

House Panel Raises Alarm on India's Air Safety - Key Findings & Reforms

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India Aviation Safety Latest News

- The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture tabled its **380th report** on ***“Overall Review of Safety in the Civil Aviation Sector”*** in both Houses of Parliament.
- The report has issued a strong warning about the state of India's aviation safety system.
- The panel's sharp observations highlight serious systemic lapses in India's aviation safety architecture and stress the urgent need for reforms to prevent future tragedies.

Context and Trigger of the Report

- In the backdrop of the **AI 171 crash in Ahmedabad (2025)**, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture has raised serious alarms over systemic lapses in India's civil aviation safety architecture.

- The committee's **380th report** highlights regulatory weaknesses, operational stress, and governance failures that could escalate into future disasters if unaddressed.
- The Committee also summoned officials from the **Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)** to question them on delays in accident investigations and coordination failures.
- While the report does not directly mention the AI 171 crash, members of the committee extensively discussed it during deliberations.

Parliamentary Panel on Aviation Safety: Key Findings and Concerns

• Aviation Safety at Risk

- The committee observes that India's rapidly expanding aviation sector has stretched infrastructure and regulation to their limits.
- With passenger traffic expected to cross **300 million annually by 2030, unchecked fleet growth, workforce fatigue, and outdated infrastructure** could create conditions ripe for catastrophic accidents.

• DGCA Autonomy Crisis

- The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is **grossly understaffed** — only 553 of 1,063 sanctioned posts are filled.
- Nearly 45% of technical staff are on deputation, leading to high attrition and loss of institutional memory.
- India's International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) audit placed it below the global average in safety oversight.
- Without urgent reforms, India risks international restrictions on airline operations.
- The committee demands full administrative and financial autonomy for DGCA and recruitment independence from UPSC to attract technical experts.

• Air Traffic Controllers: Overworked and Fatigued

- Air Traffic Control Officers (ATCOs) at major airports like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad are **working prolonged, fatiguing shifts**.
- Due to staff shortages, many airports merge control sectors at night, increasing risks.
- The committee calls this "institutionalised overwork" and demands:
 - A Fatigue Risk Management System (FRMS).
 - An end to exemptions from duty-time rules.
 - A staffing audit and expansion of ATC training capacity.

• Unresolved Safety Deficiencies

- As of April 2025, 3,747 safety deficiencies remain unresolved, including 37 critical risks.
- DGCA's enforcement is termed a "procedural formality", lacking real deterrence.
- Recommendations include:
 - Time-bound closure of deficiencies (72 hours for critical cases).
 - Strict penalties, suspension, or licence cancellation for non-compliance.
 - Independent audits of DGCA's enforcement system.

• Helicopter Operations: Weak Oversight

- Since 2021, India has seen 23 helicopter incidents, including four during the 2025 Char Dham Yatra.

- **Oversight is fragmented**, with state agencies like Uttarakhand Civil Aviation Development Authority (UCADA) managing operations with limited DGCA involvement.
- The committee calls for:
 - A uniform national framework for helicopter operations.
 - Terrain-specific training for mountain pilots.
 - A DGCA helicopter oversight cell for continuous monitoring.
- **Recurring Operational Risks**
 - Runway incursions rose to 14.12 per million movements in 2024, exceeding the target of 9.78.
 - Similar overshoots were noted for loss-of-situational-awareness events and near mid-air collision (AIRPROX) incidents.
 - The panel recommends:
 - Root-cause analysis of each incident.
 - Focused safety programmes at high-risk airports.
 - Faster deployment of fog navigation and Instrument Landing Systems (ILS) systems.
- **Regulatory Culture and Whistleblower Protection**
 - A punitive culture discourages reporting of safety lapses.
 - Instances cited where ATCOs were fined up to ₹25 lakh.
 - The committee urges:
 - Adoption of a “just culture” approach that distinguishes errors from negligence.
 - A legally backed whistleblower protection system ensuring anonymity and preventing victimisation.
- **Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) Dependence and Strategic Vulnerabilities**
 - India depends 85% on foreign MRO facilities, spending ₹15,000 crore annually overseas.
 - This creates strategic vulnerabilities in case of geopolitical shocks.
 - Recommendations include:
 - Rationalising GST and customs duties on aviation spares.
 - Incentivising domestic MRO hubs.
 - Launching a national aviation skill mission.
- **Governance Gaps in Airports Authority of India (AAI)**
 - AAI lacks a Member (ATC) on its Board despite repeated recommendations since 2006.
 - The committee calls this a serious governance failure, undermining systemic safety planning.

Conclusion

- The committee’s report is a **roadmap for urgent reforms**, stressing that without stronger regulation, staffing reforms, and governance changes, India risks facing **future aviation disasters and international restrictions**.

Source: **IE** | **NDTV**

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