

Indian aviation faces double whammy

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 06 November, 2023



Mumbai: The Indian aviation sector is cruising through a strange dichotomy. On the one hand, there is a serious shortage of trained and experienced pilots; and on the other, is a long roster of licensed but inadequately skilled pilots, many of whom have even jettisoned their dreams to fly to take up ground staff duties at airports, said several people directly connected with the aviation sector.

Many a time domestic flight training academies are not able to meet the demand for experienced and type-rated pilots for the new batches of aircraft that aviation companies have requisitioned in the recent years, said industry experts.

Read More: [Family travel market losing shine](#)

Besides, several aviation academies are not able to complete the commercial pilot licence (CPL) within the stipulated time (15-24 months); often aspirants take as much as four years to get a basic CPL due to inadequate number of trainer aircraft and training simulators, said officials from training academies.

"A commercial pilot licence should take about two years but often it gets extended - sometimes up to 4-5 years - as trainee pilots must wait for a chance to fly due to inadequate number of aircraft," said retired Air Cmde RV Kumar, director for

quality and safety at Hercules Aviation Training School.

Lower number of quality trained instructors and the shrinkage of the number of flying clubs are adding to the problem.

"Most of the trained unemployed pilots either do not have the proficiency or 'currency' (currency refers to the rules that govern how much flying, training and assessments a pilot must complete within a given period)," said Captain Mihir Bhagvati, president, Bombay Flying Club, and founder of Flying Charters.

About 400-500 commercial pilots graduate every year from various flight training schools in India, whereas the country would require about 1,000-1,100 pilots per year to meet the rising demand for air travel, new aircraft joining the fleet and newer routes getting added.

Capt Amit Singh, former head of pilot training at IndiGo, said: "The number of pilots available (including the people who are unemployed) are not a real picture of what is happening. Even if there is a talent pool, not all of them are ready to be deployed to fly."

"Airlines put them through their own filters of technical and psychometric evaluation, and many may not qualify," said Singh, who now runs an NGO Safety Matters Foundation.

To secure a CPL, an aspirant must spend about ₹40-50 lakh. Additionally, a sum of ₹20-25 lakh is required for him/her to get type-rated on a particular type of aircraft. This adds to the financial burden of entry-level graduate pilots as there is no guarantee that even after spending so much money, they will be absorbed by an airline.

"Gestation period to create a good pilot is longer than any other profession," said B Govindarajan, founder of aviation training company Tirwin. "There are many youngsters spending money and taking type-rating after CPL, but there is no guarantee of landing a job, with many falling short on required skills," he added. "There are lot of trained pilots working as ground staff and losing hope every day," said Govindarajan.

Concurred Satyendra Pandey, managing partner at aviation services firm AT-TV: "There is a shortage of trained commanders on type, which means captains with a certain number of hours on the specific type of aircraft."

"Air India and IndiGo will continue to be the most sought-after airlines as they can give a clear career path, international exposure and better pay than smaller players, who will continue to face the brunt," said a partner at a professional services firms.

However, the head of a North India-based flight simulation training company said: "The problem of unemployment of domestic pilots - trained in independent local flying clubs - will intensify as the bigger airlines open their own flight training academies and prefer to employ those trained under their cadet training programmes."

