


Indian tycoon sets hot-air balloon record

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MUMBAI, India (Reuters) -- An Indian business tycoon with a penchant for adventure created a new hot-air balloon altitude record on Saturday, touching the edge of space in a climb to nearly 70,000 feet (21,336 meters).



 Singhania celebrates after a record-breaking flight in his hot air balloon.

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 **MUMBAI, India (Reuters) -- An Indian business tycoon with a penchant for adventure created a new hot-air balloon altitude record on Saturday, touching the edge of space in a climb to nearly 70,000 feet (21,336 meters).**

Vijaypat Singhania, an amateur aviator whose family controls the JK Group, broke the 17-year-old world record of 64,997 feet (19,810 meters) set by British-based Swede Per Lindstrand by ascending to approximately 69,852 feet, the edge of space.

Singhania, 67, had originally aimed for 70,000 feet, but decided against it towards the end of the journey.

"I was only about a 100 feet short," he said after landing. "I encountered problems with the burners. I could have stayed back, burnt a little fuel, maybe for an hour and tried again.

"Above 45,000 feet it is dangerous territory. If something goes wrong, you have nobody to blame. So better get the hell out of there as quickly as possible."

The Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) says an aviator must achieve at least a 3 percent improvement on an existing record to qualify for recognition as a new record.

Singhania's record awaits formal ratification.

"Representatives of the Aeronautical Club of India, who are here, will submit a report to the FAI," Colin Prescot, who designed the balloon with Andy Elson, told reporters.

Singhania took off at dawn in a specially designed nylon balloon -- powered by 18 burners, fueled by kerosene and propane -- from a polo ground in India's commercial hub of Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay.

He rode the rising warm air west and then moved north before landing at 1130 am (0600 GMT)) near Nasik, 185 km (115 miles) from Mumbai.

An avid flyer, Singhania flew solo a microlight aircraft from Britain to India in a record 23 days in 1988. He also won the International Around the World Air Race in 1994.

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