

Five aviation facts that Parliament uncovered

BY HOWINDIALIVES.COM

Written questions in Parliament are a rich source of information, compelling the Centre to disclose details it might not otherwise make public. They can even force it to add some degree of processing to what is essentially raw data. In the recently concluded monsoon session, this was clearly evident in the written questions directed at the civil aviation ministry; several were focussed on air safety. Here are five revelations:



All entities tasked with air safety have hundreds of key posts vacant

Entity	Sanctioned posts	Vacancy (in %)
Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)	1,644	50.1
Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS)	598	38.5
Airports Authority of India (AAI)	25,730	36.8

Data as of June 2025. Source: Civil aviation ministry.

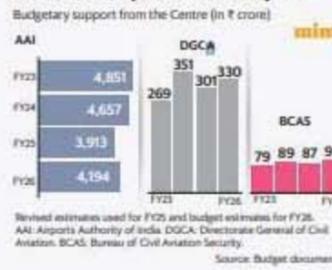
1 Regulator Vacancies

IN INDIA, three entities are tasked with air safety: Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), which regulates the aviation sector; Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), which sets safety standards; and Airports Authority of India (AAI), which regulates flight movement and operates air traffic control. Parliamentary questions focused on their staffing, exposing severe shortages. Nearly half the sanctioned posts in the DGCA were vacant. Overall, staff vacancy was about 39% in the BCAS and about 37% in the AAI as of June 2025. After these numbers came out, Parliament members dug deeper. They posed questions on staffing by grades and then by technical/non-technical functions. The answers showed that, in the DGCA, only half of the sanctioned 'Grade A' posts and half of the sanctioned technical posts were occupied. Further, the 546 vacancies in technical functions made up two-thirds of the DGCA's 823 vacancies.

2 Tapering Budgets

IN ONE of its responses, on 11 August, the Centre said: "The shortfall has not impacted the functioning of the DGCA." While it said it was filling up these posts on priority, it also said the high vacancy was partly on account of recency—44 DGCA posts were created between 2022 and 2024, including 426 technical posts. In BCAS, which had 230 vacancies, 84 posts were created during restructuring in 2024. In AAI, which had 9,477 vacancies, 840 posts of air traffic controllers "had been created recently". One challenge for these organizations is budgets. All of them are reliant on the central government, to varying degrees, for funding. In 2024-25, the revised estimates for all three organizations indicate a drop in funding from the Centre. The drop was the highest in the case of the DGCA, from ₹351 crore in 2023-24 to ₹301 crore in 2024-25. In general, all three entities have seen a tightening of support from the central budget.

Budgetary support for air safety entities has tapered in recent years



3 Elusive Profits

ONE QUESTION shed more light on the pre-tax profit or loss and debt levels in 2024-25 of five Indian airlines that currently fly about 99% of domestic passengers. Some of it was already in the public domain, some of it was not. Like most years, a financial summary of Indian airlines does not paint a pretty picture, except for market leader IndiGo. Four of these five airlines were in the red in 2023-24, and remained so in 2024-25. Air India, which entered the Tata group fold in 2022, continues its long climb to profitability. It has been adding planes, rationalizing routes and increasing revenues. Amid a period of lower oil prices, its pre-tax loss shrank from ₹8,922 crore in FY23 to ₹5,025 crore in FY24 to ₹3,890 crore in FY25. But it has a fair distance to travel, and the recent crash has set it back further.

IndiGo remains the only profitable Indian airline, and by a huge margin



IndiGo had the most on-time flights, Akasa Air had least cancellations

Airline	...showed on-time performance	...were cancelled
IndiGo	82.4	0.9
Akasa Air	79.5	0.3
Air India Group**	76.1	0.9
SpiceJet	59.2	2.1
Alliance Air	58.1	4.9

*Data until 30 June 2025. **The Air India Group comprises Air India and Air India Express. Source: Civil aviation ministry.

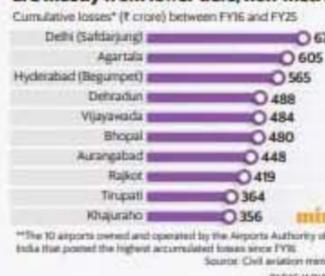
4 Shrinking Glitches

SEVERAL QUESTIONS revolved around the Air India Boeing 787 that crashed on 12 June—status of this investigation, norms related to working hours of pilots and cabin crew, staffing at regulators, safety of the 787 aircraft, and technical glitches, among others. For example, one of the government responses said the number of technical glitches reported by Indian airlines declined from 448 in 2023 to 421 in 2024. In 2025, till 28 July, the count was 183. In 2025, till 30 June, market leader IndiGo was also the leader on timeliness, registering an on-time performance in 82.4% of its flights. It was followed by Akasa Air (79.5%) and the Air India Group (76.1%). While these airlines were somewhat close to each other, further down, there was a big gap to SpiceJet and Alliance Air. In terms of cancellations, the three leaders in timeliness were also the only ones below the 1% mark.

5 Airports in Losses

AIR TRAFFIC in India has been growing at a steady pace. Amid a diversification of this traffic beyond the leading metros, there are challenges to the extent this can continue in a profitable way. Several parliamentary questions focused on the UDAN-RCS (Uday Desh Ka Aam Nagrik-Regional Connectivity Scheme), where the government incentivizes airlines to fly to underserved destinations. The government has pulled back from this scheme. One reason for this can be seen in the performance of airports in lower tiers. As per its 2023-24 annual report, the AAI owned and operated 123 airports. One of the questions shows that 81 of these airports, which accounted for about 6% of domestic passenger traffic in 2024-25, made a loss that year. Their accumulated losses over the past decade stand at ₹10,852 crore, with 45% accounted for by the top 10 alone.

AAI airports making the highest losses are mostly from lower tiers, non-metros





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THE HINDU

CHENNAI

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T.N. govt. identifies site for proposed airport at Hosur

Sunitha Sekar

CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government has identified the site for the proposed airport at Hosur, and will apply to the Ministry of Civil Aviation for site clearance in two weeks.

The chosen site lies 15.5 km from the airstrip of Taneja Aerospace and Aviation Limited (TAAL), east of Hosur city, and Shoolagiri Taluk.

Soon after the decision to develop an airport at Hosur was made, the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation identified five sites, which were narrowed down to two, based on the recommendations of the feasibility study carried out by the

The govt. will apply to the Ministry of Civil Aviation for site clearance in 2 weeks

Airports Authority of India (AAI).

After deliberations, the State government found that the site now finalised is more feasible since the number of obstacles is far less here.

The other site shortlisted is 1.5 km south of TAAL.

“The Obstacle Limitation Surfaces survey, done by consultants, shows that the chosen site has only about 75 obstacles, whereas the one closer to TAAL has nearly 350 obstacles. The site near TAAL has high-tension lines and a ve-

ry hilly terrain. While it is not impossible to build an airport on the site near TAAL, the government may have to spend more for the project if constructed here,” a source said.

T.N. to write to Centre

Now that the site is chosen, as in any airport development project, the next step is for the Tamil Nadu government to write to the Ministry of Civil Aviation in two weeks, seeking approval for it. Meanwhile, the Collector will prepare a proposal for land acquisition for this project, and submit it to the government in about a month and a half, sources said.

CONTINUED ON

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State identifies site for proposed Hosur airport

Nearly 2,300 acres of land will be required for the Hosur airport, as per the estimates. Of this, about 650 acres in the area are lands belonging to the government.

While the State government has already written to the Ministry of Defence with respect to the creation of a separate air control zone, they will now communicate the chosen site to the Ministry shortly, and hold discussions with them. This approval is also likely to be made in a few months.

Hosur, which is poised to witness an industrial boom as investments are streaming in steadily, will significantly benefit from an airport. Even as Bengaluru's second international airport site is getting finalised, Tamil Nadu has fast-tracked the Hosur airport project. “We know there are challenges with the Hosur airport [project], but we have also been working out solutions to make it a reality,” the source said.



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DELHI

25 AUGUST 2025

SET TO BE INAUGURATED IN LATE SEPTEMBER

Navi Mumbai airport to use ILS for landings in poor visibility

**SIDDHANT KONDUSKAR
& NARESHS**

MUMBAI, AUGUST 24

SET TO be inaugurated by September-end and begin operations around 45 days later, the much-awaited Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) will have the capability to carry out landings and take-offs even in poor visibility conditions, thanks to the advanced navigational aids and lighting systems installed at the airport, NMIA officials said. The greenfield airport, thus will address the hassle of diversions and delays that airplanes are subjected to especially during monsoon.

The airport will use a Category II Instrument Landing System (ILS) which allows pilots to make safe landings when conditions are poor due to fog, heavy rain, or other weather conditions. "The system operates by offering aircraft on the final approach precise lateral and vertical guidance, enabling landings at visibility levels as low as 300 metres," said Prabhat Mahapatra, Chief Operating Officer, NMIA.

This is an important improvement for Mumbai, where the existing CSMA requires a minimum



The upcoming Navi Mumbai airport. Narendra Vaskar

runway visual range (RVR) of 550 metres for landings. Although CSMA allows Low Visibility Take Offs (LVTO) at 400 metres RVR, poor conditions often force diversions to other cities. NMIA's setup will ensure an aircraft can continue operations without rerouting, reducing inconvenience for passengers and airlines alike.

To support the Category II Instrument Landing System, NMIA has displaced its runway threshold by nearly 600 metres. This adjustment ensures that approaching aircraft follow a standard three-degree glide angle,

which is essential for safe and predictable landings during poor visibility conditions.

The decision to align the runway with a three-degree glide path was taken keeping international practices in mind, ensuring compatibility with pilot training standards across the world.

Along with the ILS is a Category II approved Precision Approach Lighting System. This lighting aids pilots in aligning the aircraft properly to the runway at the final approach to landing. The lighting pattern is easily seen even in adverse weather.



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AMAR UJALA

DELHI

25 AUGUST 2025

तकनीकी खराबी से एलायंस एयर की उड़ान की गई रद्द

हैदराबाद। हैदराबाद से तिरुपति जाने वाली एलायंस एयर की एक उड़ान में बार-बार तकनीकी खराबी के बाद रद्द कर दी गई। एयरलाइन के अनुसार, तकनीकी खराबी के बाद, विमान को शुरू में अनिवार्य जांच के लिए बे में वापस लाया गया और बाद में उसे उड़ान भरने की अनुमति दे दी गई। हालांकि विमान में एक और खराबी आ गई और उसे ठीक करने में उम्मीद से अधिक समय लग गया। एलायंस एयर ने कहा, इसके कारण अन्य उड़ानों में और व्यवधान से बचने के लिए इस उड़ान को रद्द करना पड़ा। इससे पहले गुवाहाटी-कोलकाता रूट पर संचालित एलायंस एयर की उड़ान संख्या 9आई756 में भी गत बुधवार को हवा में तकनीकी खराबी आ गई थी, जिसके परिणामस्वरूप विमान को गुवाहाटी में उतारना पड़ा था। एजेंसी

Four Chinese airlines seek landing slots at Delhi

Aneesh Phadnis
Mumbai

Chinese carriers have applied for slots at the Delhi airport and have initiated steps to resume flights after a gap of five years.

While IndiGo is preparing to relaunch flights to Chengdu and Guangzhou, four Chinese carriers have shown interest to restore the air connectivity.

These include Air China (from Beijing); China Eastern Airlines (from Shanghai); China Southern Airlines (from Guangzhou), and Shandong Airlines (from Kunming). China Eastern Airlines is also keen to relaunch flights between Kunming and Kolkata, it is learnt.

"The Chinese carriers are waiting for the green light and are hopeful of resuming service from the winter schedule," said a person familiar with the matter.

NEED DGCA NOD

Foreign airlines planning to operate flights to India are required to obtain an operating authorisation from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). For that purpose, the airlines have to submit information such as names and nationality of its board members, operations manual, details regarding its fleet etc. The airlines also need to have their security programme

READY TO TAKE WINGS

- Air China (from Beijing); China Eastern Airlines (from Shanghai); China Southern Airlines (from Guangzhou), and Shandong Airlines (from Kunming) have shown interest
- China Eastern Airlines is also keen to relaunch flights between Kunming and Kolkata
- IndiGo is also preparing to relaunch flights to Chengdu and Guangzhou



approved by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, which, in turn, has to be submitted to the DGCA.

"Operating authorisation is valid for five years and since Chinese carriers have not been flying to India since February 2020, that has lapsed," said a source. Following the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the Ministry of External Affairs said both sides have agreed to resume direct flight connectivity at the earliest and finalise an updated air services agreement.

This agreement allows carriers from both sides to operate 42 flights each per week.

Prior to the pandemic, while Chinese carriers were utilising the quota fully, Indian carriers operated 19 weekly flights.

Over half a million passengers flew between India and China (two way) in FY25 and the number is set to grow with the planned

resumption of flights. In the absence of non-stop flights, passengers between India and China are transiting via Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and other cities.

TRANSIT HUBS

Hong Kong and Singapore are the largest transit hubs for travel between India and China with each having a market share of around 30 per cent in FY25.

"Demand for China has shown steady recovery, led primarily by business travel and trader traffic. There is an upward momentum, especially on key routes linked to technology, manufacturing hubs. We remain one of the top three carriers on the India-China route, and witness strong medium-term growth potential, supported by the return of corporate travel," Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific said.

The airline said it is seeing tremendous growth in

its air-to-sea product which enables passengers to travel onward from Hong Kong in a ferry to Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

"We continue to see healthy demand for both business and leisure travel between India and China, and this remains an important market for Singapore Airlines," the airline said.

Passenger traffic flows into China are growing with relaxation in visa norms. After the implementation of the visa-free policy and 240-hour transit visa-free policy in China, the number of international inbound tourists have increased significantly," International Air Transport Association said in June. Outbound travel is recovering too.

However, flights between China and the US continue to remain capped below pre-pandemic level.

"Malaysia Airlines continues to see encouraging performance on its China routes with average loads exceeding 85 per cent. While demand is generally stronger into China, the airline has also observed increased outbound travel from China during the summer holidays," said airline's chief commercial officer Dersensih Aresandiran. He added that Malaysia Airlines is also seeing an increase in inquiries for group leisure travel from India to China.



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BUSINESS LINE

DELHI

25 AUGUST 2025

Profitability under stress

Provisional figures (in million ₹) of debt, profit and loss before tax, and operating cost of major scheduled airlines in financial year 2024-25.



Airlines	Debt	Profit/loss before tax	Operating cost
Air India	2,68,796	-38,902	6,17,770
Air India Express	6,175	-56,782	2,04,006
Akasa Air	785	-19,834	60,905
Indigo	6,70,884	75,875	7,65,223
Spicejet	8,860	-581	48,897

Source: Ministry of Civil Aviation

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THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

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25 AUGUST 2025

UDAN passenger count nosedives

SWARAJ BAGGONKAR
Mumbai, August 24

THE MUCH-HYPED JOURNEY from *hawai chappal* to *hawai jahaaz* (rubber slippers to aeroplanes) has hit a massive air pocket.

As the government's regional connectivity scheme – UDAN (*Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik*) – completes nine years (it was launched in 2016 though the first flight took off a year later), passenger count has slumped by more than half in FY25 from the peak seen just three years earlier.

Only 1.41 million passengers availed the benefit, a drop

PROMISE vs REALITY



Source: Ministry of Civil Aviation

of 57% compared to the peak of 3.3 million clocked in FY22, and a 24% drop compared to FY24's total of 1.87 million. FY25 marked three consecutive years of decline in passen-

ger count for the scheme.

UDAN was conceived to promote regional air connectivity by making flying affordable for the common citizen, the central idea being encour-

aging airlines to operate flights on regional and remote routes through enabling policies and extending incentives.

Continued on Page 11

UDAN passenger count nosedives

BUT OUT OF the 915 valid routes under the scheme, only 637 routes have been operationalised, connecting 92 unserved and underserved airports, including 15 heliports and 2 water aerodromes across the country. Nearly 80% of these 92 airports are unserved.

The untouched routes are yet to commence operations due to delays in the development of airports because of land unavailability, technical and operational constraints at certain airports, time taken in obtaining the relevant operators permit by new entrants and issues such as non-availability of suitable aircraft, aircraft leasing and maintenance issues.

A total of 222 routes under the scheme have been discontinued since 2020. Air India and Akasa Air do not fly on such routes and IndiGo and SpiceJet



did not respond to queries at the time of going to press.

Besides lukewarm response from airlines, there are various operational challenges, including low passenger demand on some routes, low visibility at certain airports, challenges related to the availability of slots, ATC watch hours, delays in the development of aerodromes, and a shortage of aircraft. Some routes

became non-operational after the subsidy ended.

As per the Centre, both airlines and passengers highlighted concerns, including challenges in last-mile connectivity from the city centre to the airport, occasional flight diversions or cancellations due to bad weather and discontinuation of routes after completion of VGF tenure.

A total of ₹4,160 crore, including ₹2,233 crore between FY23 to FY25, have been disbursed by the government under the viability gap funding (VGF) scheme to encourage airlines to continue with the connectivity.

The budget estimates of ₹540 crore for 2025-26 under the UDAN scheme shows a decrease from the previous year's revised estimates of ₹800 crore. However, it still reflects an increase over the previous year's budget estimates of ₹502 crore.



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THE INDIAN EXPRESS

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25 AUGUST 2025

Resumption of direct flights imminent, Indian, Chinese airlines prepare to reclaim market

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 24

WITH CHINESE Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent visit to New Delhi, India and China appear to be one step closer to resuming direct flight connectivity between the two most populous countries in the world. With the exception of the Chinese special administrative region of Hong Kong, India and China have had no direct flights since early 2020, just before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic.

"Both sides agreed to resume direct flight connectivity between Chinese mainland and India at the earliest, and finalize an updated Air Services Agreement. They also agreed on the facilitation of visas to tourists, businesses, media and other visitors in both directions," the Ministry of External Affairs had said in a release.

Although the two countries have not given a timeline yet on resumption of direct services, the evident signs of a thaw in the India-China relationship — notably at a time when New Delhi's relationship with Washington has hit a few roadblocks — has built the hope that normalisation of air



connectivity between India and China is imminent. Direct flight connectivity between India and China was initially suspended due to the pandemic. As the India-China bilateral relationship soured following the standoff in Eastern Ladakh in 2020 and remained frigid over the subsequent years, direct flights between the two nations did not resume despite air connectivity returning to pre-pandemic levels globally.

Resumption of direct flights and normalisation of visa issuances — demands China has been making over the past couple of years — had come up in Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's discussions with Beijing during his China visit in January. At the time, the two countries had agreed "in principle" to resume direct flights. In the preceding months, the matter featured in talks between foreign and aviation ministers of the two countries.

Airlines gear up to resume direct flights

Chinese and Indian airlines have been keenly watching the developments, and are now preparing for direct flights. Just last week, IndiGo's CEO Pieter Elbers had said that the carrier stands ready to resume direct flights to China as soon as the bilateral arrangements between the two countries allow. Chinese carriers, too, are eager to resume direct services, it is learnt. Lack of direct flights have led to high fares and long travel times for those flying between India and China. According to industry insiders, airlines — Chinese as well as Indian — have been looking to restart direct flights, as there is high demand for travel between the two countries.

Lack of direct air connectivity between India and mainland China, along with stringent visa restrictions, led to airlines from

both countries losing out on potential passenger loads, and airlines operating from other Southeast Asian countries cashing in on the opportunity. Passenger traffic between India and China — currently solely through connecting hubs in South and Southeast Asia — is less than half of what it was in 2019.

All of it is being catered to by airlines from regions like Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam. To be sure, the Hong Kong airport is not exactly considered a Chinese airport due to Hong Kong's special autonomous status and a different visa regime than mainland China. It continues to be the leading connecting hub between India and mainland China.

Chinese carriers held dominant share

The normalisation of air connectivity between India and China would likely be beneficial for airlines from both countries. However, Beijing appears to believe that Chinese carriers stand to gain more, as they held the dominant share of the direct flight market before the pandemic.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Spanish influencer couple misses flight after taking travel advice from AI

'For travel rules or visas, AI should be a reference, not final authority'



ChatGPT's Wrong Advice Leaves Influencer Couple Stranded At Airport



Riya Sharma

Relationship advice? Ask AI. Career tip? Ask AI. Travel help? Just ask AI! All good – until a major hiccup occurs. A Spanish couple recently missed their flight to Puerto Rico after their AI advisor told them they didn't need a visa, skipping the mandatory ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization – an online application determining EU visitors' eligibility to enter the US). Travel agents warn this isn't the first AI-related travel mishap. "AI can plan trips, but it can't be trusted for visa rules, flight changes, or critical documents," they caution.



'Have seen travellers stranded at airports due to half-verified AI advice'

Travel agents note that many travellers now face issues similar to what the Spanish couple faced when they rely solely on AI. "AI should be used as a first step, not the final word," says Ravi Gosain, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO). "It's great for inspiration, itineraries, and comparisons, but for visas, rules, or documents, always verify with official sources. Immigration regulations change frequently, and even small oversights can derail a trip. I've seen travellers miss cruises or get stranded at airports because they assumed e-visas applied everywhere or that vaccination and insurance were optional."



'AI info can be outdated'

Industry experts say such cases are increasingly common. "Just last month, we assisted three families who nearly missed their vacations due to incorrect AI tip on documentation," says Heniel Rupaarelia, founder and managing director of a travel tech platform. "AI info can be months or even years outdated, especially with fast-changing travel regulations. Requirements shift weekly, sometimes daily, and AI systems cannot access real-time government databases."

'Use AI for ideas, not to verify rules'

Akash Rastogi, from a Gurgaon-based travel agency, points out that he recently came across a couple of a different nationality who could not board a flight to Thailand because of the same reason. "Be very specific about your question and narrow down your search by asking one question at a time," he advises people seeking travel tips from AI. Offering travellers guidance on planning, Gosain adds, "Use AI for ideas, but verify rules with official sources and trusted travel advisors before you take a trip."

Mistakes happen because of regulations like visa and entry requirements which change often, sometimes overnight. AI models, which are software, might not be updated to reflect the latest rules. Complex exceptions, like special categories or overseas territories, may not be captured correctly. AI gives general info, but your nationality, purpose of visit, or travel history can change requirements completely

– Ravi Gosain, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)



'Should only depend on embassy websites/official government websites for visa-related info'

Visa rules differ by country and change often due to disruptions or closures, so experts urge using official government sites. Akash says, "Visa rules and regulations change and differ from one nationality to another. It is best to cross-check the information given by AI with the embassy, travel consulting companies, or the airlines. In fact, check these details directly from the official website only."

Hari Ganapathy, co-founder of a travel agency, agrees, "Always cross-check critical information, particularly when it comes to visas, entry requirements, or local regulations, with official government sources or embassies before making any travel decisions."