

Solar plane lands in east China ahead of most ambitious leg

April 21 2015



This photo released by the Solar Impulse project shows the Solar Impulse 2 preparing to take off from Chongqing, China to Nanjing on April 21, 2015

Solar Impulse 2 landed late Tuesday in the Chinese city of Nanjing, finishing the sixth stage of its landmark 12-leg quest to circumnavigate the globe powered only by the sun.

With pilot Bertrand Piccard at the controls, the pioneering single-seater

aircraft touched down at 11:31 pm (1531 GMT), after a 17-hour trip from the southwestern megacity of Chongqing some 1,190 kilometres away.

Its arrival came after repeated meteorological delays and its other Swiss co-pilot, Andre Borschberg, returned to Europe to be treated for migraines.

Borschberg is expected to return to China by Friday, a Solar Impulse 2 spokesperson told AFP Tuesday.

"Wishing good health recovery to my friend (Andre Borschberg)," Piccard said in a Twitter message sent Tuesday morning as he flew high above China's Yangtze River. "He should have flown this leg."

Borschberg tweeted back with a photo of Piccard in the cockpit and a message that the pilot—clad in an orange flight suit, blue air mask and dark sunglasses—was "looking great after more than 10 hours of flight".

Nanjing, located near Shanghai along the lower reaches of the Yangtze, is the final stop for the aircraft before it departs on the most ambitious leg of its journey: a solo non-stop flight for five days and nights across the Pacific to Hawaii, a distance of 8,500 kilometres (5,270 miles).

Solar Impulse 2 is powered by more than 17,000 solar cells built into wings that, at 72 metres, are longer than those of a Boeing 747 and approaching those of an Airbus A380 superjumbo.



Solar Impulse 2 flies over the Mandalay International Airport in Myanmar on March 30, 2015

The plane is the successor of Solar Impulse, which notched up a 26-hour flight in 2010, proving its ability to store enough power in lithium batteries during the day to keep flying at night.

The team hopes to promote green energy with its round-the-world attempt.

Solar Impulse 2 arrived at Chongqing airport from Myanmar on March 31 and had been due to make only a brief stop in Chongqing, but was held up for weeks by weather and safety concerns.

Ridiculed by the aviation industry when it was first unveiled, the Solar Impulse venture has since been hailed around the world, including by

UN chief Ban Ki-moon.

The plane's maiden global circumnavigation began in Abu Dhabi last month and is scheduled to take in 12 stops, with a total flight time of around 25 days spread over five months.

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