

Solar plane lands after 21-hour flight

WASHINGTON: The Solar Impulse, a single-person solar-powered aircraft piloted by a Swiss adventurer, landed in St. Louis, Missouri early on Tuesday on its transcontinental flight after more than 21 hours in the air.

The organiser's ground crew rushed out on the tarmac of the Lambert-St Louis International Airport when the aircraft, which has four electric engines and a 63-metre wingspan, landed at 1157 IST.

"I feel [like] I was coming back from another world," said pilot Bertrand Piccard upon landing. "It's almost a shock" to return to normal life. Despite the long hours "I didn't really feel the fatigue. I felt very fortunate to be up there."

The landing was broadcast live on the organiser's website, live.solarimpulse.com.

Mr. Piccard departed the Dallas-Fort Worth airport in Texas aboard the Solar Impulse at 1436 IST on Monday on the third leg of a five-stop journey across the U.S. aimed at showcasing the potential of renewable energy technologies.

St. Louis was chosen as the Midwest stopover to pay homage to aviation pioneer



SWEEPING AWAY FOSSIL FUELS: *The Solar Impulse plane takes off from Moffett Field NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, California in this May 3 file photo. - PHOTO: AFP*

Charles Lindbergh and his "Spirit of St Louis", the first plane to fly from New York to Paris non-stop.

The Texas-Missouri leg was Mr. Piccard's longest flight to date.

Powerful storms that hit the St. Louis area late on Friday rendered Solar Impulse's airport hangar unusable, so organisers deployed what they described as a "revolutionary" inflatable mobile hangar.

The hangar consists of several heavy-duty inflatable segments that attach to each other and can be sealed off like a cocoon.

The mobile hangar is designed to be used at unplanned stops, or at airports unequipped to handle the large solar airplane, said Nils Ryer, head of ground crew operations.

The goal of the Solar Impulse project is to showcase what can be accomplished without fossil fuels, and has set as its "ultimate goal" an around-the-world flight in 2015.

The first leg of Solar Impulse's U.S. tour took place on May 3, when Mr. Piccard flew the aircraft from the San Francisco, California area to Phoenix. - AFP

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