberg spoke to reporters in the western Indian city of Ahmadabad after Piccard flew the single-seat Swiss-made plane there from Muscat, Oman, on the second leg of the 35,000-kilometer (21,700-mile) journey.

Piccard said their goal was to spread the message of adopting clean technologies and improving the quality of life of India's 1.2 billion people. He said they chose to demonstrate this with the world's first aircraft powered by solar energy "because this is what captures the imagination of people."

The fuel-free aircraft, called the Solar Impulse 2, is powered by more than 17,000 solar cells on its wings that recharge the plane's batteries, enabling it to fly.

The round-the-world trip began Monday in Abu Dhabi, with Borschberg piloting the first leg of the trip.

"It was an incredible experience," Borschberg told reporters at a temporary hangar at Ahmadabad's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel international airport, where the plane remains parked.

Borschberg said he practiced yoga to prepare himself for the rigors of flying solo for long hours during the trip.



Crew members gather to push the Solar Impulse 2 towards a hangar after it landed at an airport in Ahmadabad, India, Wednesday, March 11, 2015. The Swiss-made solar powered aircraft landed in western India on Tuesday night, completing the second leg, and its first sea crossing, of its historic round-the-world trip. The aircraft's wings are covered by more than 17,000 solar cells that recharge the plane's batteries. It flies ideally at around 25 knots, or 45 kph (28 mph). (AP Photo/Ajit Solanki)

For the second leg, Piccard was at the controls of the aircraft. The 1,465-kilometer (910-mile) flight from Muscat to Ahmadabad took nearly 16 hours, and took the plane over the Arabian Sea in its first sea crossing.

Piccard said flying to India was a long-cherished dream. "Sixteen years ago, I flew around the world nonstop in a balloon and I flew over India. Today, I am very happy to be back," he said.

He said they chose to land in Ahmadabad because some of the material

used in the plane was sourced from companies near the city.

During their stay in Ahmadabad, Borschberg and Piccard are scheduled to meet with Indian government officials, environmental groups and students to speak to them about sustainable energy.

On Saturday, if weather conditions are suitable, the plane will fly to the northern Indian city of Varanasi to lend support to efforts to clean up the heavily polluted Ganges River.

The Solar Impulse 2 is slated to make 12 stops during its 35,000-kilometer (21,700-mile) journey, including in China and Myanmar, before it crosses over the Pacific Ocean. It will then land in Hawaii and the U.S. Midwest and East Coast before flying over the Atlantic Ocean. It may also stop in southern Europe or North Africa, depending on weather conditions.



Bertrand Piccard, Swiss pilot and co-founder of Solar Impulse 2, displays the

thumbs up symbol after landing at an airport in Ahmadabad, India, Wednesday, March 11, 2015. The Swiss-made solar powered aircraft landed in western India on Tuesday night, completing the second leg, and its first sea crossing, of its historic round-the-world trip. The aircraft's wings are covered by more than 17,000 solar cells that recharge the plane's batteries. It flies ideally at around 25 knots, or 45 kph (28 mph). (AP Photo/Ajit Solanki)

Some legs of the trip, such as over the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, will mean five days and five nights of flying solo.

The fuel-free aircraft's flight has excited people across the world who see solar power as the fuel of the future, providing a source of clean, renewable energy.

One drawback of using the sun's energy was the high cost of solar electric panels. But in recent years, solar panels have become 70 percent less expensive and are expected to become cheaper still as newer, more energy-efficient materials are developed.



Bertrand Piccard, Swiss pilot and co-founder of Solar Impulse 2, waves to the media after landing at an airport in Ahmadabad, India, Wednesday, March 11, 2015. The Swiss-made solar powered aircraft landed in western India on Tuesday night, completing the second leg, and its first sea crossing, of its historic round-the-world trip. The aircraft's wings are covered by more than 17,000 solar cells that recharge the plane's batteries. It flies ideally at around 25 knots, or 45 kph (28 mph). (AP Photo/Ajit Solanki)

However, not many solar-powered planes will be whizzing around any time soon, Piccard said.

"Not everybody will be able fly in a plane like this," he said. "But everyone can use the technologies to have electrical cars, solar heating and lighting in their homes. People can choose new cleaner technologies instead of the old polluting ones."



In this photo released by Solar Impulse "Solar Impulse 2", a solar-powered airplane piloted by Bertrant Piccard, left, from Switzerland lands in Ahmedabad, India on Tuesday March 10, 2015, during its historic round-the-world journey finishing the second leg of the journey from Muscat in Oman. With his 15:20 hours flight he set a new world record for solar distance flight with 1,486 kilometers. The trip continues on Sunday with Andre Boschberg, right, being the pilot. (AP Photo/Solar Impulse, Jean Revillard)



In this photo released by Solar Impulse "Solar Impulse 2", a solar-powered airplane piloted by Bertrant Piccard, from Switzerland approaches the airport in Ahmedabad, India on Tuesday March 10, 2015, during its historic round-the-world journey finishing the second leg of the journey from Muscat in Oman. With his 15:20 hours flight he set a new world record for solar distance flight with 1,486 kilometers. The trip continues on Sunday with Andre Boschberg, being the pilot. (AP Photo/Solar Impulse, Jean Revillard)



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