

# INDIAN FIGHTER PILOT FREED, RETURNS HOME

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Amid tight security scores of people in jubilant mood, waving the national flag were seen gathered on the Indian side of the border at a distance from the Attari Joint Check Post to welcome the IAF pilot. On Wednesday, IAF fighter jets intercepted Pakistan Air Force jets as they entered Indian air space and attempted to bomb military installations. Wg Cdr Varthaman was in a formation of Mig-21s which intercepted them and engaged in a dog fight with an F-16 in which he shot it and was shot down too and crashed in PoK. As a precautionary measure, the daily retreat ceremony at the Attari-Wagah border, conducted by the Border Security Force (BSF) was closed for the public. Amritsar Deputy Commissioner Shiv Dular Singh Dhillon told reporters that beating the retreat ceremony would not be open for public viewing and the decision to this effect was taken by the BSF. "For all of us here the most important thing right now is the return of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman. Everything else is secondary. Probably, the BSF did not want anything else to interfere in this process and therefore this step was taken," said Mr. Dhillon. The BSF conducts the ceremony in coordination with its cross-border counterparts Pakistan Rangers. It involves lowering of the flags of the two countries along with foot stomping manoeuvres of the troops. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh welcomed the release of Wg Cdr Varthaman and urged Pakistan to admit to, and release, the Prisoners of War (PoWs) still in its captivity from the 1971 war.

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