

HUMANE FACE OF IAF:

AID TO THE CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

Disaster relief is a major area of responsibility of the Armed Forces in general and the Air Force in particular. Disasters or natural calamities, such as floods, earthquakes, avalanches or fires; require swift response, which is most effectively provided through military aviation. It need hardly be stated that natural calamities occur in India with uncanny regularity. Speedy transportation of rescue and recovery teams, medical aid, food supplies, relief material and evacuation of casualties are some of the activities for which military aviation is considered eminently suitable. However, it would neither be possible nor necessary to quantify the contribution of IAF towards this national effort as such contribution cannot be provided so effectively and speedily by any other agency, nor can it be translated into monetary equivalence to be added to GDP. Response to the cyclone on Gujarat coast in June 1998, the earthquake in Gujarat on 26 January 2001, the Tsunami of 25 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean, the earthquake in Jammu & Kashmir on 08 October 2005 are vivid examples of contribution by the IAF in aid to civil authority during testing times for the nation.

The Bhuj Earthquake

On 26 Jan 2001 an extremely severe earthquake struck the state of Gujarat at 0846hrs. The earthquake peaking at a massive 7.9 on the Richter scale had its epicenter about 20 Km north-east of the town of Bhuj, with a population of about 50,000. One of the first to respond, despite the tragic loss of life at the local air base were the personnel from the IAF. All IAF helicopters were put on stand-by. Fifteen medium lift Mi-17/Mi-8 and 02 heavy lift Mi-26 carried out more than 50 sorties, to practically make an air bridge to the quake devastated areas, which were practically cut off from the rest of the country. Medium and heavy transport aircraft carried the relief material from different parts of the country, besides airlifting the wounded needing tertiary care to metropolitan cities.

The Killer Tsunami

On the morning of 26 Dec 2004 terror ripped apart the whole of South-East Asia as monstrous sea waves triggered by an under sea earthquake off the coast of Sumatra islands. The killer waves engulfed everything which came in its way. The Indonesian islands were the most affected although devastation was almost the same in all other places including the Andamans and coastal Tamil Nadu. Operation Sea Wave was activated by the IAF. It was a huge relief campaign consisting of massive contingents of transport aircrafts with aid and relief material were constantly engaged in helping the affected population. While all operations fell under the auspices of Ops Sea Wave; operations in other areas were given specific names – Ops Mother for the East Coast; Ops Castor for the Maldives and Ops Rainbow for Sri Lanka. It was due to this massive effort that the region could limp back to normalcy within a short period.

The White Tsunami

Close on the heels of the tragedy of Tsunami in the Indian Ocean, Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) area experienced heavy snowfall in January and February 2005. This blocked the vital Jammu - Srinagar National Highway No. 1-A. Large number of passengers including defence and para-military personnel were stranded. IAF launched a massive air evacuation operation between 03 Jan 05 to 17 Jan 05. A total of 353 sorties were flown to airlift 19,625 defence personnel, 2,854 para-military troops and 385 civilians. In spite of nature's fury and disruption of normal life during the *White Tsunami*, IAF remained steadfast and devoted in its commitment to provide air effort, providing a lifeline to the valley. While the aircraft operated at their limits of performance envelope, highly motivated personnel of the IAF worked tirelessly

behind the machines to ensure the accomplishment of relief operations in a swift and time bound manner at all the airbases in valley.

The Society Salutes “IAF’s Aid to the Civil Administration”

Members of the Indian Society of Aerospace Medicine, who have always been an integral part of any military aid to the civil, made a humble effort to showcase this humane face of the IAF to the world during the 54th Congress of Aviation and Space Medicine hosted by the Society at Bangalore in Sep 2006. This exhibition stall had a series of posters highlighting the mammoth task undertaken by Air Warriors in support of the country in times of natural disasters. Delegates from more than 40 countries were, beyond doubt, impressed by the Society’s ‘salute to the air warriors’.



THE SAGA OF CIVIL AVIATION IN INDIA

Commercial aviation commenced in India in February 1911 as a mail flight. The first airmail flight piloted by French pilot M. Picquet flew from Allahabad to Naini, a distance of 6 miles. However, it took more than 20 years for the country to have its own airline.

In 15 October 1932, Tata Son's Limited, later Air India International, commenced weekly airmail service with a Puss Moth aircraft between Karachi and Madras via Ahmedabad and Bombay, covering over 1,300 miles. In its very first year of operation, Tata Airlines flew 160,000 miles, carrying 155 passengers and 10.71 ton of mail. In the next few years, Tata Airlines continued to rely for its revenue on the mail contract with the Government of India for carriage of surcharged mail, including a considerable quantity of overseas mail brought to Karachi by Imperial Airways. The same year, Tata Airlines launched its longest domestic flight - Mumbai to Trivandrum with a six-seater Miles Merlin.

In 1945, India's second domestic airline, Deccan Airways, was founded with seventy-one per cent ownership by the Nizam of Hyderabad and balance 29 per cent by Tata Sons. Deccan Airways, one of the first domestic airlines, flew in the Hyderabad region, using a fleet of 12 Douglas DC-3s. Its first service began in July 1946.

At the time of independence, the number of air transport companies, which were operating within and beyond the frontiers of the company, carrying both air cargo and passengers, was nine. It was reduced to eight, with Orient Airways shifting to Pakistan. These airlines were: Tata Airlines, Indian National Airways, Air service of India, Deccan Airways, Ambica Airways, Bharat Airways and Mistry Airways.

In early 1948, a joint sector company, Air India International Limited, was established by the Government of India and Air India, erstwhile Tata Airline, with a capital of Rs 2 crore and a fleet of three Lockheed constellation aircraft. Its first flight took off on June 8, 1948 on the Bombay - London route. At the time of its nationalization in 1953, it was operating four weekly services between Bombay -London and two weekly services between Bombay and Nairobi. This joint venture was headed by J.R.D. Tata, a visionary who had founded the first airline in India in 1932 and had himself piloted its inaugural flight.

The Indian Government nationalised the airlines industry in 1953, with enactment of Air Corporation Act. Assets of eight existing air companies viz. Deccan Airways, Airways India, Bharat Airways, Himalayan Aviation, Kalinga Air Lines, Indian National Airways, Air India, Air Services of India, were merged to form the national carrier. This included Air India International for the international routes and Indian Airlines Corporation for domestic sector. A large fleet of 74 DC-3 Dakota, 12 Viking, 3 DC-4 and various smaller aircraft were part of this large airline. In 1960, India entered the jet age when Air India began operating its first Boeing 707-437. It also marked the year when USA was connected to India by an Indian airliner.

After 40 years, in 1994 Air Corporation Act was repealed ending the monopoly of the national air corporations, enabling entry of private operators.

The first Indian, or maybe even Asian, to have an airplane was the young Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh. With keen interest in aviation, the Maharaja bought three planes, including a Bleriot monoplane and Farman biplanes from Europe.

In 1929, Aga Khan offered through the Royal Aero Club, a special prize of £ 500 for "a solo flight completed within six weeks from the date of starting". The prize was to remain open for one year from January 1930. There were three contestants – an eager JRD Tata, Man Mohan Singh, a civil engineer graduating from Bristol who had learnt to fly in England, and ASPY Merwan Engineer, later the Chief of the IAF. The three men set out flying single-engine, light aeroplanes with simple instruments and without

radio. Man Mohan Singh took off from Croydon airport, south of London, in a Gypsy Moth which he called Miss India; ASPY Engineer followed the same route while JRD Tata, also in a Gypsy Moth, started his journey in the reverse direction. After Croydon, Man Mohan Singh flew on to Lympe, Le Bourget (Paris), Dijon, Marseillers, Rome, Naples, Catania, Tripoli and Sirle. From Gaza, he flew eastwards to India, with Engineer trailing a day behind. Singh finally landed at Drigh Road, Karachi on 12 May 1930, winning the historic air race. Engineer landed the next day and, though he came second, due to a technicality, was eventually declared the winner, which Singh accepted.

The Scion of Indian Civil Aviation – JRD Tata

Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata, was born on 29 July 1904 in Paris. He spent much of his childhood in France. In 1922, JRD returned to India to join the family business. He inherited most of his grandfather Jamshedji's industrial empire, Tata & Sons, as an unpaid apprentice in 1925. He had the distinction of being the pioneer in aviation in India. On 10 February 1929, he became the first Indian to pass the British pilot's license examination; and fly solo from Karachi to Mumbai. With this distinctive honor of being India's first pilot, he was instrumental in giving wings to India by setting up the first Indian airline company, Tata Aviation Service in 1932. In 1948, JRD launched Air India International as India's first international airline. After the nationalisation of his company in 1953, the Indian Government appointed JRD as Chairman of Air India and a director on the Board of Indian Airlines, a position which he retained for 25 years. For his crowning achievements in Aviation, JRD was bestowed with the title of Honorary Air Commodore. He was bestowed with the Bharat Ratna in 1992.



Women in Indian Aviation

The Indian women were not far behind in earning their wings. In 1932, Urmila K Parikh became the first woman to get a pilot's licence when she was given an 'A' licence by the Aero Club of India and Burma. In 1951, Prem Mathur became the first woman commercial pilot. She flew planes owned by Deccan Airways. In 1956, Durba Banerjee was inducted as the first woman pilot of Indian Airlines. Captain Saudamini Deshmukh commanded the first all-women crew flight on an Indian Airlines Fokker Friendship F-27 on the Calcutta -Silchar route in 1985. Capt Nivedita Bhasin of Indian Airlines at 26 became the youngest pilot in civil aviation history to command a jet aircraft when she piloted IC-492 on the Bombay – Aurangabad - Udaipur sector on 1 January 1990. Bhasin also became the country's first woman check-pilot on an Airbus A300 aircraft.