

Dealing with Fake Bomb Threats in Aviation

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Why in News?

- Over the past week, nearly 100 fake bomb threats, mostly from anonymous social media accounts, have raised significant concerns about aviation safety in India.
- Although all the threats turned out to be hoaxes, they caused widespread disruptions for airlines, passengers, and crew members.
- In this context, there is the need to analyse security protocols when a flight gets a bomb threat and the government and Ministry of Civil Aviation's (MoCA) efforts to deal with/ avoid similar situations in the future.

Bomb Threat Response Protocol:

- **Mid-air bomb threat:**
 - Upon receiving a bomb threat during a flight, the Bomb Threat Assessment Committee (BTAC) convenes to evaluate the credibility of the threat.
 - Pilots coordinate with Air Traffic Control (ATC) to determine whether to return to the departure airport, continue to the destination, or divert to the nearest airport.
- **Pre-departure bomb threat:** If the threat occurs before take-off, the aircraft is moved to a secluded bay for thorough checks in coordination with the BTAC.
- **International flights:** In cases where bomb threats target international flights outside Indian airspace, Indian agencies work with international ATC and security agencies to divert the flight to the nearest airport.

Response to Recent Spate of Fake Bomb Threats Targeting Indian Airlines:

- **Swift response from airlines:** Airlines immediately activated anti-terror protocols and contacted the MoCA for assistance. Despite strict security measures, each threat was treated with caution.
- **Inter-Ministerial coordination:** The MoCA, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and agencies such as the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) are coordinating closely to address the spate of threats.
- **Enhanced security:**
 - In response to the threats, security has been tightened at airports with an increase in security checks by 10%.
 - CCTV coverage has also been expanded to ensure that no suspicious items are carried on board.
 - MoCA is working towards enhancing security protocols.
- **Deterrence and investigation efforts:**
 - The BCAS and airport-specific Bomb Threat Assessment Committees (BTACs) are adopting a dynamic approach to evaluate each threat based on recent cases.
 - While ensuring passenger safety, the committees aim to minimise disruptions by refining the assessment process.
- **Tracking culprits:**
 - The government is actively working to trace those responsible for the fake threats, **but the use of VPNs and anonymous social media accounts has made tracking difficult.**
 - Efforts are underway to collaborate with social media platforms and VPN providers to identify the perpetrators.
- **Legislative changes:** The Indian government is planning legislative changes to deal with fake bomb threats targeting airlines, aiming to impose harsher punishments and strengthen deterrence.

Legislative Action to Curb Fake Bomb Threats:

- **Current arrangement:** Currently, such hoax bomb threats are dealt with in accordance with the country's criminal laws, as there are no legal provisions dealing specifically with bomb threats to aircraft.
- **Amendments to Aircraft Security Rules:**

- The government plans to modify the Aircraft Security Rules (governed by the Aircraft Act 1934) to include culprits of hoax bomb threats in the no-fly list, effectively banning them from boarding flights.
- This is currently limited to unruly passengers on board but would be expanded to those sending threats via social media or other external means.

- **Changes to SUASCA Act, 1982:**

- Amendments to the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Civil Aviation (SUASCA) Act are proposed.
- Currently, the Act applies to in-flight incidents, but the government seeks to broaden its scope to cover bomb threats even when the aircraft is grounded, making such offences cognizable under the law.
- This would also include heavy fines and possible jail time.

Conclusion:

- The surge in hoax bomb threats is causing serious disruptions to Indian airlines and placing significant pressure on aviation security.
 - The government is taking steps to tighten regulations, **but the challenges of responding to and mitigating such threats continue to strain the system.**
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Q.1. What is the name of the regulatory body for civil aviation in India?

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is the regulatory body in the field of Civil Aviation, primarily dealing with safety issues. It is responsible for regulation of air transport services to/ from/ within India and for enforcement of civil air regulations, air safety, and airworthiness standards.

Q.2. What are the laws applicable to the aviation industry in India?

The legal framework for airlines in India is primarily governed by the Aircraft Act of 1934 and the Aircraft Rules of 1937. The former regulates air navigation and controls Indian aircraft, while the latter regulates the manufacturing, possession, sale, use, operation, export, and import of aircraft.

News: We are planning legislative action to enable stringent punishment for aircraft bomb hoaxes: Aviation minister Naidu | IE

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