

# Air India's Maintenance Procedures Raise Serious Questions

**December 20, 2015.**

A Lucknow-bound Air India flight with 160 passengers on board was forced to return to IGI airport here after being airborne for over an hour following cracks in the aircraft's wind shield which could have proven extremely dangerous during the flight. All the passengers and crew had a narrow escape.



Flight AI 411 took off from IGI airport for Lucknow around 7:15 AM. When the plane was airborne for some time, the pilot noticed cracks had developed in the wind shield and decided to head back to New Delhi. The pilot informed the Delhi Air Traffic Control (ATC), following which full emergency conditions were declared at the airport. The aircraft landed safely at 8:20 AM. It was only after the aircraft landed that the passengers came to know as to what had actually happened. Airport officials said that an aircraft undergoes a rigorous check before taking off. "How the crack appeared on the wind shield is yet to be ascertained," said an official of the Airports Authority of India.

"All passengers were deplaned and later flown to their destination in another aircraft. The aircraft is back into operation after necessary repairs." Air India said



## May 2015.

In another incident, a Bhubaneswar-bound Air India flight (AI 873) from Delhi had to make an emergency landing at Lucknow airport after its co-pilot detected a crack in the wind shield of the cockpit. The aircraft– Airbus-321– was flying at 38,000 feet over Khajuraho when the pilot informed passengers over the intercom that they would be making an emergency landing in Lucknow, soon after he spotted the crack.

## December 2015.

-Air India has no money to procure spares. 2 Dreamliners grounded. (See Grounded)

-In a freak accident, an Air India technician died after getting sucked into the engine of an aircraft at the Mumbai airport. (See Freak Acci)

**These incidents** have raised serious questions over the maintenance quality procedures being followed in Air India. Is all well with Air India ?

Earlier, reported by ET Bureau dated December 20, 2015, Ashwani Lohani, the chairman and managing director (CMD) of Air India has stated in an interview, “Many CMDs have come and gone in the past two decades but the situation has rarely improved for the airline. Air India’s turnaround should happen not later than 2018-19. Right now the focus is on improving brand image, productivity, service, motivational level as well as staff morale. And that the airline gives a good experience to its passenger.”



*Ashwani Lohani, CMD of Air India*

According to the data released by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Air India operated the least number of flights on time in August. Air India's on-time performance compared to the industry average is not very encouraging. The CMD agrees to it. On-time performance is certainly the final product. He sees the end situation as a result of a number of factors –

**1. The staff**

- morale,
- shortage
- their motivational level

**2. And the fact that Air India is a loss-making enterprise; surviving on life-support system – a Rs 30,000-crore bailout package**

“We do not have the power to hire regular staff. We can only take people on a contractual basis. So how do I get more working hands?” the CMD has mentioned. This point is to be noted. (See also Don't Go).



*Air India staff protest*

Any organisation requires manpower. In case of an Airline, it is skilled manpower. That too, highly skilled; in aviation

circles that area is aptly termed as “critical”. A pilot, an engineer and a technician belong to this category. And, that skill comes through experience: that is, years of grind, training under seniors – something which are not written in traditional text books. Air India CMD knows this very well.

“It is not something that can be fixed straight away; even If I want I can’t make it happen in a day. We are tightening the screws. Towards that end we are working on multiple fronts,” the CMD has said. On an optimistic note he summed up, “A turnaround will happen before 2018-19. It will happen not because of any strategy but because of willpower. I am driven by that dream. Turning around an organisation is an intoxicant for me. I live that dream. I am working for that pleasure, for that high.”



Till such time, the common airline user and Air India staff will continue ruing over one grievance or the other. The common tax paying citizen will also like to seek positive results from the airline. Recent incidents surely do not give any nice experience to its customers, as is being hoped by the CMD. Concerns still persist. The CMD is well aware of those concerns. How and when they shall be addressed, remain to be seen.

The most surprising aspect has been the fact that while Spicejet, Indigo, and Jet are moving ahead, Air India is lagging behind. Analysts are now able to confirm a common man’s view that Air India has been beaten squarely in its own game.

All over the world, it has now become an established fact that India's civil aviation is growing very fast. (See Fastest). Air India's contribution is questionable. Shares of Indigo and Spicejet are at their life time highs – something which is beyond the wildest dreams of Air India. Does this fact tell the whole story of last 11 years of India's civil aviation ?