

LOK SABHA DEBATES

LOK SABHA

Tuesday, August 6, 1991/Sravana 15,
1913 (Saka)

*The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of
the Clock*

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[English]

Fleet Renewal by Air India and Indian Airlines

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*307. SHRI V. SREENIVASA
PRASAD:

SHRI M. V. CHANDRA-
SHEKARA MURTHY:

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIA-
TION AND TOURISM be pleased
to state:

(a) whether the Government have expressed serious concern over the aged fleet of the Air India and the Indian Air-lines;

(b) if so, whether the Government have any proposal for the fleet renewal programme on a long term basis; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and the time by which a decision in this regard is likely to be taken?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM (SHRI M.O.H. FAROOK): (a) to (c) The fleet requirements of Air India and Indian Airlines are kept under constant review. Both Air India and Indian Airlines have been directed recently to prepare a long term perspective plan for fleet renewal. A decision will be taken after the plan is submitted and considered.

SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD: Sir, sometime back, the Minister has expressed his serious concern over the ageing fleet of the Air India and the Indian Airlines. Now in his reply also he has stated that he has directed the Air India and the Indian Airlines to prepare a long term perspective plan for fleet renewal. I would like to know from the hon. Minister what exactly are the necessary steps that are going to be taken by the Air India and the Indian Airlines for the renewal of the ageing fleet.

SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK: Sir, the plan will be submitted soon and we will take a decision.

SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD: What are the steps...(Interruptions).

MR. SPEAKER: The decision is yet to be taken.

SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD: My second supplement is regarding Airbus A-320. I would like to know whether the Government is evaluating the performance of the A-320. It already had a tragic crash in Bangalore and it had a couple of emergency landings at other places due to technical fault. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what steps are being taken to improve the performance and safety of airbus A-320.

MR. SPEAKER: This is unconnected to the main question. If you want to answer, I have no objection.

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM (SHRI MADHAV RAO SCINDIA): This is not relevant to the main question. But I would certainly use this opportunity to put at rest any misconception about the A-320. As far as its performance is concerned, it is known all over the world that this aircraft is the latest in the state of the art technology and there is nothing wrong with the aircraft. The Ramdas Committee went into all the aspects after the tragedy that took place in Bangalore and the Committee had mainly put in down to pilot error. But there are other recommendations regarding infrastructure support that is required. Almost all those items have been implemented. In fact, as far as the aircraft is concerned, there are no major problems in the aircraft. Small snags appear in every type of aircraft and there is nothing to worry about. A-320 is a very safe aircraft and as I have said just now, it represents the latest in the state of the art technology.

SHRI M. V. CHANDRASHEKARA MURTHY: I would like to know from the hon. Minister what is the normal lifespan of an aircraft at the international level, when compared to our standards. Also, how is the age of an aircraft determined? Is it in terms of years or in terms of its total flying hours?

SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK: Sir, we have a mixed fleet. The international standard varies from country to country. As far as we are concerned, we are keeping it from 15 to 20 years. We want to keep it within 15 years. That is our target.

[*Translation*]

SHRI SHANKAR SINGH VAGHELA: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to know the period for which the air-buses were grounded and the loss

incurred by the Government as a result thereof. What is the present position and the number of airbuses lying idle and the reasons thereof; whether it is because of dearth of pilots or the trained pilots. For how long A-320 Airbuses were grounded till today, and the total loss suffered because of the same and the reasons for keeping these airbuses idle. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Sir, again I don't think this is really related to the main question.

MR. SPEAKER: The question is about the planning of the capacity utilisation.

SHRI SHANKAR SINGH VAGHELA: Sir, it relates to the aged fleet of the Air India.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: I can very much answer this question now when we are throwing the whole subject open. I agreed to answer the supplementary put by the hon. Member just now, though it was not related to the main question. In this way if I start answering every supplementary...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI RAM NAIK: When you can answer the supplementary put by the other hon. Member, why cannot you answer this one?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: As this question is not related, I don't have the notes ready to support me. I stand to be corrected. But I think A-320 was grounded between the period of 8 to 10 months. After examination they were put into operation first on the evacuation of the Gulf and later they were brought into service sometimes in November or December. The Hon. Minister of Power informed me that it was in November. As he has a store of information, I would like to rely on what he is saying. The fact of the matter is that we have 18 A-320. Normally, on an average two are al-

ways in maintenance by rotation. The rest of 16 are in flying condition but at no given time more than 12 are in the air because one of the recommendations of the Ramdas Committee was that our pilots should be even more vigorously trained to be able to handle the latest technology that the cockpit has got. We do not in any way want to compromise with the safety of the passengers. So, until we are certain that the pilot is fully trained, we will not put him in command or we will not put him in the cockpit of A-320. So far we have enough crew to handle 12 A-320. Intensive training is going on and by December we should have enough crew to man the entire fleet of 16 which will be in the air at one given time.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: I would like to know whether it is a fact that three out of 11 Air bus 300 have been lying idle for the last several months at Bombay Airport because the Indian Airlines engineers are demanding parity in wages with the Air India.

MR. SPEAKER: The question is about aging of aircrafts and augmenting of the fleet capacity.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: Sir, my question relates to capacity utilisation as three aircrafts are lying idle for several months. I would like to know whether the Government will take up this matter with the Indian Airlines Engineer.

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE: Sir, the question refers to the fleet renewal.

MR. SPEAKER: No, you don't have to explain.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: My supplementary relates to capacity utilisation also.

MR. SPEAKER: Please come to the point. The ambit of the ques-

tion should not be so wide that you don't get pointed reply.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: Sir, he is ready to reply. I have said that three aircrafts are lying idle.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Sir, as this is not a matter of age but of wage, I would require a separate notice.

SHRI MANORANJAN BHAKTA: Sir, during the past Congress Government, headed by Shri Rajiv Gandhi there used to be a flight from Delhi via Bhubaneswar to Port Blair. But subsequently this was withdrawn. Then, again permission was given to private aircraft to fly to Port Blair.

MR. SPEAKER: This does not pertain to this question. You are a very good friend of the Civil Aviation Minister. You can talk to him privately.

SHRI MANORANJAN BHAKTA: Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether it is due to the ageing of the aircraft, the aircraft were grounded. When is he going to restore the air services? This is my pointed question.

MR. SPEAKER: It is a very simple question.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Sorry.

SHRI MANORANJAN BHAKTA: I have asked a pointed question. I wanted to know whether it is due to ageing of the aircraft that they are grounded. It comes within the ambit of this question.

MR. SPEAKER: He wants a separate notice.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: It is nothing to do with the ageing of the aircraft.

SHRI RAM NAIK: There is a particular age for every aircraft. It depends upon the company which is producing or manufacturing it. I want to know how many aircrafts are in use at present which are overaged? I want to know the number and why are they being used?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: There is no particular specification as far as my knowledge goes, laid down for the use of an aircraft, the ageing of an aircraft...

SHRI RAM NAIK: It should be there.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Because throughout its life, every single part of an aircraft is under constant renewal. But every Airlines, normally, ensure that maintenance costs are kept down and the useability goes up. Because with age, naturally, all of us tend to wear a little quicker. Therefore, it is not that the aircraft was unsafe to fly beyond 15 years or 20 years. The hon. Member will be surprised to know that a quarter of the total fleet in the world is above the age of 20 years. So, it is not that it cannot fly, it can fly but the commercial viability becomes very low.

SHRI RAM NAIK: That is what we want.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: I am just marshalling the facts. Therefore, the commercial viability does certainly go down because the maintenance effort required is all that much greater.

Moreover, our Indian Airlines' fleet is fairly now young in age. Because we have eighteen A320s which are almost new and we have 12 which will be coming in I think some time in early, 1995. It will bring down the average age considerably. Apart from that, we are also going into a long term perspective plan so that a

uniform policy is laid down over the future 20 years in order to see that there is no ad hoc and arbitrary decision taken. Of course, the decisions will have to be changed depending on the market conditions and technology changes. But generally, we will try and follow that and bring the average age of an aircraft down. But none of our aircraft are unsafe. That is what the Member is meaning and no particular age is laid down...

SHRI RAM NAIK: What about the economic viability?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Naturally, the economic viability goes down. Why do we want to keep the aircraft? Not just because they are good looking and that they are young. It is because, the commercial viability goes down.

So, we have 4 Boeing 737s which, we are going to retire. In fact we have already advertised for sale. I think most of them are over 20 years old. We are considering also, further phasing out of another eight which are ranging between 15 years and 19 years so that we can bring that age down. So, about 12 aircraft will be phased out very soon of which 4 Boeings have already been advertised. These are Boeing 737s.

[Translation]

SHRI YELLAIAH NANDI: Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Andhra Pradesh, Tirupati Balaji is one of the most scared places. Earlier, a 48 seater aeroplane Avro used to ply there, which is now replaced by a 18 seater Vayudoor aeroplane and because of the lower capacity the passengers are facing great difficulty. I would like to know from the Minister through you whether there is any proposal under consideration to resume operation of 48 seater Avro Aeroplane.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: Disallowed.
(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

SHRI DAU DAYAL JOSHI: Mr. Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister be pleased to state whether the places where Vayudoot services have been introduced...

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: Disallowed.

(Interruptions)*

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE: In view of the ageing of the aircrafts and in view of resource constraint, will the Minister think of withdrawing some of the domestic flights which are not essential so that both of us can be saved?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: These schedules and flight destinations are matters which are under constant review.

SHRI SHRAVAN KUMAR PATEL: Apart from the economic viability of the old aircrafts, there is a factor which is known as metal fatigue of the aircraft. Is the hon. Minister aware of that aspect and has that aspect also been taken into consideration?

SHRI M. O. H. FAROOK: All the aspects have been taken into consideration.

[Translation]

Mailani-Shahjahanpur Railway Line

*308. DR. P. R. GANGWAR: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a railway line was in operation between Mailani-Shahjahanpur long back;

(b) whether it was promised recently to operate the said line; and

(c) if so, when this line is likely to be restored?

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MALLIKARJUN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) Does not arise.

[Translation]

DR. P. R. GANGWAR: A railway line was in operation between Mailani and Shahjahanpur which has been abandoned now. May I know whether that area is not inhabited by human beings? The entire population of that area is worried because that railway line has been removed. When this line is likely to be restored and the steps being taken by the Government in this regard?

[English]

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: Actually, this line had been abandoned before Independence. Now, at the moment, the land is with the State Government; and in that land the construction of National Highway No. 29 is going on.

[Translation]

DR. P. R. GANGWAR: I mean to say that this abandoned line may kindly be restored so that the common men may get some relief. May I know by when this line is likely to be restored?

[English]

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: There is no question of constructing any line. However, for the facility of the passengers, there is a service from Mailani to Pilibhit and from Pilibhit to Shahjahanpur.

*Not recorded.