Hassles in Pre-Election Flying 2019

Dear Reader,

Hassles in Election Flying 2019

During the present elections, the aircrew feel that the political parties seem to comply with the regulations governing helicopter operations better. Specifically, political leaders are adhering to the sunset and last landing time. With the availability of GPS on mobile phones, locating helipads based on coordinates being provided by the political parties does not pose any difficulties as experienced in the 2014 elections.

Hot weather, hurriedly prepared helipads, unreasonable demands made by the users, uncertain mobile connectivity (making it difficult to get ADC/FIC) and lax helipad security arrangements, are some of the factors that plague helicopter operations during elections. A PIC and his crew including the AMEs, technicians and operations coordinators really have to work in complete harmony to ensure un-interrupted operations. Working hours of operating crew extend into late hours of the nights as new destinations are added to the schedule and new routes have to be planned for next day’s operations.

However, following drawbacks are still experienced by the aircrew involved in Election flying:

(a) Late receipt of approvals for landing at helipads. While the program is passed to pilots, the approvals are not received till the morning of the flight. On occasions, the Timings mentioned in the approved schedule, do not match the programme of the political leader.

(b) Virtually no facilities for the aircrew to rest at Helipads. In most of the helipads, there are no arrangements made in providing covered space against hot sun for the aircrew to rest.

(c) Delay in obtaining ADC / FIC. With the increased traffic FIC / MLU are not able to cope with requirement of ADC / FIC. Often, the FIC /ADC tele numbers are always busy. Even if one manages to get through to the number, there are avoidable delays in obtaining ADC/FIC. The delayed departures put lots of pressure on aircrew with the VIP arriving on schedule at the helipad and the ADC not being available for next leg. The AAI / IAF will need to seriously consider augmenting their resources at these locations.

With each election, the demands for helicopters are on the rise especially in States where constituencies are not effectively linked by surface transportation. Election flying will be more demanding unless steps are taken to improve the infrastructural facilities at launching bases and helipads, Flight Plan Transmissions and security. As out lined in the earlier paragraph, the AAI and IAF will need to seriously consider augmenting their communication lines at these locations besides eliminating the delay in providing ADC & FIC clearance.

RWSI is willing to support the Regulator in which ever manner required to enhance safety ambiance during the election flying.
Civil Helicopters in the Elections & Hazards in Election Flying

In this Parliamentary Elections which is under way, civil helicopters are playing a very useful role. Besides being extensively used by political leaders for campaigning in their constituencies, the civil helicopters are also being used for transporting electronic voting machines (EVMs) and EC officials to polling booths in remote areas for conducting elections. We also understand that some States have hired helicopters for meeting medical emergencies.

With Phase I, II and III of the polling being over, the demand for chopper continues and the Helicopter Operators are witnessing two to three-fold increase in the utilization of their machines. As against 25-30 hours per month utilization at other times, their machines in elections fly about 75-80 hours. We understand that the demand for choppers during this year's elections has been considerably more than it was during the previous Parliamentary Elections in 2014.

Owing to the negligible growth of Civil Helicopter fleet recorded since 2012, the operators are unable to cope up with the demand for helicopters during this election thus pushing the hiring rates for these machines. We understand that the demand for twin engine helicopters are more. The charter rates for hiring a helicopter is in the range of INR 1.5 lac to 3 lac per hour depending on the type of helicopters (single/twin engine). There are also other pre-conditions such as minimum usage hrs and landing /parking charges,3-5-star boarding and lodging arrangements for crew, positioning of fuel etc. Since several intermediary agencies are involved in hiring the helicopters for political parties, it is difficult to find out the exact money paid in chartering the flights.

With the Parliamentary elections in full swing, political leaders of various parties are desperate to charter choppers for reaching out to their constituencies especially those in areas not well connected by surface transportation as use of helicopters gives them unique advantage of covering several constituents in shortest possible time during their campaign.

We see that there is an immense need for use of civil helicopters in various roles in India. Yet, very little efforts have been made by the Civil Aviation Authorities in encouraging the growth of Civil Helicopter fleet for commercial use. On 31 Mar 12, the fleet strength of Commercial Civil Helicopters was 186 and after seven years later, on 31 Mar 19 as per the DGCA website it is just 177. While there has been phenomenal growth of commercial fixed wing aircraft in General Aviation during the same period, the fleet strength of Commercial Civil Helicopters has dwindled. The Commercial Helicopter Operators have been constantly plagued by op, regulatory and fiscal bottlenecks including high fuel costs, among other things. Many of these issues have been brought to the notice of Civil Aviation Authorities regularly by RWSI.

RWSI has also drawn the attention of authorities concerned to the problems being faced by the operators during Election flying. Majority of the problems involve political parties using the helicopter services for pre-election campaign. The Election Commission has issued stringent guidelines on use of choppers and small aircraft during elections. However, we understand that compliance to the safety guidelines published by the Regulator (DGCA) has been better during this election. In February 2019 the DGCA convened a meeting of the Helicopter Operators (NSOP) and discussed the various Dos and Don'ts to be adhered to during Election flying.

Election flying is a highly demanding exercise in terms of skill levels, professionalism and tact. Long flying hours, large number of take-off and landings, weather changes, lack of proper rest and recuperation arrangements, hurriedly prepared helipads, frequent changes in itinerary, time management, highly stretched security arrangements, crowd control, congested airspace, lack of adequate communication and airspace management, commercial interests and language barrier are some of the challenges of election flying.

RWSI being the nodal agency for the conduct of helicopter operations in the country, it is concerned about the safe and efficient conduct of the election flying. It has therefore taken the initiative to highlight some of the Hazards in flying in Elections.

Hazards of flying in Elections.

Many helicopters are engaged in flying political party leaders and candidates for election campaign to all parts of the country. Flying for elections is associated with significant hazards and risks. Causes of some of the accidents and incidents that have occurred in the past, are enumerated for the awareness of pilots and operators, (a) Late receipt of approvals for landing at helipads. While the program is passed to pilots, the approvals are not received till the morning of the flight. On occasions, the Timings mentioned in the approved schedule, do not match the programme of the political leader, (b) Ground Resonance: Vibrations: At times pilots continue to fly helicopters with some amount of rotor vibration. These vibrations made worse by uneven helipad could result in accident due to ground resonance, (c) Dusty helipads: Sometimes the helipads are prepared in a hurry and there is not enough water to suppress dust. Many helicopters have been damaged due to landings on dusty helipads. (d) Wrong helipads: The political parties keep assessing the suitability of the helipads for their electoral gains till the last moment. Pilots operating helicopters are told about the helipads to be covered next day, late in the previous night. Sometimes, the coordinators do not convey accurate location of the helipads. (e) Stress and Fatigue: Flying in elections often implies working long hours and standing and waiting in hot weather at the helipads. In most of the helipads, there are no arrangements made in providing covered space against hot sun for the aircrew to rest. (f) Delay in obtaining ADC / FIC. With the increased traffic FIC / MLU are not able to cope with requirement of ADC /FIC. Often, the FIC /ADC tele numbers are always busy. Even if one manages to get through to the number, there are avoidable delays in obtaining ADC/FIC. The delayed departures put lots of pressure on aircrew with the VIP arriving on schedule at the helipad and the ADC not being available for next leg. The AAI / IAF will need to seriously consider augmenting their resources at these locations. There are other factors such as inability to contact company personnel to find out if the fuel has reached and if FIC /ADC has been received for the next flight. (g) Mob Fury: There have been instances when helicopters have been stoned and burnt by angry mobs,
Use of Civil Helicopters in the Elections

The EC has also stipulated that all expenses on using fixed wing or rotary wing aircraft must be paid by the parties with suitable accounting, maintain detailed passenger manifests, exact departure/arrival timings, proper maintenance records with the district administration, etc and submit Revenue Returns.

The PM Modi Uses IAF Helicopters for Election Flying. Top political leaders like Bharatiya Janata Party President Amit Shah or Congress President Rahul Gandhi use civil Helicopters from Operators issued with Non Scheduled Helicopters Permit.

Hazards in flying in Elections... continued. P-2

(h) Unreasonable Passengers: Sometimes the passengers, some of whom are highly influential, force the pilots to take off or land after sunset, beyond Flight Duty times, at helipads other than those in the fight plan, to take load beyond the capacity of the helicopters etc. etc. There have been instances of pilots being manhandled and assaulted when they refused to toe the line of their passengers. Sometimes when the helicopter is diverted for adverse weather, there are mafias amongst the passengers who politicize the event.
Induction of Chinook Helicopters in IAF

On 25 March 2019, the IAF formally inducted the CH 47 F(I)- Chinook heavy lift helicopters into its inventory at Air Force Station Chandigarh. Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa PVSM AVSM YSM VM ADC, Chief of the Air Staff was the Chief guest and the event was attended by various dignitaries.

IAF had signed a contract with M/s Boeing Ltd in September 2015 for 15 Chinook helicopters. The first batch of four helicopters has been delivered on schedule and the last batch is to be delivered by March next year.

These helicopters will be deployed in the Northern and Eastern regions of India.

The addition of heavy-lift CH 47 F(I) helicopter is a significant step towards modernisation of Indian Air Force’s helicopter fleet. The helicopter has been customized to suit IAF’s future requirements and capability roadmap.

The helicopter has a fully integrated digital cockpit management system, advanced cargo handling capabilities and electronic warfare suite that complement the aircraft’s performance.

The helicopter is capable of airlifting diverse military and non military loads into remote locations.
All future conflicts would be planned and executed jointly by the three services

The Army Commanders’ Conference, an apex level biannual event, which formulates important policy decisions, was held in New Delhi from 08 to 13 April 2019. The Conference marked an important event in planning & execution process of Indian Army.

It was emphasized in the Conference that Indian Army was committed to peaceful security environment and would holistically address emerging threats, challenges & ensure no room for terror. Reviews during the Conference included readiness, tri-services synergy, military diplomacy, joint exercises that have created capacity & environment and supporting operational plans that have evolved. Defence cooperation would facilitate new vistas to provide excellent opportunities for enhancing strategic engagements.

The sessions of Commands were followed by Principal Staff Officers providing update on contemporary issues. To mitigate the cyber threats, management and streamlining of communication and data security, were emphasized. Live issues pertaining to administration and human resources development were deliberated in detail.

All future conflicts would be planned and executed jointly by the three services. For developing deeper understanding and enhancing jointness, Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa, Chief of Air Staff addressed Army Commanders & Staff wherein he conveyed vision & high credibility of IAF missions and ideas for synergized application. Admiral Sunil Lamba, Chief of Naval Staff and Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee has also addressed the Army Commanders and focused on jointness and challenges in maritime domain.

Additionally, to promote indigenization through ‘Make in India’, an exhibition of emerging and future defence technological innovations was held. A total of 53 domestic companies participated in this event. This interaction of industry representatives with the senior leadership of the Army facilitated in obtaining a direct feedback regarding product development and enhancement keeping in view the requirements of Army.

With a focus on the welfare of the families of brave soldiers who made supreme sacrifice in the services of the Nation, Year 2019 was declared as the year of ‘Next of Kin’.

The deliberations in Army Commanders’ Conference validated the current course set by the military hierarchy, as merited by the dynamics of emerging security and operational events. The key highlights of the conference are as given below:

(a) Optimum force readiness to be ensured
(b) Re-prioritizing the existing requirements to ensure that the resources allocated for force modernization and capacity building be ensured by optimizing allotted budget
(c) Increase the content of indigenization in force modernization
(d) The state of existing infrastructure along Northern Borders and it has been decided to pursue these projects on higher priority. Ensure speedy move and all-weather connectivity to Northern Borders are the focus areas
(e) As the Indian Army is becoming a more networked and digitized force, the COAS emphasized on the need to enhance technological threshold of all ranks to imbibe state of art technology and exploit the same
(f) The need to appreciate role of women officers in view of their permanent commission and align their employment gainfully with organizational requirements has been concurred by all. Avenues for making the Lady Officers experts in foreign languages, artificial intelligence, data management, cyber and space domains are being examined.
US Department of State approves sale of 24 MH-60 Romeo Seahawk helicopters to India

The United States Department of State on Tuesday approved the sale of 24 multi-role MH-60 Romeo Seahawk helicopters to India at a price of $2.4 billion (Rs 16,516 crore). The principal contractor will be Lockheed Martin Corp’s Lockheed Martin Rotary and Mission Systems, a statement by the Pentagon said.

“The proposed sale will provide India the capability to perform anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions along with the ability to perform secondary missions including vertical replenishment, search and rescue, and communications relay,” the Pentagon said. The Donald Trump administration notified the US Congress of the decision to sell India the helicopters, PTI reported. The State Department said the proposed sale would support the foreign policy and national security of America by strengthening the US-India strategic partnership. It added that India would use the helicopters as a deterrent for threats from its neighbours and for homeland security. The helicopters, designed to operate from frigates, destroyers, cruisers and aircraft carriers, were currently the US Navy’s primary anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface weapon system for open ocean zones. India has been in need of the helicopters like Seahawk for over a decade.

Second Edition of Indian Navy-Vietnam Peoples’ Navy Bilateral Exercise Concludes

In the backdrop of the growing maritime engagement between India and Vietnam, the Indian Navy participated in the second edition of the bilateral maritime exercise with Vietnam Peoples’ Navy at/ off Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam from 13 to 16 Apr 19. The maiden edition was conducted from 21 to 26 May 18 at Da Nang, Vietnam. The exercise was undertaken as a part of the ongoing Overseas Deployment of Eastern Fleet ships to South East Asian countries. IN Ships Kolkata under the command of Capt Aditya Hara and Shakti under the command of Capt Sriram Amur participated in the exercise, comprising a harbour and a sea phase.

The Navy to Navy cooperation involved a Composite Training Programme in the fields of Submarine, Aviation and Dockyard training. The two countries also signed an agreement to exchange White Shipping Information and have a running ‘Information Sharing’ programme.

Indian Navy Chetak incident at Sea

A major catastrophe was averted by the well trained Indian Naval aircrew, when their Chetak helicopter ditched at sea last week.

The helicopter was integral to an Indian Naval Warship operationally deployed in the Arabian Sea. As per reports, the helicopter developed technical failure prior to ditching and the crew displayed immense professional prowess and sound training thereby, deftly landing the helicopter in the water and successfully egressing from it. While all three crew members are safe, a Board of Inquiry has been ordered to investigate the cause of the technical failure leading to the loss of the helicopter.
RWSI Ground Training Efforts in April 19

RWSI Steps up its Ground Training Efforts in April 19. A total of 62 candidates went thru Safety related Training Courses at RWSI in April 2019. a) CRM - 6 Pilots at Noida by Wg Cdr VP Mathur, b) SGT - 46 Pilots at Mumbai by Gp Capt RN Joshi and 5 Pilots at Noida by Wg Cdr VP Mathur and c) Two days SMS for one technical officer and one store incharge and 5 days SMS for 3 officers (QM, CAM and Head of Ops) by Gp Capt MK Labroo, Secretary General, RWSI.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Course</th>
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<td>04th to 08th May</td>
<td>SMS (5 days)</td>
<td>Rs 25,000 + GST @ 18%</td>
<td>RWSI Trng Complex, Sector-62, Noida</td>
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<td>11th &amp; 12th May</td>
<td>Accident Prevention Training (2 days)</td>
<td>Rs 10,000 + GST @ 18%</td>
<td>RWSI Trng Complex, Sector-62, Noida</td>
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<td>13th &amp; 14th May</td>
<td>Accident Investigation Training (2 days)</td>
<td>Rs 10,000 + GST @ 18%</td>
<td>RWSI Trng Complex, Sector-62, Noida</td>
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<td>17th May (Fri)</td>
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<td>18th &amp; 19th May</td>
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<td>CRM + SGT (Two courses)</td>
<td>Rs 5,000 + GST @ 18% EACH</td>
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WHO SHOULD ATTEND

- **CRM & Survival Training** (For Both Helicopter & Fixed Wing) - Pilots, Engineers, Cabin Crews, FSO, Flight Dispatchers, Management Personnel
- **Safety Management System** (For Both Helicopter & Fixed Wing) - All Above
- **Accident Prevention & Accident Investigation** (For Both Helicopter & Fixed Wing) - Pilots, Engineers, Flight Safety Officers
- **Special VFR Ground Training & Test** - Pilots
- **Adverse Weather Ops - Monsoon Operations** - Pilots, Engineers, FSO, Cabin Crews