

DGCA revises duty time rules for pilots

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New Delhi: Civil Aviation regulator DGCA, India has made significant changes to its rules which will ensure pilots get more rest and restrict the hours they work at night in the cockpit. It has made it mandatory for airlines to submit a quarterly report on fatigue report filed by pilots.

The regulator's action comes after complaints from a large number of pilots that they are being stretched by the airlines using the regulator's soft rules which ensures they are not violating the norms. In August, an IndiGo pilot died due to a sudden cardiac arrest at the Nagpur airport minutes before operating the flight.

Civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said the changes is in line with international best practices, will ensure India has the necessary arsenal as the country prepares to clinch the largest domestic aviation market title in the future.

“A bunch of much-awaited reforms in Flight Duty Time Limitations for our pilots has come through. After in-depth analysis of pilot rosters, fatigue-related reports and direct feedback from pilots, we have introduced the new regulations that include increased rest periods, redefining night duty, and regular fatigue reports to be shared by airlines,” Scindia said.

The minister also said that the regulator will soon implement a Fatigue Risk Management System (FRMS), which will be a data-driven approach to enhance monitoring of flight crew fatigue.

According to the new rules which have been opened for public consultation, the regulator has cut down the maximum flight duty period from 13 to 10 hours for a pilot operating at night that is between 12 AM and 6 AM. DGCA has also said that a pilot can do a maximum of two landings during that period. The definition of night has also been amended which now covering 12 AM-6 AM from 12 AM- 5 AM under the previous regulations.

“Pilots operating that period remain the most vulnerable to fatigue because it falls within the window of circadian low (WOCL) meaning the body experiences the highest level of sleepiness and performance capability is at lowest. We want to limit the number of flights a pilot does during that period,” a senior DGCA official said.

There has been an exponential increase in the number of red eye flights which depart at night and arrive the next morning over the last few years due to slot constraint at metro airports.

For flights which are above 14 hours, DGCA has restricted the maximum flight time to 17 hours and asked airlines to provide a rest of at least 120 hours after each flight. The rest period shall increase by 24 hours after 02 consecutive ULR flights.

“Multiple pilots had submitted the feedback that most airports have multi-terminal operations now due to which the pilot, after a flight has to come out of the terminal, commute to the new one and go through all the procedures again. They said that the existing rules don’t consider the time taken for this. So, this change has been made,” the official said.

