

# THE AWARE CONSUMER

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## Navigating Consumer Protections in the Skies



### INTERVIEW

**G. ASOK KUMAR**  
Former Joint Secretary  
Ministry of Civil Aviation

**CONSUMERS, BEWARE**  
Know Your Rights  
When You Fly!

**IN FOCUS**  
Soaring Airfares –  
A Crisis in the Skies

**PLUS**

**ROUND UP • RESEARCH FEATURE • MY MARKET**



# NATIONAL ACCREDITATION BOARD FOR TESTING AND CALIBRATION LABORATORIES

## RECOGNITION OF TEMPORARY SITE LABORATORIES TESTING AGGREGATES AND CONCRETE IN BUILDING PROJECTS

**NABL launches first of its kind recognition scheme for temporary site testing of aggregates and concrete in building projects.**



### ENHANCING THE INFRASTRUCTURE LANDSCAPE BY KEEPING QUALITY AT THE FOREFRONT



Ensuring both quality and safety throughout the construction process.



Positioning India at the forefront of innovative building practices, thereby helping India become Viksit Bharat.



Empowering civil engineers by providing on-site testing facilities for crucial building material such as fine aggregates, coarse aggregates and concrete cubes.



Ensuring the competency and quality standards of temporary site testing laboratories with the help of industry collaboration and commitment.



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- With this remarkable initiative, NABL enhances the confidence and trust of industry and the common man in the quality infrastructural projects
- Network of such quality-competent, NABL-recognized temporary site laboratories would strengthen the Government of India's commitment to provide safe and quality infrastructure to the people of the country..

#### **The scheme applies to:**

- **Projects exceeding 50,000 square feet.**
- **Projects with temporary site testing facilities.**

# VIEWPOINT



MESSAGE FROM PUBLISHER & EDITOR



## The PLANE Truth About Flyers' Rights

**TRAVELLING SEEMS TO** be everyone's goal these days. And most urban folks are preferring to travel by air. However, more often than not, the flight experience turns the trip into a disaster even before it has started!

Actually, the issues begin much before you arrive at the airport. The arbitrary pricing of tickets and high fares put a spanner in the works, not to mention the hidden charges that surface just when you are about to complete the booking. The travel agencies and online travel platforms prove to be more of a hurdle than a help.

And what happens at the airport? The check-in queues are harrowing, compounded by the unethical and callous behaviour of the airline staff. And God save you if your flight has been delayed or cancelled? You are left stranded - Nobody cares if this makes you miss a connecting flight, an important meeting, an event or spoils your vacation. The complete lack of professionalism is apparent from the growing incidence of lost and misplaced baggage woes reported by the passengers.

Complaints aren't of much use – you find yourself running from pillar to post to claim the refund/compensation from the airline. And it may come, or may not come, for all that you know....

Is it any surprise that a passenger assaulted a pilot who was announcing a flight delay a couple of months

ago? The reason may have been heavy fog at the Delhi airport, but the air rage was a manifestation of all the pent-up frustration of millions of consumers. While we do not condone the violent behaviour, how can passengers be left cooped inside an aeroplane for hours on end?

The government has adopted the 'open sky policy' and India has emerged as the world's third-largest civil aviation market by volume (IATA estimates). But, the harsh reality is that it has neglected to lay down clear rules and regulations to control the activities of the airlines. The regulator is for namesake only. In this scenario, the airlines are able to get away with turning a blind eye to the inconveniences faced by the passengers and care two hoots about their own negligence.

***Bon Voyage, if possible!***

Prof. Bejon Kumar Misra

Publisher & Editor

[bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in](mailto:bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in)



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PRAFULL D. SHETH

Editorial Board Member

# WHEN WILL CONSUMER RIGHTS TAKE WINGS IN THE SKY?



**FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS** and put your seats in the upright position as we are about to take-off on a turbulent journey through the maze of (non-existent) consumer rights in the aviation sector. I'm afraid it will not be a pleasant flight....

The airlines essentially come under the purview of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has outlined a set of guidelines related to flight delays, cancellation charges, refunds, compensation and the like. A consumer complaint redressal mechanism is in place as well. But, all of this remains on paper only.

A standing example is the fact that despite the Aviation Ministry issuing clear instructions to the airlines to provide full and immediate refunds – sans any cancellation charges - for tickets booked during the Covid-19 lockdown period, refunds to the tune of Rs 30-40 crore still remain unpaid!

Alas, consumer protection is largely missing for airline passengers. And while consumers in other sectors are armed with the weapon to discontinue patronising a product or service if they are dissatisfied with the same, the Indian aviation sector

does not afford this choice either as the alternatives are equally untenable! The consumer complaints do not get a fair redressal across airlines. Talk about being stuck between a rock and a hard place!

And airports at Mumbai and Delhi lack enough security check points, aircraft parking bays and aerobridges creating chaotic conditions at peak times!

Given the intense competition between the airlines to attract customers, you would think they would pay attention to improving the quality of service provided to the flyers and care for their comfort. Alas, the opposite is true as a web of unfair trade practices seems to have consumed the entire aviation industry.

The government is on a slew of expanding the aviation infrastructure and connectivity – but at what cost? Can the money-minded airline owners be allowed to focus on revenues while ignoring consumer rights? Why can't we expect strict measures to safeguard consumer interests? Why don't the authorities consider making air travel affordable and comfortable for the consumers? Why can't passenger grievances actually get a fair redressal?

**We await the day when passengers can fly with a smile on their face and satisfaction in their heart!**





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RESEARCH FEATURE

REGULATION TAKES FLIGHT TO SAFEGUARD CONSUMER RIGHTS



The invention of aviation brought a revolutionary change in the world of transportation. Air transport is the fastest – and also the most-preferred mode of travel.



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HORIZON

GIVE YOUR TRAVEL THE WINGS OF INSURANCE



Insurance never makes it to our travel checklist, especially for domestic flights.



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INTERVIEW



**G. ASOK KUMAR**  
Former Joint Secretary  
Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI

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MY MARKET

CANCELLING FLIGHT TICKETS: HEAVY TURBULENCE AHEAD!



A nightmare unfolds the moment you have to cancel/change a flight booking.

Almost all your hard-earned money will go down the drain in the face of the hefty cancellation fees levied by most airlines/booking platforms. Is a reasonable refund too much to ask for?



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OUT OF THE BOX

FLIGHT BLUES CLIP THE WINGS OF PASSENGERS



Every flier seems to have a troublesome tale to tell these days.



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IN FOCUS

SOARING AIRFARES – A CRISIS IN THE SKIES




More people are choosing to travel by air than ever before. Yet, the skyrocketing fares are becoming a deterrent once again. Is a respite in sight?



Consumers, Beware

# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS WHEN YOU FLY!



Airline passengers are largely a disgruntled lot with some issue or the other related to the flight, baggage or refund dogging them almost every time they travel. However, you don't have to simply grin and bear it as part and parcel of the game. Indeed, consumers have specific rights when they take a flight, and various avenues for seeking redressal for their grievances.

**PICTURE THIS – YOU** arrive at the airport full of excitement, only to find that there is some glitch with the booking, the flight has been cancelled, your ticket has been downgraded or the flight keeps getting delayed by 30 minutes with each announcement. When you approach the airline staff for help, they are too busy sorting out the issue to listen to you. Everyone around you is at a loss.

And what if your seat is too uncomfortable or the promised meal is not provided during the flight? Or, what if you find that your luggage is missing or damaged after the flight has landed?

Alas, these hiccups can ruin your holiday or throw a spanner in your onward plans? It's not just about disappointment, the mishaps can cause you to miss an important meeting or face a loss too.

### Passenger Woes

Air travel has become a part of regular life. Many first-time fliers are taking to the skies almost every day. Low-cost fares are making it possible for more and more people to avail the convenience of air travel. However, flying is not as easy and straightforward as it sounds.

Most passengers end up complaining about flight cancellations without prior knowledge, inordinate delays, denied boarding, missed connections, damaged, misplaced or lost luggage, exorbitant onboard food prices, silent changes in boarding gates, rude behaviour from staff at check-in counters and late/missing refunds. Complaints related to poor service and harassment also abound.

While passenger confrontations at airline counters seem to be the norm, they have escalated into heated arguments with the airline staff this winter. Unfortunately, the staff often do not acknowledge or deal with airline customer complaints effectively. This can lead to even more frustration and anger on the part of the consumers - Many even take to Twitter (now X) to express their angst with their air travel.

**How many of us know that airlines are mandated to provide assistance to passengers which includes refreshments, hotel accommodation, full refund, extra compensation and so on? And, how will you seek the remedies if you aren't even aware of them?**

### Become an Empowered Flier

The problem here is that most passengers are not aware of their rights. In fact, *hardly anyone knows that passenger rights actually exist.*

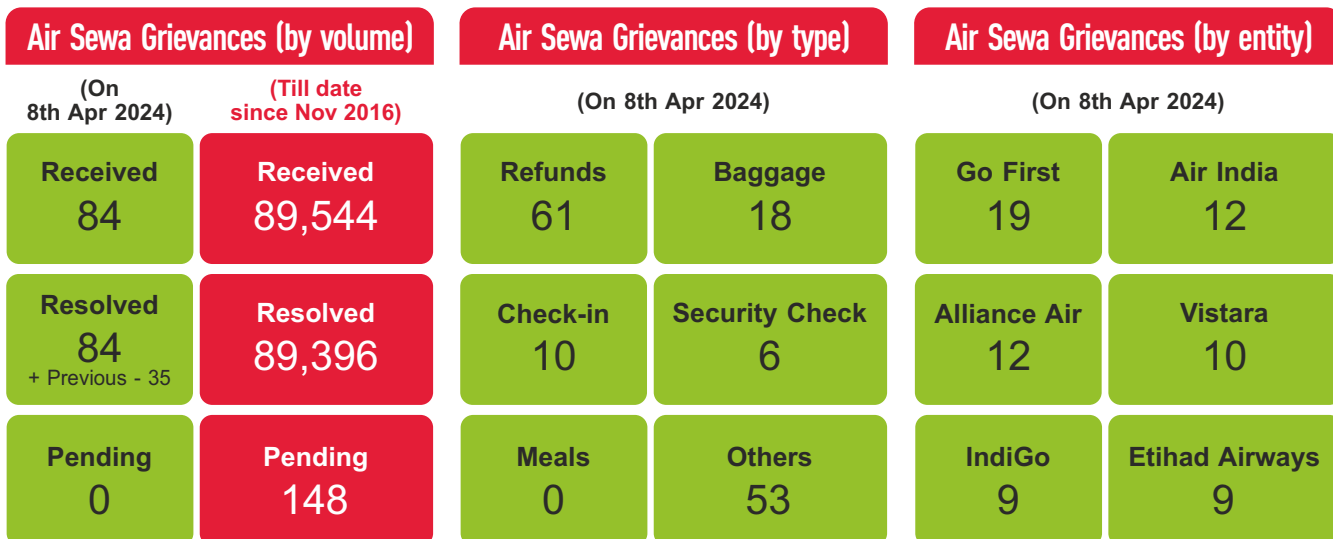
The unfortunate reality is that most passengers don't claim their compensation due to lack of information. (Passenger rights are detailed under Government Perspective section)

**Did you know that Air India has recently introduced a 'Fog Care' initiative wherein affected passengers can reschedule or cancel their flights without any additional charges?**

Or, that the union Ministry of Civil Aviation has launched an AirSewa portal in November 2016 which provides information about flights operating from various airports in India along with the services and facilities (including assistance to disabled or unaccompanied minor etc.) available.

Travellers can not only seek information on air travel on the app or website (<https://airsewa.gov.in/>), but also submit their grievances. It brings together all the collaborators on a common platform to provide speedy and powerful handling of customer grievances and to circulate and publish real-time data.

**Grievances reported with #AirSewa on X or on the AirSewa Facebook page are tracked, acknowledged and addressed.**



Source: Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI



## How to Make a Complaint?

A passenger can raise a complaint against any airline for issues like:

- Cancellation of flights without proper intimation
- Cancellation of flight tickets at the last minute without prior intimation
- Unreasonable delay in departure
- Change of aircraft
- Behavioural issues of flight crews with passengers
- Bad food service while onboard
- Cleanliness and hygiene issues on the flight
- Hidden charges
- Non-initiation of refund in case of refundable bookings
- Safety and security issues

**Keep a record of all documents related to the flight, including boarding passes, ticket and information about why the delay, cancellation or other problem happened. Save all correspondence with the airline, like emails, in case you need to escalate your complaint.**

To make a complaint, you can approach the customer service desk at the airport or contact the nodal officer of the concerned airline/airport operator. If the nodal officer fails to address the matter, you can appeal to the appellate authority of the airline/airport. The contact information (phone number/email) and procedure for handling claims will be available on the respective websites.

**IndiGo:** <https://www.goindigo.in>

**Air India:** <https://www.airindia.in>

**Vistara:** <https://www.airvistara.com>

**SpiceJet:** <https://www.spicejet.com>

**AirAsia India:** <https://www.airasia.com>

**Akasa Air:** <https://www.akasaair.com/>

**Advocate Jaison J advises, "Check about the compensation from the airline before approaching a consumer court. If they agree to provide it, seek a written confirmation. If denied rightful compensation, use the documentation to seek legal assistance or approach a consumer rights' forum."**

Airline and airport operators must address consumer grievances within one month. If the complaint is not resolved in the specified timeframe, it can be escalated directly to the DGCA ([sugam@dgca.nic.in](mailto:sugam@dgca.nic.in)). You can approach the Ministry of Aviation as well:



**Public Grievance Officer - Ambuj Sharma**

E-mail: [pgo-moca@gov.in](mailto:pgo-moca@gov.in)

**Nodal Appellate Authority of Public Grievance -  
Satyendra Kr. Mishra**

E-mail: [jsskm.moca@gov.in](mailto:jsskm.moca@gov.in)

The grievance section of the AirSewa portal offers an online reporting and monitoring mechanism for any air travel related concerns. You have to sign up as a user to file and track the complaint. The complaints don't have to be limited to the airlines alone. You can raise any issue related to the airport, customs, immigration, security or something else that bothered you. The incident can relate to the pre-travel, during travel or even post-travel period.

Alternatively, consumers can register their complaints by calling the National Consumer Helpline at 1915/1800-11-4000, sending SMS to 8800001915, registering on [www.consumerhelpline.gov.in](http://www.consumerhelpline.gov.in), SUGAM website or on the NCH/UMANG app.

**The Department of Consumer Affairs, GoI is mulling integrating NCH with the AirSewa portal to effectively resolve air passenger complaints.**

The complainant can choose to send a legal notice to the airline or file a complaint in a consumer commission under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. Certain websites also provide airline grievance redressal services.

*This is a sincere appeal to the authorities to reinforce passenger rights by ensuring that airlines adhere to the regulations and ensure proper redressal in case of consumer grievances. ▶*

# Regulation Takes Flight to Safeguard Consumer Rights in Aviation



The burgeoning growth in air traffic and rising passenger footfalls is being supported by successful schemes to expand the airport infrastructure.

The invention of aviation brought a revolutionary change in the world of transportation. Air transport is the fastest – and also the most-preferred mode of travel. Here, we trace how the regulatory authorities gained altitude in tandem with the growth of the airline industry in India along with the government measures to increase aviation infrastructure and connectivity.

**IT WAS WAY** back in 1911 that India's first commercial civil aviation flight took off from a polo ground in Allahabad, carrying mail across the Yamuna river to Naini over a distance of 9.7 kms. It has literally been a high-flying journey from then to being the world's third-largest civil aviation market today and the Mumbai–Delhi air corridor being ranked the third-busiest route in the world.

India has flown a long way over the better part of the last century – a handful of private airlines were operating pre- and post-independence till the airline industry was nationalised in 1953. They were subsumed into two government-owned entities - Indian Airlines for domestic routes and Air India for international services. In 1991, the Government of India de-regularised the civil aviation sector leading to the advent of some private airlines once again.

Till the early 2000s, air travel was a luxury that was limited to the affluent sections of the population. A few years later, the aviation sector witnessed a boom with the introduction of low-cost carriers which finally made air travel mainstream in India. Since then, the aviation sector has been growing at an astonishing rate with a record number of travellers taking to the skies.

The Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns upended the airline industry. But, we have not only

## India's air traffic movement crossed 327 million passengers in 2022-23

Today, there are around 15 scheduled airlines operating passenger services apart from other cargo carriers.

rebounded, but already surpassed pre-pandemic levels and are poised for an impressive and healthy growth.

### Regulations

The Indian aviation sector is primarily governed by the provisions of the **Aircraft Act, 1934** which empowers the federal government to make rules for regulating the manufacture, sale, use, operation, export, import and safety of all civil aircrafts. The **Aircraft Rules of 1937** were made thereunder dealing with flying conditions, registration, airworthiness, licences, etc. They are amended from time to time, the latest being in 2023.

The Carriage by Air Act, 1972 lays down the rights and liabilities of air carriers and is applicable to both domestic and international carriage by air.

The other important legislations governing civil aviation in India are:

- International Airports Authority Act, 1971
- Tokyo Convention Act, 1975
- National Airports Authority Act, 1985

- Airports Authority of India Act, 1994
- Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India Act, 2008
- Aircraft (Security) Rules, 2011
- Aircraft (Investigation of Accidents and Incidents) Rules, 2012
- Anti-Hijacking Act, 2016
- Aircraft (Amendment) Act, 2020

The Aircraft (Amendment) Act, 2020 seeks to improve India's aviation safety ratings and provides statutory status to regulatory institutions like the DGCA, BCAS and AAIB. The ICAO had suggested providing proper recognition to the aviation regulators.

### Regulatory Bodies

The **Ministry of Civil Aviation** (MoCA), Government of India is the nodal ministry responsible for the formulation of national policies and programmes for the development and regulation of civil aviation. It is entrusted with the administration of the Aircraft Act, 1934, Aircraft Rules, 1937 and other legislations pertaining to the aviation sector.

Different regulatory bodies function under the aegis of the aviation ministry to govern and monitor civil aviation in India. Each of them has their own distinct function and roles and often work hand-in-hand to ensure effective regulation of aircrafts, airports, et al.



**Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** – This is the primary body responsible for enforcing the civil aviation regulations, air safety and airworthiness standards apart from training and licensing, aerodrome standards, flight training, flight inspection, research and development. Hence, it deals with all kinds of safety and operational issues.

### Domestic traffic

(On 10th Apr 2024)

Departing flights 3,018	Departing Pax 4,27,108
Arriving flights 3,025	Arriving Pax 4,20,902
Aircraft movements 6,043	Airport footfalls 8,48,010

### International traffic

(On 10th Apr 2024)

Departing flights 511	Departing Pax 96,192
Arriving flights 602	Arriving Pax 93,121
Aircraft movements 1,113	Airport footfalls 1,89,313

Source: Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI



← Mr. Jyotiraditya M. Scindia is the Minister of Civil Aviation and Mr. Vikram Dev Dutt is the chief of DGCA →

**Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) –**



This aviation security regulator was established in 1987 following the tragic crash of Air India Flight 182. It lays down standards and measures for security of civil flights at domestic and international airports.

Accordingly, it is in charge of the construction, modification, maintenance, operation, financing and management of airports - including passenger terminals, cargo terminals, runways, parallel taxiways, apron, etc. – as well as the provisions for communication, navigation and surveillance, air traffic services, passenger facilities and related amenities.

and monitors the performance standards of such airports. Accordingly, it determines the amount of development fees and passenger service fees levied by airports, and monitors standards relating to quality, continuity and reliability of services, etc.

**Aircraft Accidents Investigation Bureau (AAIB) –**



It was set up in 2012 to conduct investigations into accidents, serious incidents and incidents. It also carries out safety studies from time to time. The recommendations made in the Investigation Reports and Safety Studies are forwarded to the DGCA



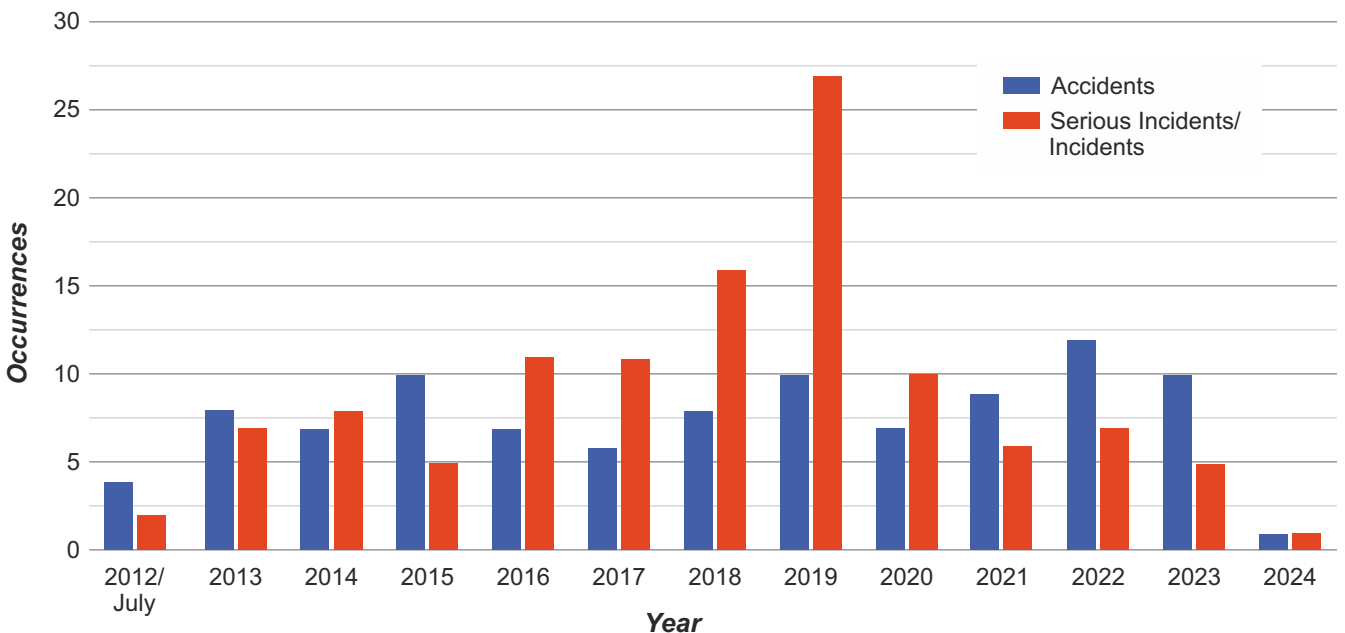
**Airport Authority of India (AAI) –**

It is responsible for creating, upgrading, maintaining and managing the civil aviation infrastructure.



**Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) –** It regulates the airport tariff for aeronautical services, determines airport charges for services rendered at major airports

**Occurrences investigated by AAIB**



India follows the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) guidelines on safety and has a state safety programme under the Chicago Convention (ICAO 9859). The DGCA coordinates regulatory functions with the ICAO.

(and regulatory bodies of other countries) for implementation and follow up.

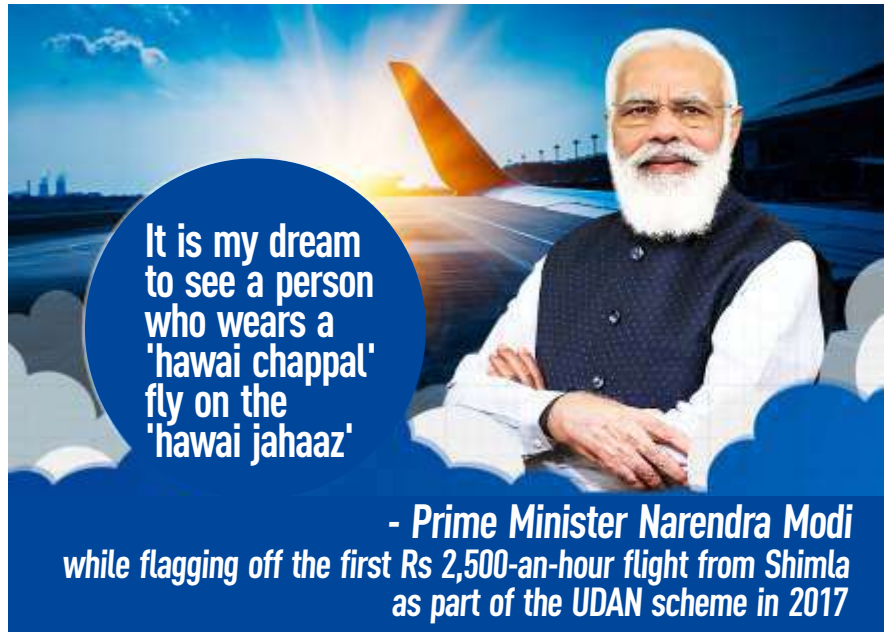
### Latest Developments

The Government of India formulated the **National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP), 2016** with an aim to create an ecosystem to make flying affordable for the masses while ensuring safe, secure, affordable and sustainable travel for air passengers and transportation of cargo with access to various parts of India. The centre-piece of this integrated civil aviation policy is to make regional air connectivity a reality through fiscal support and infrastructure development. It also seeks to enhance ease of doing business through deregulation, simplified procedures and e-governance.

**NCAP 2016 aims to increase domestic ticketing to Rs 50 crore, international ticketing to Rs 20 crore and cargo volumes to 10 million tonnes by 2027.**

Under this, the Regional Connectivity Scheme - UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) was launched in April 2017 to increase the number of operational airports, number of routes, number of flyers and also reduce the cost of flying. The target is to raise the number of operational airports to 220 by 2025 and put tier-II and tier-III cities on the aviation map.

Indeed, the government has been diligently working towards increasing the number of airports in the country. Foundation stones for new airports are being laid left, right and centre. The number of airports has already doubled from a little over 70 in 2016.

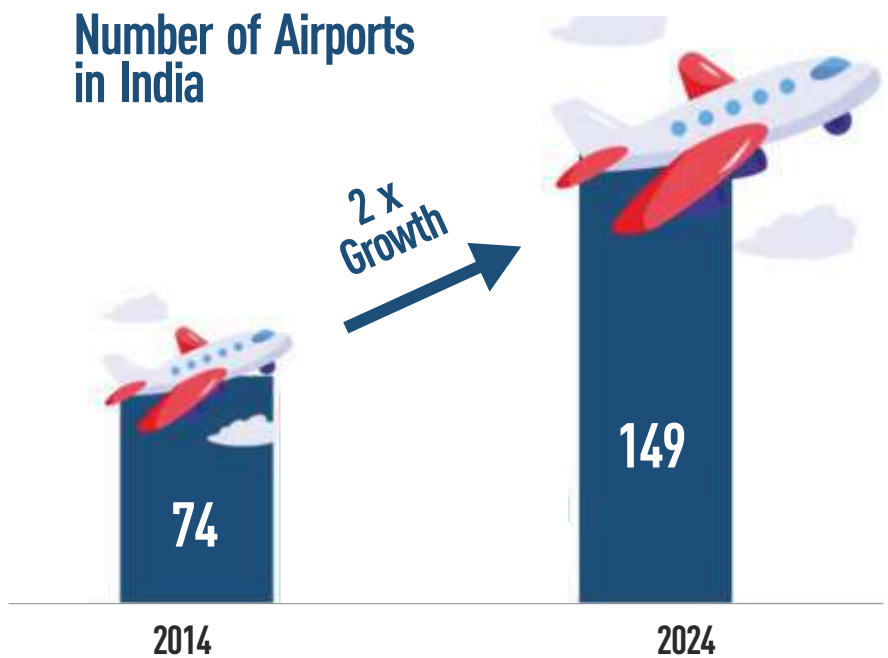


Around \$11 billion have been invested in building new airports and refurbishing existing ones and the aviation minister has promised another \$15 billion.

Moreover, the operations of major airports have been privatised which has resulted in better-equipped and cleaner airports. Many of the terminals are being refurbished or expanded.

**According to latest estimates, India has 149 operational airports for civil aviation, including 33 international, 11 customs, 105 domestic and few more civil aviation enclaves within military air bases. With 517 air routes, passenger air traffic is at its peak.**

### Number of Airports in India



**Airports**

(Till 10th Apr 2024)

<b>Operational</b> 149	<b>International*</b> 33 Incl JV airports
<b>Custom</b> 11	<b>Domestic*</b> 105 Incl State Govt./ Private airports
<b>Joint venture International</b> 7	<b>State Govt./ Private</b> 18

Source: Ministry of Civil Aviation, Gov

A lot more still needs to be done in terms of airport infrastructure. For instance, many of the regional airports are a far cry from the behemoth structures in the metro cities. Hardly 1 or 2 aircrafts take-off/land in a day. There are no parking lots, passengers simply walk past a checkpoint, wait on benches outside the terminal and again walk to the aircraft.

The UDAN-RCS scheme has also led to the rise of many small regional airlines such as FlyBig, Star Air, Zoom, IndiaOne Air and the latest, Fly91, to cater to the rising demand. Almost half of the seats on UDAN flights are offered at subsidised prices, and the participating airlines receive financial support known as viability gap funding (VGF), which is shared between the centre and relevant state governments.

There are plans to build second airports in big cities for decongestion - 6 dual-airport cities by 2030, 15 by 2040 and 30 plus by 2047. The National Capital Region and Mumbai will witness the launch of Noida International Airport and Navi Mumbai Airport in this year.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation released a report titled 'Vision 2040' in January 2019 outlining a roadmap for the future of civil aviation in India. It projects that air passenger traffic will increase sixfold to 1.1 billion by 2040 including 821 million domestic and 303 million international passengers. It further estimates that around 2340 aircrafts will be required to serve these passengers and the number of airports should be 190-200 by March 2040.

The government proposed creating a \$2 billion fund to help support low-traffic airports apart from establishing an aircraft manufacturing base in India by 2040. Indeed, the

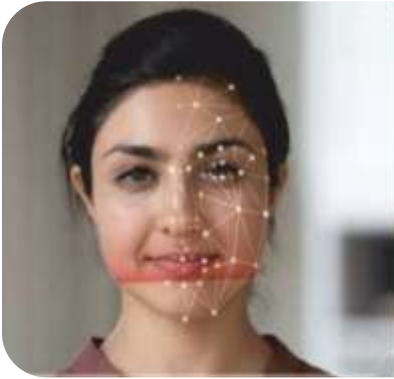


Due to investments made by the Indian government on airport infrastructure, the potential of growth from the Indian market has increased manifold.

- Willie Walsh, Director General of IATA



The launch of C-295 transport aircraft manufacturing facility by Tata-Airbus in Vadodara for the Indian Air Force is a significant development.



DigiYatra is built on Four Pillars -

- Connected Passengers
- Connected Airports
- Connected Flying
- Connected Systems



YOUR FACE IS YOUR NEW BOARDING PASS

policymakers are encouraging an ecosystem of aerospace manufacturing under 'Make in India' to build a sustainable aviation model that can overcome supply chain issues and reduce foreign-dominated expenses.

**DigiYatra** – This digital initiative is transforming the flying experience through contactless air travel, making Indian aviation one of the most innovative aviation networks in the world.

Available at a handful airports as of now (Bangalore, Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Vijayawada, Varanasi, etc.), DigiYatra facilitates paperless travel and avoids identity check at multiple points. The digital processing uses facial recognition to identify passengers at entry point, security check and boarding apart from self bag drop and check-in.

Travellers can enroll on the DigiYatra app (or kiosks at some airports) which serves as a single-point verification for seamless entry at the airport through e-gates and

does not even require showing the ticket, boarding pass or identification documents. Everything is already stored on the mobile platform. Your face is scanned and the gates literally open for you! Thus, the wait time is reduced, security check and boarding is faster, making the travel convenient, hassle-free and even secure for the passengers.

**Environment Sustainability**

There is increasing pressure on the aviation sector to reduce its carbon footprint and adopt



sustainable practices. The Ministry of Civil Aviation is actively promoting responsible aviation practices. It has taken initiatives to achieve carbon neutrality and net zero carbon emissions across airports in the country by standardising the Carbon Accounting and Reporting Framework of the airports.

Airports in Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru have achieved Level 4+ Carbon Accreditation and the Airports International Council (ACI) Accreditation and have become carbon neutral. Additionally, 66 Indian airports are operating on 100% green energy. The world's first solar energy airport has come up in Kochi and it entirely functions on solar power.

**Conclusion**

New airports, new terminals, new aircrafts and new technology are making inroads into the aviation sector. However, as Kapil Kaul, CEO of Australia-based CAPA Center for Aviation, points out, "India must also significantly strengthen safety, security, skills, airspace architecture and institutional infrastructure to ensure this growth is well-managed. The industry is still dogged by minor problems, such as wintertime flight delays and cancellations when dense fog affects operations. Regulatory enforcement also needs strengthening." ▶



India has got its highest ever aviation safety ranking from ICAO – our **Global ranking jumped from 102 to 48**







# AIR INDIA'S A350 WILL BE GAME-CHANGER



**India:**  
Emergence of  
**a global leader**  
in aviation





With the arrival of the Airbus A350, Air India is expected to transform Indian aviation. The airline's introduction of this aircraft demonstrates its commitment to staying current with the times. Airbus A350 will upgrade long-distance travel as it can fly non-stop for approximately 16-17 hours, covering 15,400 km, bringing a new level of efficiency and comfort for its customers

Expected aviation market ranking by 2024

3<sup>rd</sup> largest

Air passenger traffic in FY24\* (in nos.)

213,981,528

Air passenger traffic in FY23 (in million)

327.28

For 2028, forecasted contribution of travel & tourism to GDP

US\$ 512 billion

Expected expenditure of Indian travellers in 2023

US\$199.54billion

**GROUNDING DREAMS:**

# PASSENGER PAIN POINTS UP IN THE AIR

With the rising household incomes of the upwardly mobile middle class, India's air passenger numbers have been surging. However, a large section of the air transport potential still remains untapped. Considering the huge growth opportunities, the government is endeavouring to take flying to the masses by enhancing connectivity and affordability. Yet, it cannot be denied that an increasing number of passengers appear to be dissatisfied with the airline industry.



**The harsh reality is that the passenger experience remains cumbersome at various levels!**

**FOLLOWING A WAVE** of complaints from fliers, LocalCircles - India's leading community social media platform and pollster focusing on governance, public and consumer interest issues – has been conducting a series of nationwide surveys to gauge the consumer sentiments vis-à-vis the airlines.

### Airline Experience of Passengers

A survey to quantify the experience of airline passengers in 2023 received over 25,000 responses from air travellers located in 284 districts of India. 64% respondents were men and 36% were women. 47% respondents were from tier-1, 33% from tier-2 and 20% from tier-3, 4 and rural districts.

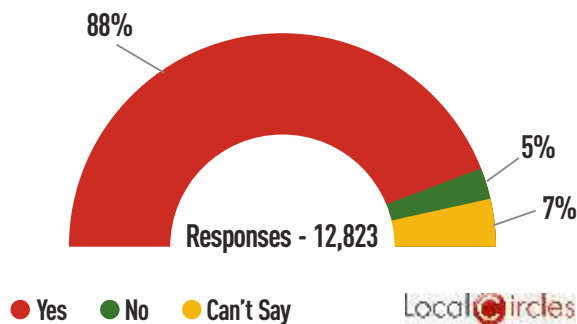
The results are a shocker - 9 in 10 passengers believe airlines have been compromising on comfort and cutting corners in the last 24 months. (see Figure 1) This percentage escalated from 78% in 2022 to 88% in 2023, indicating a clear decline in customer service and care. The survey further revealed that:

- 35% of the surveyed passengers reported issues with boarding and check-in procedures and baggage handling
- 17% had issues with airlines not timely sharing information and hassles due to flight delays
- 9% had issues with airline staff behaviour inside the flight and at the airport
- 30% indicated poor aircraft interiors including seats and entertainment systems (see Figure 2)

In the community discussions, it was apparent that a significant number of air travellers still perceive the aviation regulator as largely unaware of the shortcomings that they routinely encounter in airline customer service. The survey report noted that many passengers want the regulator to take steps to ensure improved services and behaviour from airline staff. Additionally, there is a call for faster and real-time escalation mechanisms for consumer grievances.

**FIGURE 1**

*In your experience have India-based airlines been compromising on passenger comfort and cutting corners in the last 24 months?*



### Flight Disruptions and Lack of Penalties

Following the spate of outbursts related to flight cancellations and delays this winter, LocalCircles conducted another survey to gather the pulse of the fliers on flight cancellations or reschedules by airlines due to internal reasons, the frequency of such incidents along with what should be the penalty on airlines if they reschedule or cancel flights.

The survey received 23,000 responses from air passengers located in over 318 districts of the country. 61% respondents were men and 39% were women. 46% respondents were from tier-1, 34% from tier-2 and 20% from tier-3, 4 and rural districts.

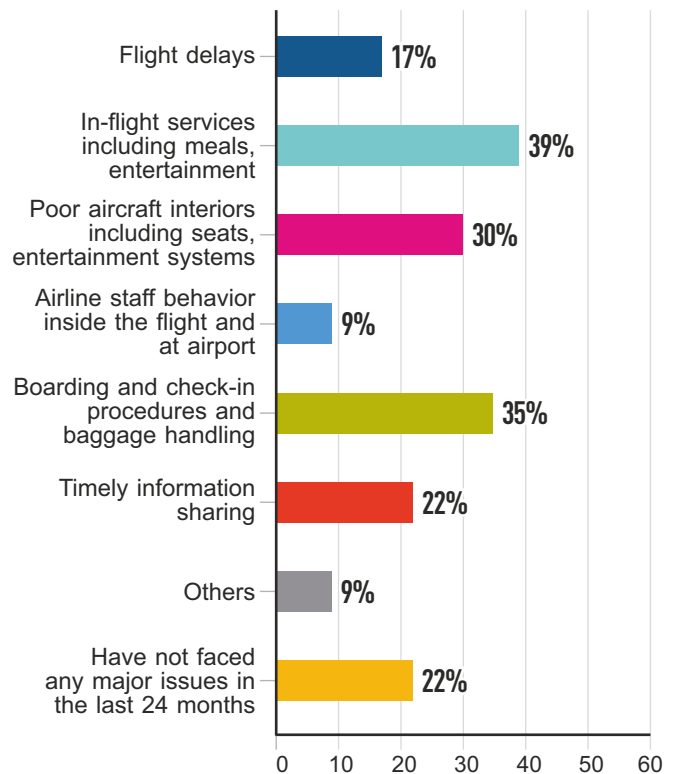
The report revealed that a staggering 7 in 10 fliers surveyed had one or more flights cancelled or rescheduled in the last one year due to internal reasons of the airlines. (see Figure 3)

A whopping 9 in 10 want the government to mandate airlines to pay a penalty of 25% to 50% of the ticket value to passengers for cancelling or rescheduling flights due to internal reasons. (see Figure 4)

Many passengers pointed out that an airline can delay a flight via multiple notifications of one hour delay leading to an eventual delay of 3 hours or more. At best, a few

**FIGURE 2**

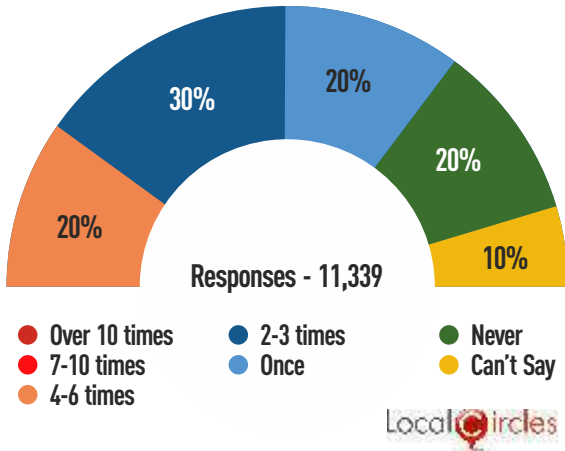
*What have been some of your top issues with India-based airlines in the last 24 months?*



\*\*Some respondents have selected more than 1 options in the survey and hence the total does not equate to 100%

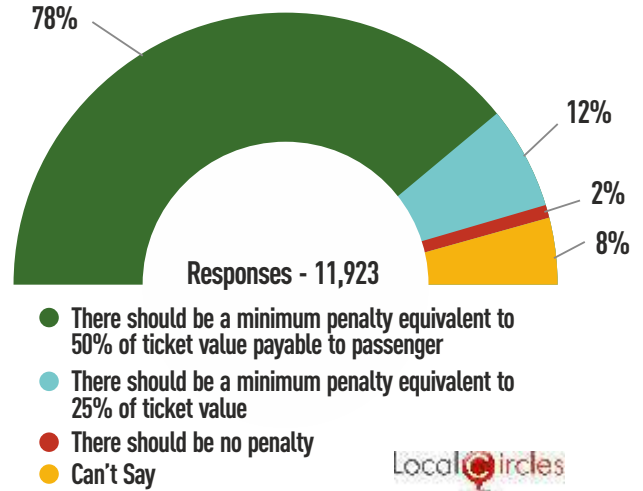
**FIGURE 3**

*In the last 12 months, how many times have airlines rescheduled or cancelled your flight due to their internal (non-weather, security, Government order, etc.) reasons?*



**FIGURE 4**

*What should be the disincentives for airlines to not cancel or reschedule flights because of empty seats or low load factor on the flight?*



passengers may opt out of travelling and get a fare refund or an alternate flight. There is no major financial disincentive to the airline for delaying for internal reasons.

A major bone of contention for the fliers is that if they arrive a few minutes late at the airline check-in counter, they not only face boarding denial, but, in most cases, are directed to buy a ticket on the next available flight at a significantly higher fare.

Moreover, some passengers alleged that airlines even overbook flights as a business strategy and then close check-in 60 minutes before departure time. This generates additional revenue for them in the form of the fare difference for booking the next available flight.

This is downright unfair as the airlines can collect additional amounts in fare differences while they do not

incur any penalties for delaying, rescheduling or cancelling flights. There is a need for the regulator to step in here and introduce appropriate penalties for airlines to induce them to be better prepared with appropriate resources and thereby minimise delays due to internal reasons. This is likely to improve on-time performance of the entire aviation ecosystem in India.

### Baggage Handling

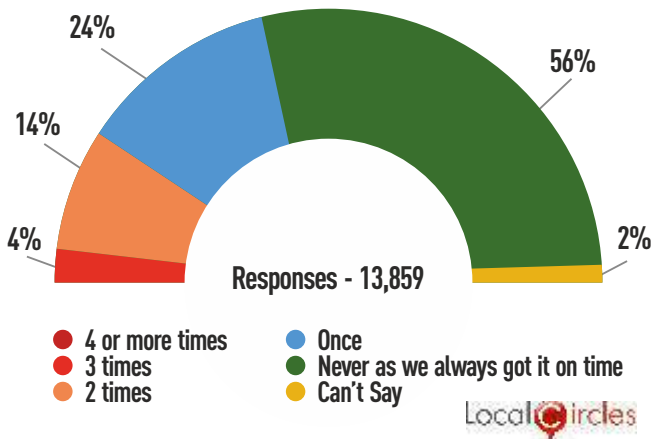
Following constant complaints of fliers about damaged, delayed and lost luggage, LocalCircles conducted a follow-up survey in February 2024 to find out the baggage handling problems faced by passengers.

It received over 41,000 responses from airline fliers located in 303 districts of India. 67% respondents were

**The survey responses showed that as many as 2 in 5 fliers experienced delayed or lost baggage issues with the airlines.**

**FIGURE 5**

How many times in the last 2 years (2022-2024) have you or your family traveled on had an issue with delivering your bag on a timely basis (instead had delayed baggage or lost baggage)?



men and 33% were women. 41% respondents were from tier-1, 30% from tier-2 and 29% from tier-3, 4 and rural locations.

The survey responses showed that as many as 2 in 5 fliers experienced delayed or lost baggage issues with the airlines. (see Figure 5)

- 1 in 2 fliers surveyed experienced damage to their checked in bag(s)
- 1 in 4 fliers surveyed rate the customer service and responsiveness of airline as poor or worse

The report stated, "LocalCircles hopes the government will move forward, make the airlines more accountable and ensure fliers are not faced with undue harassment. Airports also have to be more responsive to customer care and handle baggage more efficiently."

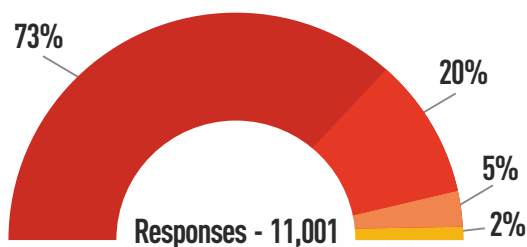
### Dark Patterns

Earlier, a LocalCircles survey turned the limelight on yet another passenger woe - manipulative 'dark patterns' pervading the travel sector. Herein, 7 in 10 users of online travel platforms surveyed confirmed that they have experienced dark patterns like hidden charges, false urgency and price manipulations based on their search patterns.

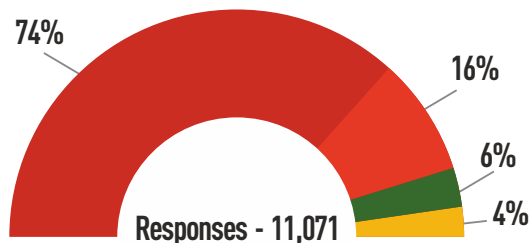
- 73% indicated they have frequently experienced surge in air fares/hotel room tariffs after multiple searches
- 74% of travel apps/sites users indicated they have faced situations of what appeared to be a false sense of urgency
- 67% said they have experienced hidden charges associated with flight ticket/hotel booking during the final payment stage (see Figure 6)

**FIGURE 6**

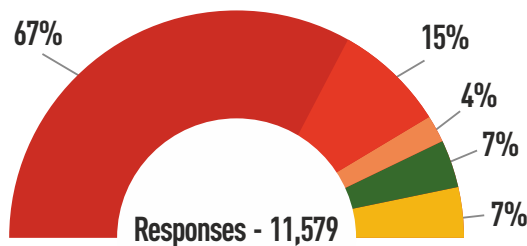
How often have you experienced with travel apps/sites that the air fares/hotel room tariffs are increased while you searched for it multiple times in a session?



How often have you experienced with travel apps/sites that a false sense of urgency (Example: Last 2 seats or 2 rooms available at this price) is created to get you to book faster?



How often have you experienced with travel apps/sites that there are hidden charges (other than taxes) that are associated with flight ticket/hotel room bookings which are not presented upfront but only later when you are making payment?



- Very frequently
- Some times
- Rarely
- Never
- Can't Say



**Same product with slightly different packaging has an MRP of over 14 times when sold onboard flights**



**Sold in the stores/online**



**Sold onboard flights**



**Seat Booking Charges**

A follow-up survey by LocalCircles in March - covering around 40,000 fliers from over 300 districts - gauged the extent of some more unfair trade practices and misleading claims by airlines.

About 65% fliers who booked a flight reported paying an extra fee for reserving a seat. According to the survey, if a family wants to sit together, they spend more than what the actual ticket costs as most of the seats are available on extra payment of Rs 200 to Rs 2000. Else, they have to sit in separate rows as in some airlines only the middle seat requires no extra payment.

The survey concluded that the current priority is for airlines to adjust their proportion of paid seats to a level that is more reasonable for consumers, particularly by refraining from obliging families to pay additional charges to sit together. Moreover, all airlines and travel platforms should transparently disclose any potential extra fees during the booking process.

**Food and Beverage Charges**

Still another LocalCircles survey conducted this year raised concerns about packaged food and water being sold at 5 to 15 times the MRP on flights. A simple food item is priced around Rs 500 – which is almost 13% of the cost of the flight ticket.

59% and 72% of the fliers surveyed said that the

airlines sold them packaged food and bottled water respectively at a published MRP higher than the MRP available in the market/stores. 23% reported that the MRP of packaged food was 10 times higher while 36% stated that the MRP of bottled water was 10 times higher.

The report surveyed around 22,000 citizens from 322 districts in India. 63% respondents were men and 37% were women. 48% respondents were from tier-1 cities, 32% from tier-2 and 20% from tier-3, 4 and rural districts. It highlighted that this overcharging malpractice is underway despite the government's guidelines prohibiting identical pre-packaged products from having different MRPs at different locations.

**It should be noted that in a 2022 survey, 65% of the surveyed passengers wanted the civil aviation ministry to reintroduce a cap on airfares!**

**Summing Up**

The writing on the wall is clear. The airlines must prioritise passenger convenience and fair treatment apart from providing a seamless experience from booking to arrival.

**Come to think of it, there are regulators for aviation, but no dedicated authority for handling grievances of air travellers! ▶**

## Give Your Travel the Wings of Insurance

Insurance never makes it to our travel checklist, especially for domestic flights. We always expect the best to happen, but it is prudent to be prepared for the worst! Travel insurance will safeguard us by guaranteeing a hassle-free experience in case of any emergency.



**Travel insurance provides comprehensive coverage that can protect the traveller from various unforeseen circumstances.**

**TRAVELLING IS EXCITING!** We plan everything in detail – booking the flight tickets, arranging the accommodation, packing the luggage and everything in between. We take great care to stay within the baggage allowance limits, arrive at the airport well in time and gear up to fly to the destination.

Amidst all this, the thought of insuring our travel never even crosses the mind! The optimism bias kicks in to the extent that we recklessly uncheck the insurance option (if offered) while booking the tickets. After all, what can go wrong with our travel plans?

**While it is mandatory to buy travel insurance for most international flights, it remains optional for domestic flights.**

### Why You Need Travel Insurance?

A catastrophe can strike at any time. Unwanted complications can rear their head anywhere, not just when travelling to foreign shores.

And contrary to common belief, travel insurance is not just a protection against the costs of medical treatment or accidents that arise during your travel. Apart from safeguarding your health, it provides coverage against a variety of other risks related to travel.

*What if your trip gets cancelled due to some unforeseen reason? What if your flight is delayed for a couple of hours or you miss your connecting flight? What if your baggage gets misplaced or is lost completely?*

**Travel insurance is a safety shield that will protect you against any adversity before, during or just after your flight!**

### What Does it Cover?

**Trip Cancellation** – A situation may arise that may require you to cancel the trip or change the itinerary. For instance, you/your co-traveller may fall sick or meet with an accident or a family member may pass away. Cancelling the flight tickets will involve huge losses due to cancellation charges. Moreover, many of the low-cost fares are non-refundable. However, travel insurance has your back and will provide you a refund. The coverage will extend to hotel booking and other cancellations as well.

**Flight Delays** – It's not just on you – technical difficulties, inclement weather or a natural calamity can play spoilsport with your travel plans too. Long delays can lead to physical exertion, extra expenses and may even cause you to miss a connecting flight or an important event. Travel insurance will compensate you for such losses.

**Loss of Baggage** – Airlines run roughshod on the luggage. Baggage delays are a common phenomenon. It

may arrive after a few days or even be declared lost by the airline. You don't have to run pillar to post claiming compensation from the airline as the insurance will cover the unexpected expenses on new clothes, toiletries, medicines, etc. to tide over the delay without ruining your holiday budget.

**Flight Troubles** – What if you get injured during unexpectedly strong turbulence during the flight? What if your flight meets with an accident or makes an emergency landing? What if your flight is hijacked? Travel insurance will provide compensation in case of such emergencies for the medical care, distress, etc.

**Personal Liability** – You yourself may accidentally cause damage to someone else or their property in the course of your travel. Such third-party eventualities can be covered by your travel insurance.

**Digit Insurance states that one of the highest numbers of travel insurance claims every year are due to flight cancellations and in 2022-23, most claims were for flight delays.**



**Choosing the right travel insurance plan is essential while planning your trip. While opting for travel insurance, it is critical to understand the coverage provided by a plan. It should also be noted that there are various plans available in terms of the geographies/countries covered, days of travel, whether you are a single traveller or travelling in a group, and the sum insured.**

**- Sheeraj Deshpande,  
Head - Health Business,  
SBI General Insurance.**

The actual coverage and compensation can vary depending on the specifications of the policy (sum insured, benefits provided/opted for, etc.) and the insurance provider. Some policies can also be customised to suit the travel plans, length/frequency of travel and so on.

Some airlines offer insurance coverage along with the booking (for an additional charge), especially for international travel. Filing the claim is an easy process and the compensation will be provided quickly.

In sum, even for domestic flights, travel insurance can be of great help should a medical, flight, baggage or other travel-related contingency arise. While a travel issue can be the worst way to start a trip, having insurance will mitigate the pain and ensure peace of mind! ▶



## Provisions for Protection of Consumer Rights in Air Travel

The government does regulate the airlines and directs them to issue compensation and even refunds to the consumers in case of flight disruptions. The airlines are bound to facilitate the affected passengers in accordance with the rules laid down by the regulator.



**THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL** of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is the foremost authority regulating air transport in India, including ensuring consumer safety and protecting their rights. This national aviation regulator has issued the Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) that outlines the operational, procedural and other requirements for all airline operators. Section 3, Series M of the CAR define passenger facilitation and their rights in case of disruption of services. The Passenger Charter of Rights - issued by the Ministry of Civil Aviation – also lays out the rights of airline passengers with regard to a range of gross inconveniences.

The government's guidelines provide that the airlines need to extend specific information and facilities to the passengers in case of instances like denied/delayed boarding, delay/damage/lost baggage, flight delays, flight cancellations, etc.

**It should be noted that the Passenger Charter of Rights does not have any legal statutory backing!**

### Flight Delay

- If a flight gets delayed by 6 hours or more, the airline must inform the revised time at least 24 hours prior to the original scheduled departure time. Consumers should be offered either an alternate flight within a period of 6 hours or a full refund of the ticket price.

Additionally, the passengers should be granted free hotel accommodation if the flight is delayed for more than 24 hours. And, if the flight was scheduled to depart between 8 pm and 3 am, consumers should get a complimentary hotel stay if the delay exceeds six hours.

- The passengers have to be provided free food and beverages based on the 'block time' - period between a flight's departure and arrival at the destination – and waiting time. The obligation of refreshments kicks in when:

**Please Note – Airlines are not required to compensate passengers if the delay/cancellation is caused by uncharacteristic and unforeseeable events beyond the airline's control, such as political unrest, natural disasters, civil war, riots or directives from the government impacting the aircraft, strikes and disputes, and so on. Flyers will only be entitled to a fare refund in such cases.**

- flight has a block time of 2.5 hours and is delayed by two hours
- flight has a block time of 2.5 to 5 hours and is delayed by three hours
- flight does not fall in the above groups and is delayed by four hours

### Flight Cancellation

- The airline should inform the passenger about the cancellation at least 2 weeks prior the scheduled time of departure. An alternate flight or full refund should be offered, as acceptable to the passenger.
- If the airline notifies the passenger less than 14 days before departure but at least 24 hours prior to departure time, it should provide an alternate flight or full refund, as acceptable to the passenger.
- If the airline does not notify the passenger at least a day before departure, or if the passenger misses a connecting flight booked on the same ticket number, it must either provide an alternate flight as acceptable to the passenger or issue a full refund along with compensation as follows:
  - Flights with block time upto and including 1 hour - Rs 5,000 or booked one-way basic cost plus airline fuel charge, whichever is less

**In view of the unduly long delays and frequent cancellation of flights due to the dense fog massively disrupting operations in the beginning of this year, the DGCA issued Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to the airlines requiring them to publish real-time information regarding flight delays on their websites, inform affected passengers through WhatsApp messages and email, and sensitise their staff at airports to communicate with passengers. The regulator stated, “In view of the prevalent fog season and adverse weather conditions, airlines may cancel, sufficiently in advance, such flights that are anticipated to be delayed or consequentially delayed on account of such conditions beyond a period of 3 hours.....”**



- Flights with block time over 1 hour and upto and including 2 hours - Rs 7,500 or booked one-way basic cost plus airline fuel surcharge, whichever is less.
- Flights with block time over 2 hours - Rs 10,000 or the booked one-way basic cost plus airline fuel charge, whichever is less.

Furthermore:

- Free meals/refreshments have to be provided in relation to the waiting time for the alternate flight.
- If the airline offers a flight to/from an airport/terminal other than which was booked, the airline should bear the cost of transferring the passenger to/from the alternate airport/terminal from/to the one that was booked. However, if the change is intimated at least 6 hours in advance, the passenger has to make his/her own arrangements.

### Denied Boarding

- If you are denied boarding due to overbooking, the airline can arrange an alternate flight scheduled to depart within one hour of the original scheduled departure time. Compensation will not be paid in such cases.
- If the airline cannot arrange an alternate flight to depart within the specified one hour, it should provide compensation as follows:
  - If the arranged alternate flight is scheduled to depart within 24 hours of the original scheduled departure time - 200% of booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charge, subject to maximum of Rs 10,000.
  - If the arranged alternate flight is scheduled to depart more than 24 hours after the original scheduled departure time - 400% of booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charge, subject to maximum of Rs 20,000
  - If the passenger does not opt for an alternate flight - full refund of ticket fare and compensation of 400% of booked one-way basic fare plus airline fuel charge, subject to maximum of Rs 20,000.

**A clearly legible notice should be displayed at check-in – 'If you are denied boarding or if your flight is cancelled or delayed, ask at the check-in counter or boarding gate for the text stating your rights, particularly with regard to compensation and assistance'. If a flight is cancelled or boarding is denied, the airline should provide the passengers a written notice setting out the rules for compensation and assistance in line with the regulation. The contact details of the escalation mechanism should also be given in written form.**

### Involuntary Downgrading

It may happen that a passenger may book a ticket for a particular class, but the airline downgrades it to a lower class. In such cases, the compensation is payable as follows:

- For domestic travel – 75% of the cost of ticket, including taxes.
- For international travel – 30%, 50% and 75% of the cost of the ticket including taxes for flights flying 1500 kms or less, between 1500 and 3500 kms and more than 3500 kms respectively.

### Lost/Delayed/Damaged Baggage

- In case of such occurrences on domestic flights, the airline's liability is limited to Rs 20,000 per passenger (Rs 350 per kg for cargo).
- For international carriage, the liability is limited to 1131 SDR per passenger (19 SDR per kg for cargo).

### Other Issues

- There are specific stipulations for flight diversions related to disembarking at the nearest airport, proper facilitation and provision of refreshments.
- No airline can refuse to carry a disabled person or his/her assistive aids/devices, escorts and guide dogs. They should have seats that are designated as acceptable for persons with disabilities free of charge, which will remain blocked until close to the time of departure.
- In case of death (apart from natural causes) or bodily injury to a passenger onboard an aircraft, the airline is liable to pay up to Rs 20 lakhs per passenger for domestic travel and up to 113,100 SDR per passenger for international carriage. Death due to natural causes on board has no compensation.

**Please Note - You must provide adequate contact information at the time of booking, or else, no financial compensation shall be payable. Passengers should contact the airline's nodal person to claim the compensation. They should submit all relevant documents requested by the airline, like contact information, ticket number, flight number, date of travel, details of credit/debit card used to purchase the ticket, billing address, etc. In case of denied boarding, a refund claim has to be filed within a month from the occurrence.**

**Passengers need to claim refunds within a month of the incident taking place.**

## Ticket Cancellation

- Airlines are mandated to prominently indicate the cancellation charges at the time of booking. The amount of refund money admissible and its break-up must be indicated on the ticket itself or through a separate form used for the purpose, and the policy and amount of refund should be displayed by the airlines on their respective websites.
- If a passenger cancels a ticket, the airline must refund all statutory taxes and user development fee, airport development fee, passenger service fee, etc. This is applicable for all types of fares including promos/special fares and where the basic fare is non-refundable.
- Under no circumstances can the airline/agent levy cancellation charges more than the basic fare plus fuel surcharge. This will exclude any charges levied by the travel agent, which have been fully disclosed at the time of booking.
- The refund amount cannot be credited into the 'credit shell' or wallet of the airline by default, and will be the decision of the passenger.
- Passengers are not liable to pay any additional charge to process the refund.

**Lock-in Option – Passengers can cancel or amend a ticket, without any additional charges, within 24 hours of booking the ticket.**

**Please note – If the payment was made by cash, the airline should refund the money immediately. If the payment was made by credit card, it should be refunded within a week. In case a booking is made through a travel agent or third-party website, they have to process the refund within 30 working days.**

In addition to the above, the airlines are also required to:

- Display their policies in regard to compensation, refunds and the facilities that will be provided in the event of denied boardings, cancellations and delays on their respective websites as part of their passenger Charter of Rights.
- **Include a reference to the Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) on the flight tickets.**
- Disseminate reasons of cancellation and delays to the affected passengers and attend to their grievances at their counters at the airport.



**In a meeting with industry representatives a couple of months ago, the Union Minister of Aviation, Mr. Jyotiraditya Scindia himself asked the operators to strictly follow the CAR in terms of flight cancellations, delay and refund policies.**

- Appoint a Nodal officer and Appellate Authority to settle passenger grievances in a stipulated timeframe. Their details should be conspicuously displayed on their respective websites.
- Have a provision for online complaint handling.
- Maintain transparency in their internal grievance mechanism.

## Government in Action

The DGCA has made it mandatory for airlines to adhere to the provisions of the CAR. Late last year, the regulator imposed a fine of Rs 10 lakh on Air India for not providing mandatory facilities to passengers who were denied boarding or whose flights were delayed or cancelled. A year and a half prior to this, the airline was slapped with a similar penalty for denying boarding to passengers.



**DR V. K. SINGH**, Minister of State, Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI stated that the DGCA keeps a check on compliance of regulations for cancellations and delays by airlines. He claimed that the regulator conducts random inspections at various airports and initiates necessary penal action, including financial penalties, if an airline is found violating CAR provisions. It keeps a constant eye on passenger complaints as well.

Despite this, most of the times, the airlines do not offer the reimbursement/compensation and even the food/lodging facilities. It is clear that the authorities need to enhance passenger protection and establish a clearer framework for airline responsibilities. The existing rules need to be enforced in a systematic and sincere manner. ▶

## DGCA Norms Not Enough, Fume Flyers



An editorial article in the Times of India highlights that while the DGCA may be urging the airlines to follow the regulations (following over 100 Vistara flights being cancelled or delayed due to pilot protests in April), flyers cry foul as the norms are insufficient!

**THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL** of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has asked Vistara to follow the relevant regulations pertaining to facilities and compensation it should pay passengers hit by flight cancellations, delays and denied boarding. However, passengers whose flights have been cancelled or delayed have learnt that these norms do not address some of their core concerns.

For instance: For a flight cancellation done within 24 hours of departure, the norms state that the airline should either provide an alternative flight or refund the ticket and pay compensation ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000, depending on the length of the journey.

For passengers who are not accommodated on an alternative flight, this compensation amount hardly covers the costs they would have to incur in buying a last-minute ticket to their destination.

On Tuesday, Sushil Patni and his wife, both senior citizens, ended up spending Rs 21,000 to book tickets on IndiGo to fly to Delhi from Indore after Vistara cancelled their flight. They were booked on an evening departure to Baku and so could not wait for a day for alternative arrangements. Under the said norms, together they would get a compensation of Rs 15,000.

Then again, the provisions mention free hotel accommodation only in case of flight delay, and not for cancellations. It states that the airline is required to provide meals and refreshments, an alternative flight/full refund of ticket to the passenger or hotel accommodation, including transfers, depending on the total flight delay. Airlines must provide hotel accommodation only if the delay is more than 24 hours or more than six hours for flights scheduled to depart between 8 pm and 3 am.

Passengers have been pointing these deficiencies out on social media.

Sanjay Gupta posted on X that his daughters were booked on a flight from Mopa-Goa to Delhi. "The flight has been delayed many times...daughters are still stuck there. Vistara said, take a refund. What will they do then?"

Vamshi Papatla, an X user, posted that he spent Rs 2,400 on cab rides to and from Hyderabad and lost the money paid for a hotel booking in Mumbai after the airline cancelled his Hyderabad-Mumbai flight.

Sachin Chhabra, another passenger, posted on X: "Who will bear our hotel and other bookings expenses in case Vistara cancels our flight at the last moment?" ▶

The article is sourced from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/60-vistara-flights-cancelled-dgca-norms-not-enough-fume-flyers/articleshow/108985288.cms>

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## G. ASOK KUMAR

**Former Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI**

Mr. Asok was instrumental in setting up India's Aircraft Accidents Investigation Bureau (AAIB), headed a committee whose recommendations resulted in vastly improved facilities for Passengers with Reduced Mobility and also played a key role in helping to revive the ailing aviation industry when it was going through a very bad patch.

A 1991 batch IAS officer, Mr. Asok superannuated from Government Service in February 2024 while working as Special Secretary and Director General, National Mission for Clean Ganga. He is popularly known as the 'Rain Man of India'. A 190 acre lake, Asok Sagar in Nizamabad, Telangana and a village, Asok Nagar in YSR Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh have been named after him!



**Q The airline experience is found wanting in India. What are your views on this glaring issue?**

The aviation industry is growing at a fantastic pace, with domestic traffic alone hitting 15.2 crores in 2023, a growth of 8.3% YoY. The total air traffic touched 19 crores. However, the airline experience is indeed facing significant challenges. With the surge in airfares and domestic air traffic, more passengers have been complaining about quality of service provided by Indian carriers. Reports of compromised safety standards, declining service quality, and issues with various aspects of the travel process, such as boarding procedures, baggage handling, and inflight services, are coming. As per the DGCA website, in January 2024, 54% of the complaints were related to flight problems, followed by 17% on refund issues and 10% on baggage. It says that 722 of the 732 complaints were redressed.

Moreover, concerns have been raised regarding the behaviour of airline staff, both onboard and at airports, further exacerbating the negative experiences of passengers. These issues highlight a pressing need for the industry to address systemic shortcomings and prioritise passenger safety, comfort, and satisfaction.

Improving the airline experience requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including airlines, regulatory bodies, and government agencies. It is essential to implement stringent safety protocols, enhance training programs for airline staff, and streamline operational processes to ensure a seamless and enjoyable travel experience for passengers.

By addressing these challenges and prioritising passenger-centric initiatives, the industry can work towards restoring confidence in Indian carriers and delivering a high-quality travel experience for all passengers.

**Q The Ministry of Aviation's Passenger Charter of Rights lays out the rights of airline passengers for a range of issues. Why don't they have any legal statutory backing? Why don't the airlines enforce them properly?**

The Charter lacks legal statutory backing, making compliance by airlines voluntary. This, coupled with discretionary clauses exempting airlines from certain liabilities, results in inconsistent enforcement. Airlines may prioritise operational constraints over passenger rights, leading to lax adherence to the charter. To address this, legislative action to mandate compliance and strengthen oversight mechanisms is essential.

**Q What measures should be taken to raise awareness among air travellers about their rights and entitlements?**

Raising awareness among air travellers about their rights and entitlements is crucial to empower them in navigating their journey effectively. This can be achieved through comprehensive educational campaigns, dissemination of information at airports and online platforms, and collaboration between the government, airlines, and consumer advocacy groups to ensure passengers are well-informed.

**Q How do you think the chaos of flight disruptions due to fog every winter can be resolved for the benefit of everyone?**

This requires a multi-pronged approach. Enhanced meteorological technology for accurate fog prediction, improved airport infrastructure, and collaboration between airlines, airports, and air traffic control are essential. Specialised training for pilots certified for low-visibility operations and flexible ticketing policies can





**The lack of alternative carriers could result in less competitive pricing and potentially lower service quality, as the dominant airlines may have less incentive to innovate or prioritise customer satisfaction.**



further mitigate disruptions. Raising passenger awareness about potential delays is crucial. By combining these measures, the aviation industry can minimise the impact of winter fog on flight operations, ensuring smoother travel for all.

**Q Why is cancelling tickets such a nightmare for air travellers? What can be done to ensure that they get a fair refund on their tickets?**

Cancelling flight tickets often presents challenges for travellers, primarily due to the intricate nature of airline cancellation policies and the uncertainty surrounding refund eligibility. Airlines typically have complex structures in place, with various fees and conditions attached to cancellations, making it difficult for passengers to navigate through the process. As per the DCA website, in January 2024, issues related to Refund were the second most source of dissatisfaction among passengers.

To address this issue and ensure that travellers receive fair refunds on their tickets, airlines can take several steps. Firstly, simplifying their cancellation policies by clearly outlining fees, refund eligibility criteria, and any associated conditions would make it easier for passengers to understand their options. Offering flexible fare options, such as zero cancellation fee tickets or flexible fares, provides travellers with the freedom to modify or cancel their bookings without incurring significant penalties, particularly in uncertain circumstances like sudden changes in travel plans or unforeseen events.

Moreover, encouraging travellers to purchase comprehensive travel insurance coverage can provide an additional layer of protection. Travel insurance policies that cover a wide range of scenarios, including trip cancellations due to medical emergencies, travel

advisories, or flight disruptions, can offer peace of mind to passengers.

In addition to simplifying policies and enhancing insurance coverage, airlines should streamline the refund process to ensure prompt and hassle-free refunds for passengers. Establishing clear channels for refund requests, providing timely updates on refund status, and minimising bureaucratic hurdles can significantly improve the overall cancellation experience for travellers.

Furthermore, proactive communication from airlines in the event of flight cancellations or disruptions is crucial. Keeping passengers informed with timely updates, alternative flight options, and assistance with rebooking can help alleviate stress and uncertainty, ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

**Q The Aviation Ministry issued clear instructions to provide full and immediate refunds for tickets booked during the Covid-19 lockdown period. How can the airlines and travel portals get away with so many unpaid cases?**

The failure of airlines and travel portals to comply with the Aviation Ministry's directive for full and immediate refunds during the Covid-19 lockdown period highlights a concerning lack of accountability. Despite clear instructions, many entities struggled to manage the high volume of refund requests, leading to delays and unresolved cases. Logistical challenges, limited staff availability, and ambiguity in refund policies further complicated the situation, contributing to consumer dissatisfaction and erosion of trust in the industry.

To address these issues and prevent recurrence, regulatory authorities must enhance oversight and enforcement of refund policies. This includes implementing stricter penalties for non-compliance and

ensuring transparent communication with consumers regarding refund procedures. Additionally, initiatives such as establishing an Ombudsman for expedited grievance resolution and integrating consumer helplines with online platforms can provide effective channels for addressing consumer concerns and restoring confidence in the aviation sector.

**Q How successful do you think the AirSewa portal is in resolving passenger complaints? The number of pending complaints is low. Does this really reflect the situation on the ground?**

The AirSewa portal's effectiveness in resolving passenger complaints is noteworthy, with a relatively low number of pending cases indicating some success in addressing grievances. The January 2024 data shows 722 of the 732 grievances registered in January 2024 have been redressed. However, this metric doesn't offer a comprehensive view of its performance. While the low number of pending complaints suggests that some grievances are being addressed promptly, it does not necessarily reflect the overall satisfaction of passengers or the complexity of the issues being resolved.

Moreover, the proposal to integrate AirSewa with the National Consumer Helpline indicates recognition of potential improvements needed to address the backlog of complaints effectively. This suggests that while progress has been made, there may still be room for enhancing the portal's efficiency and ensuring that all passenger grievances are adequately addressed.

However, it's crucial to acknowledge that the plan to establish an aviation ombudsman faces resistance from airlines. This resistance highlights potential challenges in implementing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in the industry. Despite efforts to improve existing complaint resolution systems, overcoming resistance from stakeholders like airlines may pose significant hurdles to achieving comprehensive and impartial redressal of passenger grievances in the aviation sector.

**Q What is your opinion on the current duopoly of Indigo and Tata group in the airline industry? How does it impact the fliers?**

This scenario presents both benefits and concerns for passengers. On one hand, the dominance of these two major players could potentially lead to improved operational efficiencies, streamlined services, and strategic fleet expansions, which may enhance overall industry stability. However, the concentration of market power in the hands of just two companies raises significant concerns for consumers.

With limited competition, there's a risk of higher ticket prices and reduced choices for passengers. The lack of alternative carriers could result in less competitive pricing and potentially lower service quality, as the dominant airlines may have less incentive to innovate or prioritise customer satisfaction. Additionally, the potential for cartelisation among the dominant players raises concerns



about collusion and the manipulation of airfare levels, which could further disadvantage consumers.

Balancing the advantages and drawbacks of this market structure is crucial for ensuring that the interests of passengers are adequately protected and that the aviation sector remains competitive and consumer-friendly.

**Q How do you think air travel can be made more affordable for the consumers?**

Air travel affordability for consumers can be enhanced through innovative technological solutions like the one adopted by Akasa Air. Leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered products such as AirGain by RateGain enables airlines to access accurate and real-time airfare data, allowing them to optimise pricing strategies dynamically. By utilising such tools, airlines can offer competitive prices to consumers by adjusting fares based on changing market dynamics swiftly.

Furthermore, AI-powered platforms empower revenue and pricing teams within airlines to make faster decisions and respond promptly to market fluctuations. This agility enables airlines to provide consumers with the most affordable fares while maintaining profitability. Additionally, real-time competitor insights across channels help reduce revenue losses and ensure pricing parity, further benefiting consumers by offering transparency and consistency in fares.

In essence, the integration of advanced technologies in pricing strategies, like AI-powered solutions, enables airlines to optimise their revenue management practices, ultimately leading to more affordable air travel options for consumers. By embracing innovation and data-driven approaches, airlines can continue to make air travel accessible and affordable for everyone.

**Q Can you provide insights into the biggest challenges faced in protecting air passenger rights, and how the Ministry of Aviation addresses them?**

Protecting air passenger rights presents multifaceted challenges, ranging from flight cancellations to delays caused by adverse weather conditions and operational inefficiencies. These issues can lead to passenger inconvenience and dissatisfaction, highlighting the need for robust regulatory measures.

In response, as seen from the reports, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has proactive interventions, including stringent enforcement of regulations and fostering improved communication channels between airlines and passengers. By ensuring compliance with directives such as the Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) and promoting

transparency in operations, the Ministry aims to empower passengers and elevate the quality of their travel experiences.

**Q Looking ahead, what are the key priorities and initiatives you think the government should focus on to strengthen air passenger rights in India?**

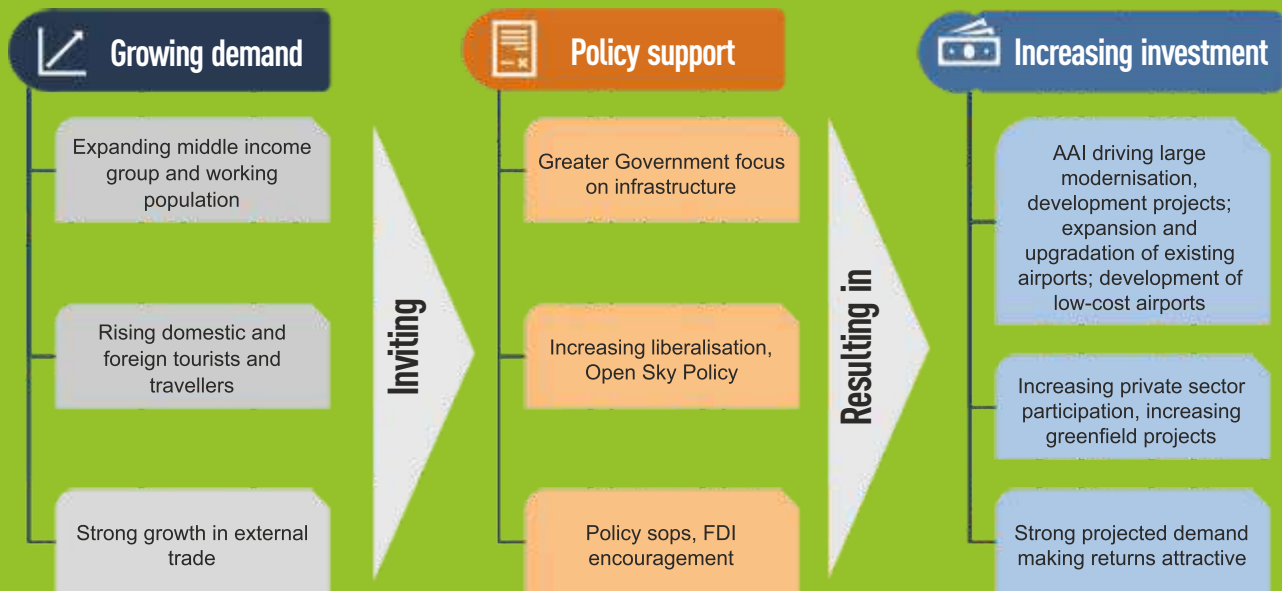
The government should prioritise initiatives aimed at directly strengthening air passenger rights in India. One key priority is to enhance consumer protection regulations to ensure that passengers are adequately informed about their rights and entitlements. This includes transparently outlining policies regarding flight cancellations, delays, denied boarding, and lost or damaged baggage.

Improving complaint resolution mechanisms is another crucial aspect. Establishing efficient channels for passengers to lodge complaints and seek redressal for issues they encounter during their travel experience will help enhance accountability among airlines and ensure timely resolution of passenger grievances.

Transparency in pricing and booking processes is essential to empower passengers to make informed decisions. Clear and accessible information regarding fares, fees, and charges should be provided to passengers at the time of booking to prevent misleading practices and ensure fair treatment.

Enforcement of strict penalties for violations of passenger rights is also critical. Holding airlines accountable for non-compliance with regulations and imposing significant fines for infractions will act as a deterrent and encourage adherence to passenger protection measures. ▶

## Strong demand and policy support driving investments in Aviation





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## Monopolistic Turbulence in the Skies – What is the Regulator Doing?

“The Indian aviation sector is in a major growth mode. However, the consumer is getting the short end of the stick in the midst of a slew of consolidations and bankruptcies slashing the industry. A duopolistic reign seems to be ruling the skies which is killing competition. Why is the regulatory watchdog sleeping?”

– Pyush Misra



**AVIATION IS AMONG** the fastest-growing sectors in the country. In fact, the Indian aviation industry is touted as the fastest growing aviation market in the world. The growth rate of almost 10% over the past decade is almost 2.5 times that of the global average.

Does the rapid and constant development mean that the consumer is the King in the skies? Does he get the benefit of price wars to woo customers? Are his rights protected when he soars in the air? Does the civil aviation regulator take prompt action to redress his grievances against the airlines, airports or other service providers?

Alas, aviation in India has become a duopoly of sorts led by two heavyweights - IndiGo and the Tata Group (comprising Air India, Vistara, Air Asia India and Air India Express). These well-capitalised market leaders together control almost 90% of the domestic market, and thus dominate how things play out both in the skies and on the ground.



Contrast this with the scenario around two decades ago when the airline industry witnessed an unprecedented boom with the entry of an array of low-cost carriers like Air Deccan, Air Sahara, SpiceJet, Indigo, GoAir and Paramount Airways that finally allowed the common man to take to the skies. Kingfisher Airlines and Jet Airways were giving tough competition to the state-owned Indian Airlines and Air India. A range of regional operators entered the industry over the following years. The consumer was the winner with a choice of pickings in terms of throwaway prices, offers and services.

### GONE WITH THE WIND

	STARTED		CLOSED
Jet Airways	1992	→	2019
Damania Airways	1992	→	1997
Kingfisher Airlines	2005	→	2012
Paramount Airways	2005	→	2010
Go First	2005	→	2023
East West Airlines	1991	→	1996

However, things went awry for a number of airlines as they either went under or were absorbed by bigger carriers. The flamboyant Kingfisher Airlines went bust while Jet Airways faced a severe cash crunch that culminated in insolvency proceedings. GoFirst is the latest casualty of the literal cartelisation of the aviation industry as it ceased operations soon after its grounding over faulty engines. And it won't be the last by a long shot.

### On a Sticky Wicket

The number of airlines in Indian skies is steadily declining – the remaining few, like the cash-strapped SpiceJet is facing multiple headwinds which are chipping away at its market share while the promising upstart of last year, Akasa Air is walking a tight rope and could very well be next on the chopping block.

New airlines keep popping up for sure – Fly91 is the newest entrant while Jet Airways is expected to relaunch in the coming months.

**This emerging market dynamic has translated into millions of passengers stuck between the two big players. Consumers have little choice as the duopoly is killing competition and cartelising the industry!**

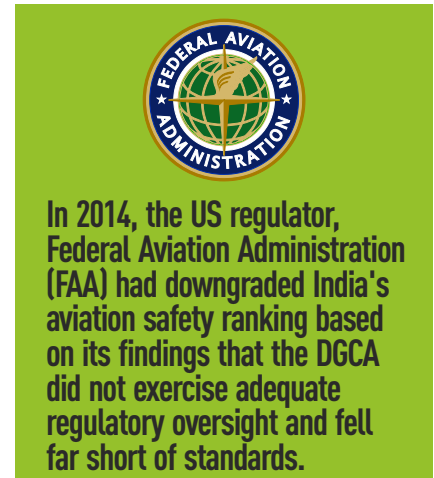
However, will they actually survive remains a huge question, given the history of smaller carriers struggling to stay afloat in the face of the bigger entities.

With only two large and established players, experts predict that further price increases are imminent. "This duopoly has emerged at a time when the market dynamics are quite volatile," stated Satyendra Pandey, Managing Partner of aviation services firm, AT-TV.



### Crux of the Crisis

While experts blame everything from market fragmentation, high infrastructure costs and oligopolies in the supply chain, it cannot be denied that the aviation sector is far too burdened by onerous regulation. The crux of the matter is that the civil aviation regulator - Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) – remains largely inactive.



The DGCA has been in the news over the last couple of months as it announced changes in the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) and was even pronounced to have authority to act against pilots who are not in compliance with its rules (in reference to Akasa Air's plea against pilots who resigned without serving their notice period!)

Recently, the regulatory watchdog took a tough stance and slapped fines of over a crore against Air India

over safety-related violations on flights operated on certain long-range terrain critical routes and Rs 30 lakh for poor preparedness leading to fog delays. IndiGo Airlines was also fined a whopping Rs 1.2 crore after passengers of one of its flights were seen eating food on the tarmac.

However, the errant airlines refuse to bat an eye and disagree with the order.

What happens next is anybody's guess given the sheer absence of transparency and accountability! Why doesn't the consumer even come to know whether the delinquent parties actually coughed up the fines or got away scot-free once again?

*The government should initiate reforms in the DGCA to ensure that it is modernised, well-staffed and incentivised. Most importantly, the regulator should be headed by aviation professionals rather than bureaucrats! ▶*



**What MR. G R GOPINATH, founder of India's first low-cost airline, Air Deccan said a decade ago continues to ring true, "If there is one sector that needs less government and more governance, it is aviation..... One of the biggest impediments to growth is flawed airport policy which has created oligopolies and has stunted the aviation sector. Established airlines have formed a cartel and have openly lobbied against new entrants."**

## Obtuse Angle by BP Acharya





**Bina Jain**

- Former President, All India Women's Conference (AIWC)
- Chairperson, Healthy You Foundation, New Delhi

## CANCELLING FLIGHT TICKETS:

# Heavy Turbulence Ahead!

A nightmare unfolds the moment you have to cancel/change a flight booking. Almost all your hard-earned money will go down the drain in the face of the hefty cancellation fees levied by most airlines/booking platforms. Is a reasonable refund too much to ask for?



Does it even make sense to cancel a flight ticket when you are left holding nothing after the cancellation?



Online travel platforms – like Yatra, MakeMyTrip, ClearTrip, Ixigo, Goibibo, EaseMyTrip, etc. – allow you to quickly scan through the timings and prices of flight options of different airlines before choosing the most suitable one. Please note that the fares may be higher on these portals or they may charge an extra fee for their services.



**AIR TRAVEL HAS** become an inseparable part of our lives. Booking flight tickets is easy and straightforward with various online options offering a slew of flights and fares. You can book a flight on the airline's website, use a travel aggregator portal or through a travel agent.

However, the moment your ticket is booked, a new worry starts haunting you – what if I have to cancel? Indeed, travel plans may change unexpectedly due to a medical issue or other emergency. Or, you may need to modify the travel date or something else.....

Especially with airlines offering early bird offers and deep discounts 2-3 months in advance of the travel date, it is very likely that something may crop up that will require you to cancel/change the booking.

To their credit, all airlines and travel portals allow quick and easy cancellation and process the refund, if any. However, more often than not, passengers hardly get anything back after deducting the cancellation fee and other charges/penalties, as applicable. So, are consumers doomed once they buy a flight ticket without any recourse available to them?

### The Cancellation Conundrum

The Ministry of Civil Aviation requires the airlines to limit the cancellation fee to the total of base fare and fuel surcharge. Other components like statutory taxes, user development fee, airport development fee and passenger service fee have to be refunded. They cannot charge you for processing the refund either.

While airlines generally conform to these rules, the actual refund policy varies from airline to airline.

The Ministry's charter provides that flyers can cancel/change their tickets free of charge within 24 hours of booking, if booked at least 7 days before the travel dates.

Moreover, the cancellation charges and refund amount will differ based on the fare category, booking type, time of cancellation (number of days prior to departure) and so on.

The fare of a basic, non-refundable ticket is significantly cheaper. But, you can bid goodbye to the money if you have to cancel the booking. The airline may refund only the non-airline taxes, which will mostly be negligible. For refundable categories like 'Regular' and 'Flexible', the fares will be significantly higher, but you are more likely to get back something on cancellation. However, a cancellation window is applicable here, beyond which you will not get anything!

Indigo levies a fixed cancellation fee of Rs 3000 when 4 days are left for departure and Rs 3500 for cancellation within 0-3 days of departure, or airfare charges (whichever is lower). For SpiceJet and Vistara, the fee is around Rs 3000 depending on the type of booking. In case of Air India, the change/cancellation fee ranges from Rs 2500 to Rs 4000 (depending on the booking class and category) with Flex fares allowing free change/cancellation 2-3 days prior to the date of travel. The cancellation is allowed only till a stipulated time before departure, after which it will be considered a no-show.

Please visit the airline's website or travel platform to find out their specific cancellation/refund policies. Most of them even levy penalties for no-show.

**Upon successful cancellation, the airline will refund the balance amount via the same mode of payment. It can take 7 to 21 working days to process the refund. In case the ticket is purchased through an online travel portal or travel agent, they have to be contacted directly to get the refund.**

*Please note that the travel platforms/agents may charge an additional fee for cancellation/change per passenger per sector over and above the airline charges.*

You can opt for a full refund offer that is mostly provided by the online travel aggregators. For instance, Ixigo has 'ixigo Assured' for zero cancellation charges and 'ixigo Flex' for free modifications of the booking. Similarly, MakeMyTrip has a 'Zero Cancellation' option and Goibibo has 'Cancellation Protection' option when booking the tickets. This 100% refund is applicable on selected sectors/flights only. And, passengers are eligible for the complete waiver only if the cancellation is done within a stipulated time, say 24 hours prior to departure and on the specific platform only. (The waiver does not extend to date change or other modifications)

Needless to say, the offers will entail a 'nominal' charge – ranging from Rs. 149 to Rs 549 per head per ticket. (At times, what is advertised as a 'Free Cancellation' offer also invokes an additional fee!) This charge will not be refunded if you continue with the booking. Nor will you get this refund if you cancel the ticket. Moreover, the convenience fee charged at the time of booking remains non-refundable in most cases.

What's more, some airlines/portals may not issue a refund, but credit the amount to your account (shell). This can be used to book a ticket on the same airline within a stipulated period. You will have to pay the fare difference (if any) at the time of making the next booking.

Given the prevailing arbitrariness in cancellation charges, a Parliamentary Committee recommended that airlines must be restricted to charge not more than 50% of the base fare as cancellation charges and that the DGCA should routinely check and monitor these charges.

## The Covid Cancellation Fiasco

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Civil Aviation Ministry specifically directed the airlines to refund the amount paid by passengers for air tickets booked during the lockdown period. If a ticket was booked during the lockdown period (25th March to 24th May 2020) for travel during the same period, the airline should refund the full amount

collected without any cancellation charges, within three weeks of the request.

For tickets booked prior to 25th March for travel till 24th May, the aviation regulator, DGCA issued detailed guidelines entailing a refund or providing a credit shell of the fare collected (for booking any ticket by 31st March, 2021). In the face of various writ petitions, the Supreme Court of India reiterated in a judgement delivered on 1st October, 2020 that full refunds should be issued within the stipulated time and manner.

*Similar refund and travel waivers were granted for Covid-19 positive travellers after the lockdown was lifted.*

Following this, the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) took suo-moto cognizance of the issue and issued notices to six online travel platforms (EaseMyTrip, Yatra, MakeMyTrip, HappyEasyGo, ClearTrip and Ixigo) and five travel agencies (Thomas Cook, Kesari Tours, Veena World, Neem Holidays and Mango Holidays) directing them to immediately issue refunds to the consumers.

However, action was limited as many airlines/travel platforms failed to process the refunds. For instance, Yatra had 5,695 pending refunds and MakeMyTrip had 63 pending refunds in 2023. Only Ixigo and Thomas Cook refunded all the amount to the consumers.

Faced with Rs 30 to 40 crore unpaid refunds in November 2023, the Department of Consumer Affairs expressly directed the travel aggregators to process the pending refunds by the third week of the month, failing which the CCPA would initiate legal proceedings in the apex court, including filing a contempt petition against the defaulting platforms, but without much avail!

*Given the prevailing situation, the best way to save on cancellation charges and avoid losing your money is to opt for insurance! ▶*





## FLIGHT BLUES CLIP THE WINGS OF PASSENGERS

Every flier seems to have a troublesome tale to tell these days. Indeed, passenger woes know no end as they face some hassle or the other - before take-off, during the flight and after landing as well. Are their outbursts not justified? The gripes may sound common, but the sheer frustration and agony deserves a fair hearing and resolution.



**The trials of air travel seem to be interminable.....**

**INSTANCES OF AIR** rage were making the headlines almost every day in the beginning of this year. Chaotic scenes ruled the airports with passengers raising hell and even breaking out in scuffles with the ground staff over the unending flight delays, cancellations and other issues. At times, enraged passengers even shouted slogans against the airlines after the cancellation announcement at the airport. Social media was buzzing with calls for legal action against the airlines, their staff and more.

Flight cancellations and delays seem to be an annual winter affair with people flying in December or January being haunted by umpteen flight disruptions due to low visibility in and around airports even till mid-morning. This year, things got even worse with an unusually dense fog blanketing most of north and central India.

In the middle of January, a Delhi bound flight was delayed for around 18 hours due to heavy fog before being diverted to Mumbai. As soon as the gates opened, the harried passengers rushed out of the plane and sat on the tarmac eating food right next to the aircraft. The irate fliers refused to get into the airline coach and proceed to the terminal building.



In a viral video, passengers of a Delhi-bound IndiGo flight diverted to Mumbai due to operational issues are seen eating and sitting on the airport tarmac at Mumbai Airport.

Just a day prior to this incident, a disgruntled passenger rushed from his seat and punched a co-pilot of a Delhi-Goa flight while he was making a delayed announcement onboard the aircraft. It should be noted that the passengers had been cooped up inside the aircraft for hours and the flight was ultimately delayed by nearly 13 hours.



A passenger who was agitated by the delay in IndiGo flight slapped the pilot.

**Fliers stranded at many airports this winter shared pictures, video clippings and complaints on social media, showcasing the sorry state of affairs with the upgraded facilities and staff at many airports not living up to the expectations of the travellers!**

*Hundreds of flights are delayed or diverted due to weather conditions which are truly out of human control. While the airlines can easily blame the fog for the massive disruptions in flight operations, can this be an excuse for the uncooperative behaviour of the airline staff? Why are passengers made to wait for hours at the airport without prior intimation or updates, leaving them wondering what is happening? How can they be made to sit in the aircraft for long periods without any care for their discomfort or inconvenience? The passengers may seem unruly and disruptive, but does anyone bother to consider where their fury is coming from? Is transparency in sharing information too much to ask for?*

The issues get highlighted when celebrities are involved. In January itself, famous actor **RANVIR SHOREY** lashed out at an airline for misleading passengers by providing false reasons for the 10-hour delay of his flight. He checked in for a 2 pm flight only to be informed of a 3-hour delay due to bad weather. After repeated schedule alterations, the flight finally took off around midnight. Meanwhile, the actor was fed a plateful of platitudes and lies as it was obvious that the fog could not hinder operations in the late evening. Later, it was discovered that the flight did not have a pilot!



Around the same time, leading actress **RADHIKA APTE** complained on social media about being locked up in an aerobridge for hours after her flight to Bhubaneswar was delayed. She highlighted the suffering of babies and elderly people, the suffocating situation inside the aerobridge and the lack of basic amenities like water and toilets. The security refused to open the doors, the staff had no clue and operational issues were cited while the real reason was that the crew hadn't boarded the flight!

Shaadi.com CEO and Shark Tank India judge, **ANUPAM MITTAL** complained of 'inhumane' treatment of passengers when his flight from Delhi to Mumbai was held up on the tarmac for over 45 minutes. The passengers were forced to remain inside the aircraft without air-conditioning to save costs. Additionally, his flight from Mumbai to Delhi faced a delay of over 2 hours, but the airline refused to refund his ticket!



In a reversal of sorts, actress **SHWETHA MENON** expressed her dismay when she was notified of her flight being rescheduled only to arrive at the airport at the revised time and find that the flight had already departed! The staff member at the helpdesk was rude and unhelpful. She refused to accommodate the passengers on the next flight and even challenged them to “complain wherever we wanted”. It was only after the actress went live on social media that they were allowed to board the supposedly 'fully booked' 5 pm flight!



Television star **SURBHI CHANDNA** landed at Mumbai airport only to find that her priority luggage had been misplaced. She accused the airline of unprofessional behaviour and mental harassment as a ground staff member actually told her, “We do not know when your bag will come, and we cannot commit anything”... “my vendors are occupied, and I will not be able to deliver the bag to you.”

Apparently, her luggage had been offloaded mid-way without any explanation.

Celebrity chef **SANJEEV KAPOOR** slammed an airline for serving unsatisfactory meals on a flight from Nagpur to Mumbai. He shared pictures of his meal on X (earlier Twitter) along with a tweet, “Cold chicken tikka with watermelon, cucumber, tomato and sev. Sandwich with minuscule filling of chopped cabbage with mayo. Sugar syrup sponge painted with sweetened cream and yellow glaze.” He further castigated, “Really! Is this what Indians should eat for breakfast?”



A couple of years earlier, actress **SONAKSHI SINHA** blasted an airline after she found her travel bag was damaged with its handles broken and 'wheels completely off'.

Alas, the horror tales are never-ending and while celebrities receive a prompt response to their ordeals with

their concerns being addressed on priority, most of the regular fliers go unheard!

Actor **SONU SOOD** tweeted about being stuck in an airport waiting area for three hours. While he criticised the behaviour of passengers, urging them to understand the situation and be polite with the airlines' crew, is it acceptable that the fliers' complaints fall on deaf ears?



*First and foremost, most of the above instances cannot be attributed to uncontrollable weather conditions! In fact, many passengers alleged that airlines used the fog-related situation to mask delays due to their internal problems like*

*crew, aircraft availability, etc. Then again, even the so-called 'operational issues', traffic congestion and staff shortages are understandable, but does it excuse the unaccommodating, discourteous and downright unprofessional conduct of the airline staff? How can they totally disregard the needs and comfort of the passengers? Why are they falling short in providing basic assistance?*

For instance, a passenger was left harangued when his flight from Kolkata to Bengaluru was delayed a record six times totalling seven hours. To add insult to injury, when he tried to cancel his flight, it took the airline two hours to cancel and get his checked-in luggage back. They argued saying 'we won't do cancellations'. The 10 pm flight finally took off at 4:41 am, causing him to miss an international flight!

His tweet strikes the right note, “The airline has zero respect for other people's time and money. If they had told me when I reached the airport, I could've just taken the Akasa Air plane departing 9:50 pm and made my BLR-SFO at 3:30 am. I get that delays happen, but the way the team dealt with it is inexcusable. Absolutely zero respect for other people's time and money.”

*Can even a full refund suffice for the disruptions faced by the passengers in their vacation plans, onward journeys, meetings, events, etc.? Not to mention the mental agony, distress, frustration and sheer harassment when nobody even bothers to answer their questions or provide proper information. The helplessness and lack of facilities is bound to escalate into heated arguments and meltdowns.*

## Woes Take Wing

Passengers face a plethora of issues before and even after reaching cruising altitude. Such as:

**Delayed and cancelled flights** – Passengers arrive at the airport in time only to find that the flight is delayed or even cancelled. The rule of prior intimation is hardly ever followed. In fact, flight delays and cancellations are some of the biggest worries for passengers as they can be extremely disruptive to any travel plan. What's more, the fog-inflicted problems can often be attributed to a lack of coordination!

**Boarding denied** – Airlines routinely overbook flights in order to avoid flying with vacant seats in case of last minute cancellations. This practice haunts many passengers who have paid for the tickets, but are denied boarding because the aircraft is full. How can such unfair practices be allowed?

**Baggage issues** – It seems like if you talk about travelling with friends lately, each one of them will have a story about their checked-in baggage being left behind, lost or damaged. Indeed, airlines are notorious for mishandling passenger luggage. Bags are thrown about without a care, leading to excessive damages. And the compensation is long in the coming, if ever. *Passengers are advised to get a written Property Irregularity Report (PIR) from the airline confirming the baggage issues and compensation, as payable.*

**In February 2024, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) directed seven major airlines to step up their manpower to streamline and improve baggage delivery at airports before 26th February, 2024 or face additional regulatory action. The aviation ministry has also directed all airlines to deliver the luggage to the passengers within 10 to 30 minutes after landing.**

Delay in baggage arrival is another thorn in the side of frustrated passengers who are often made to wait for an hour or even more to get their luggage.



**Excess baggage** – Airlines levy exorbitant charges for excess luggage beyond the permissible limit, which is usually 15 kgs for economy class. Is Rs 600 to 700 charge per extra kg credible from any angle? While the space and weight issues are understandable, it should not become an excuse to fleece passengers. In fact, aviation regulator, DGCA

expressly stated that the Aircraft Act accords the government the power to regulate the excess baggage and other tariffs. However, they fail to invoke the same.

**Food and beverages** – Similarly, the prices of eatables and drinks available on the flight are simply outrageous! How can the airlines be allowed to get away with such ridiculous charges? And still the taste and quality remains abominable – be it for free or paid meals!



**Hidden charges** – Taking a flight is no longer about booking a ticket. You may naively believe that the fare displayed (plus taxes) will be the final cost on your pocket. Reality bites hard when you find that the price seems to rise with every click of the 'Next' button. There are various unnecessary and hidden add-ons – at times, some are slyly pre-selected – and may escape your notice. You have to be very careful to avoid the charges from adding up; yet, some 'privileges' may be compulsory, leaving you with no choice but to shell out the extra money.

Indeed, web check-in is mandatory for many flights and even touted as 'free'. While levying an extra charge for more legroom, emergency exit or even aisle seats is

**A new issue has got consumers in a fix – being 'forced' to pay for seats during online check-in, despite the airlines promising free web check-in!**

still acceptable, can things get more bizarre than having to pay to select any regular seat during web check-in?

**Airline seats** – Narrow and cramped seats have always been a menace that passengers put up with quietly. Airlines try to pack as many seats as possible in the aircraft without caring two hoots for the convenience of the customers. However, the quality of seats and other facilities is also found wanting at times.

**Customer service** – Over and above everything else, the customer service of airline staff is deplorable. Not only is the ground staff rude and disinterested, but cabin assistance by the crew is also awful at times. Is simple politeness and basic assistance too much to ask for? Isn't the passenger entitled to good customer service as a consumer? ▶

**What can get worse than an online travel platform sharing a passenger's trip notification with his contact list! When the passenger complained to the customer care that this 'spamming' was done without his explicit consent, he was informed that he had opted for a 'SyncNcash' option. He was told, "Sync up of your contact details is done post your consent only. There is a default 'NO' to this when you don't sync contacts, and when you sync you are giving your 'Yes.'"**

**Isn't this a gross breach of privacy?**

**What more will the airlines and travel companies come up with?**





**Payal Agarwal**  
Editorial Consultant

# Soaring Airfares – A Crisis in the Skies

“More people are choosing to travel by air than ever before. Yet, the skyrocketing fares are becoming a deterrent once again. Is a respite in sight?”

– Payal Agarwal



**We are back to paying through the nose for flight tickets!**

**THE ADVENT OF** low-cost carriers and dirt-cheap fares introduced the common man to the erstwhile 'luxury' of flying. The reduced airfares made it economical and convenient for people to opt for air travel, leading to a massive increase in air traffic.

With the rising proportion of middle-income households and healthy competition amongst low-cost carriers, there is a greater propensity among the consumers to travel by air. More and more people prefer flights to trains - especially when it comes to travelling on an urgent note - as it is quick and affordable as well.

### Who Determines the Airfares and How?

Following the deregulation of the civil aviation sector, the government no longer establishes or regulates the airfares. It is primarily market-driven based on the principles of demand and supply.



**Airfares are influenced by various factors, including the number of seats sold on a particular flight, prevailing fuel prices, aircraft capacity, competition, seasonality, holidays, festivals, weekends and events such as sports competitions and fairs.**

*- Gen. (Dr) V. K. Singh (Retd.)  
Minister of State, Ministry of Civil Aviation*

Rule 135 of the Aircraft Rules, 1937 provides that airfares of scheduled commercial airlines should be established based on factors such as operation costs, service characteristics, prevailing industry tariffs and reasonable profit. Further, the airlines are permitted to charge separately for services (on an opt-in basis) like:

- Preferential seating
- Meals, snacks and drinks (except drinking water)
- Using airline lounges
- Excess check-in baggage

In the dynamic pricing scenario, airfares fluctuate based on not just the demand-supply, but also competitor pricing, holidays, festivals and currency fluctuations, in tune with global practices. Moreover, the airlines have various booking classes or fare buckets for the pricing schedules, with lower fares in the buckets available for bookings done 3, 2 or 1 month to even a week before flight departure. Fares booked closer to the journey or on an immediate basis move to higher buckets.

**Prasanna Kumar Jha's family resides in his hometown, Darbhanga, Bihar while he works in Delhi. Flying home to see his ailing mother on short notice cost him Rs 10,500. This was a pinch, but he stated, "If you calculate the alternative - by train from Delhi and then taxi to Darbhanga - it will take at least 30 hours. The plane journey is no longer a luxury but a necessity."**

The airlines use advanced computer and pricing algorithms to determine prices and run sales based on the time of the year, passenger demand, weather, major events/festivals, time of day, competitor prices, fuel prices, etc.

**Keep in mind that the airline websites, travel portals and search engines store the search history and cookies from your browser to increase the airfare of a repeatedly searched route. If you search a particular route again and again, the websites keep increasing the price, thus manipulating you into booking the ticket 'before it increases further'! You can avoid this by using the incognito mode of your browser.**

### Recent Upheavals

Over the past year or so, people have been complaining about the sky-high fares. And this is not just for last-minute and spot fares (which are shooting through the roof). Air travel, overall, is becoming expensive, characterised by steeper fares than usual.

Looking back, the story unfolds following the initial days after the Covid-19 lockdowns. The airlines were reeling from the untold losses due to the complete shutdown of air services. Faced with a significant decline in travel even after the opening up of the skies, the airlines offered steal deals to lure the passengers. On the other hand, they tried to offset this with higher prices for less popular destinations with lower bookings.



**Normally, an air ticket covers the base fare or the cost of commuting from point A to B, taxes (GST), airport fee (User Development Fee), fuel surcharge and a service or convenience fee to issue the ticket.**



## A Supreme Court lawyer reportedly shelled out Rs. 50,000 to book the last available seat on a Delhi-Dehradun 'low-cost' flight on the date of travel!

The situation took such an extreme turn that the Ministry of Civil Aviation had to intervene with both upper and lower price caps on airfares to ensure fair pricing for travellers. These were lifted once the market stabilised, but the fares have been on an upward trajectory ever since. *Airfares jumped by around 30% in the last two years with a 45% increase in spot fares! The exorbitant increase in domestic airfares has made international short hauls more attractive for vacationers!*

Another furore erupted over the unparalleled surge in ticket prices last summer – in the face of the capacity squeeze following the sudden suspension of GoFirst airlines (which operated on as many as 315 routes and served 8-9 lakh passengers) bang in the middle of the holiday season.

The surge can also be attributed to the imbalance between the growing number of air passengers and the lower number of aircrafts. As Jitender Bhargava, aviation consultant and former executive director of Air India points out, “The number of average flights per month has gone down between the pre-Covid times of early-2020 and January 2024, while the number of passengers has surged by over 10%.”

Trade body, Airports Council International (ACI) conducted a study of around 36,000 routes in the top ten aviation markets in Asia Pacific and the Middle East around this very time. It found that airfares in India saw the biggest jump with an increase of 41%, followed by UAE at 34%, Singapore at 30% and Australia at 23%.

The government had to finally step in once again with the Aviation Minister, Jyotiraditya Scindia asking the airlines to self-monitor and rationalise the fares in the face of the unusually high spikes last summer. He also suggested that they should devise a mechanism to ensure reasonable pricing on routes with abnormal surges in fares. Following this intervention, the airfares moderated to a certain extent.

However, Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) feels the high airfares will sustain, “In the time spent in this business, I have never seen fares coming down once they go up, as the

supplier (airline) also realises there is demand. Airfares crash only in the eventuality of a lean season and any such dip is also momentary.”

### Voice of Caution

The stakeholders should keep in mind that air travel is still out of the financial reach of a vast majority of Indians. An estimated 3% of the country's population flies on a regular basis – this represents only 2 million flyers of the total population of 1.4 billion.

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Mr. Derek O' Brien) submitted a report on 'Issues Related to Improving Consumers' Satisfaction of Airlines' in January, 2018. The Committee noted that around festivals and for bookings made closer to the travel dates, some airlines charge more than ten times of the advance booking fare, which is arbitrary. It also noted that windfall profits cannot be taken from passengers especially those belonging to the working class. The Aviation Ministry has a social responsibility towards its citizens and economic viability cannot be the only decision-making criteria. It further recommended that the Ministry should consider fixing an upper limit for air tickets for every sector.



Why don't we still have a pricing regulatory controller appellate body for aviation to keep a tab or control pricing when there is a SEBI, TRAI and AERA for other sectors?

- Mark D Martin,

CEO of Martin Consulting, an aviation consulting firm and member of the UK-based Royal Aeronautical Society

The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture again presented a report in February this year on the government's actions regarding its recommendations on airfare regulation. It reiterated the suggestion of implementing route-specific caps on airfares and proposed establishing a dedicated authority to oversee ticket prices and addressing concerns over escalating fares.

Concluding that airline self-regulation on ticket pricing has been ineffective, it recommended empowering the DGCA to regulate air tariffs and exploring the feasibility of establishing a separate entity with quasi-judicial powers to control airline fares. The panel also suggested modifying fare ceilings during peak seasons, with prior notice to protect airlines' commercial interests.

Will this finally spell some relief for the flyers? ▶



It's a demand-supply situation.

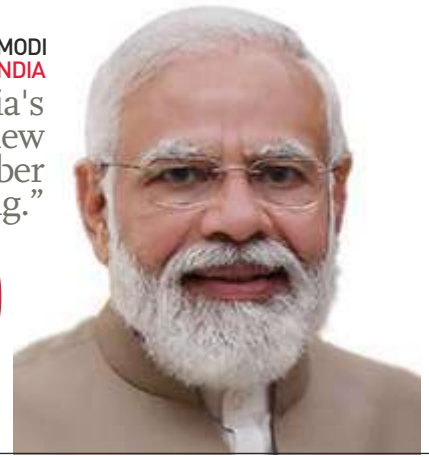
As long as the airlines are able to fill up their seats at a certain price, fares will go up.

- Sabina Chopra,

Co-founder & COO of Yatra, one of the leading online travel agencies (OTAs) in the country

NARENDRA MODI  
PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

“The last 10 years have been transformative for India's aviation sector. Existing airports have been modernised, new airports have been built at quick pace and record number of people are flying.”



# ROUNDUP



## Government Discussed Consumer Grievances with Airlines, Travel Portals

**IN OCTOBER 2023**, then Secretary of Consumer Affairs, Rohit Kumar Singh, highlighted that in the past year the National Consumer Helpline had received approximately 10,000 complaints pertaining to the airline sector.

According to NCH data, a whopping 40.8% of the complaints received related to non-receipt of refunds post cancellation of tickets. Other grievances include deficiency of

services (14%), delayed or no compensation for lost/damaged luggage (14%) and lack of information on rescheduled or cancelled flights (5%). Consumers also complained about money deducted but ticket not received, denial of boarding despite valid tickets and being 'forced' to pay for seats during the mandatory and 'free' web check-in apart from the interface being 'misleading' on airline websites and travel portals.

### DATA BRIEFING

The Airports Authority of India has projected all-India passenger growth at **412 million** in 2024-25



Mr Rohit Kumar Singh pointed out, "One of the key issues raised has been the promise of 'free web check-in' but when the consumers go online, all seats are shown as paid. Once a traveller has paid the fare and the airlines has issued a confirmed ticket, then all the services have to be fair and to the advantage of the consumers." He further added, "We are not getting into fare structures. That is not our mandate. But we are concerned with any violation of consumer rights or deficiency in service. If an airline promises free web check-in, it cannot force a passenger to choose a paid seat."

**A Parliamentary panel in its report last year had observed that the airlines charging passengers a fee for seat selection on an aircraft is 'arbitrary and unjustifiable'.**

The Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA), Ministry of Consumer Affairs, GoI convened a meeting with various airlines, online travel aggregators and consumer organisations on 4th November to discuss the rising number of complaints from air travellers and find ways to address them. It was attended by representatives from major travel platforms including MakeMyTrip, Yatra, ClearTrip as well as noted consumer activists like Ms. Pushpa Girimaji and Mr. Shirish Deshpande, Chairman, Mumbai Grahak Panchayat.

During the meeting chaired by Rohit Kumar Singh, the officials expressed apprehensions regarding unfair trade practices – like hidden fees - within the airline industry and called for faster complaint resolution.

It was highlighted that the airlines and travel aggregators are designing online interfaces in a way that manipulates decision making and suppresses consumer autonomy. Ms. Nidhi Khare, Special Secretary, DoCA, made a presentation on the commonly prevalent 'dark patterns' on online travel platforms such as:

- Confirm shaming - Showing 'No, I will risk it' during add-on of insurance

- Showing pre-ticked checkboxes - Authorising contact by platform, its affiliates and associate partners
- Triggering alarm - 'Last few rooms left', '18 people are looking to book'
- Forced action - Giving option of 'yes' and 'I'll do this later' for push notifications, without any option to select 'no'

The issue of non-refund for tickets booked during Covid-19 lockdown period was also discussed. The DoCA ordered the online travel aggregators to pay all outstanding balances on such tickets by the third week of the same month. Otherwise, the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) will file a contempt petition against the platforms that are in default with the Supreme Court and begin legal proceedings.

Rohit Kumar Singh called for establishing an Ombudsman to address the consumer grievances in a time-bound manner. During the deliberations, an idea was floated to integrate the AirSewa portal with the National Consumer Helpline for effective resolution of consumer complaints.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) stressed that the Ministry has published a 'Passenger Charter' which includes the rights of passengers during air travel. It was decided that the Charter should be actively publicised among consumers including publishing the same on the National Consumer Helpline.

The meeting concluded with the commitment to continue to explore ways to counter deceptive online practices and protect consumers' interests in the travel sector.

While the officials hoped to convince the airlines and travel companies to refrain from indulging in unfair practices, the meeting failed to bring about any substantial change. The CCPA continues to stay silent, there is no follow-up work on integrating the complaint portals and the idea of an ombudsman seems to have disappeared into thin air! ▶

## Stuck in the Airplane? You Have An Exit Now!



**WITH PASSENGERS BEING** jammed in the aircraft for long hours after boarding due to flight delays and congestion at airports, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) issued new guidelines - which came into effect on 1st April. This will allow passengers to exit from an aircraft through an airport departure gate if the flight gets delayed.

Accordingly, airlines, airports and security agencies have been directed to allow passengers to be deboarded and returned to the departure terminal in case of extraordinary flight delays. **ZULFIQUAR HASAN**, Director General of the aviation security watchdog stated, "In case of delays (no specific time limit of delay) the call will be taken by airport security or airlines to deplane passengers and bring them to the boarding area again."

Prior to this, if a flight was delayed by technical issues or other emergencies, the passengers either had to stay put in the flight or return to the arrivals section and repeat the process of boarding. Now, they can return to the departure area. ▶





## PILs to Bring Fairness and Affordability in Airline Operations

Capping prices to a reasonable level and ensuring timely refunds is essential to protect consumer rights and promote transparency in any industry. We are working to ensure that when consumers book a flight ticket, they should have the confidence that the price they pay is fair, and they will get a reasonable refund, if needed.

**GIVEN THE GROWING** reliance on air travel for connectivity and mobility, the issues of arbitrary price hikes, hidden fees and missing refunds continue to be a major hassle for passengers. Fluctuations and disparities persist, leaving consumers extremely vulnerable to exploitation.

## Capping Airfares

Worried by the plight of passengers and seeking to uphold basic consumer rights, our editor and international consumer policy expert, Prof Bejon Kumar Misra filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Delhi High Court way back in 2018, seeking capping of airfares charged by the various airlines in the country.

The plea highlighted the fact that airlines often charge more than 10 times the base rate when there is a shortage of seats. It sought that the airlines should not be allowed to charge more than a justified hike in the advance booking fare. It was further stated that the authorities were acting as silent spectators to the arbitrary fixing of fares by the airlines.

In support of the claim, the PIL referred to IndiGo airline cancelling a large number of its flights in 2018 after some of its A320N aircraft were grounded due to engine trouble. The passengers bore the brunt of the cancellation of these flights, as they had to book tickets at the last minute on other airlines at exorbitant prices.

Hence, the affidavit stated that capping of airfares or guidelines to regulate them are necessary to ensure greater transparency and accountability and discourage profiteering and undue enrichment in the business of civil aviation.

**Judicial Response** – Following the PIL filed by advocate Anjana Gosain, a bench of Acting Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Justice C Hari Shankar of the Delhi High Court sought responses from the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

The civil aviation regulator took the stand that the airlines are not charging unlawful, discriminatory or exorbitant fares and that the ticket prices change according to market forces. Denying the allegation, the DGCA further stated in its affidavit that “change in airfares are dynamic” and that “fares increase with increase in demand for seats on any given flight and as a flight’s available seat inventory diminishes, lower bucket fares consequently may no longer be available”.

The DGCA told the bench of Chief Justice Rajendra Menon and Justice V K Rao that under the Aircraft Act, it was not empowered to make ‘financial regulations’ with regard to airfares. The regulator even said that “prevailing airline practices with regard to the type of fares offered and their charging method by private and government owned airlines are same and in line with practices followed globally”.

Can it be denied that imposing caps on airfares will enable the regulators to uphold consumer rights, instil trust in the aviation industry and enhance the overall passenger experience? **Alas, it’s been 6 years and the PIL continues to remain pending before the court. The matter has again been listed for hearing in this month. (We will keep our readers posted on any developments in our following edition)**

## Jet Airways Crisis

The sudden suspension of services of Jet Airways in 2019 severely affected the innocent passengers who were not

informed about it earlier. Moved by their sheer helplessness, Prof Misra filed another PIL in the Delhi High Court seeking directions to the Civil Aviation Ministry and the DGCA to provide passengers (who had booked tickets with the airline in advance) a full refund with a reasonable compensation or arrange an alternative travel mode for them to reach their destinations.

The petitioner’s counsel, Advocate Shashank Deo Sudhi said that with more than 100 flights cancelled without prior notice, passengers were constrained to run from pillar to post to manage their urgent official and personal commitments. Amidst the ongoing chaos, other airlines were profiteering out of the crisis.

The plea further stated, “It is common knowledge that all competitor airlines have exorbitantly increased airfares and the toothless and vulnerable consumers are constrained to suffer not only in terms of money, but also in terms of mental harassment of unprecedented scale.” It also cited a media report which affirmed that more than Rs 360 crore of passengers/consumers’ hard earned money is under threat due to non-refund of ticket value!



The passengers have to not only purchase alternative tickets at highly exorbitant cost, but also go through lots of anxieties and mental agony. This has resulted in profiteering by other airlines at the cost of the passengers and till date no relief has

been announced by the respondents (Ministry and DGCA).

- Prof. Bejon Kumar Misra

It is on record that such a situation was existing for more than two years, but was intentionally allowed by the authorities without any concern for passengers and other affected parties. Accordingly, the PIL also sought an amendment to the existing laws and appointment of an effective regulator as the need of the hour to protect the interest of passengers and regulate airfares in an open and transparent manner to avoid such events in the future.

**Judicial Action** - A bench of Chief Justice Rajendra Menon and Justice A J Bhambhani issued a notice to Jet Airways seeking its response on the matter and also asked the DGCA to file an affidavit on the issue.

As one can observe from the intervention made by the Editor and Publisher of **The Aware Consumer**, voiceless passengers are left in the lurch by the regulator (DGCA) and the lawmakers to look for remedies. Unfortunately, there is no update on the matter since then. Now, one more airline has joined the club in India, GoAir. Passengers are still waiting for refund and compensation towards the deficiency in service and damage caused due to the deliberate act of negligence by the Airlines. They continue to await action that will lead to prompt redressal of their complaints and access the money they had paid towards their travel, which never took off! ▶

## Airlines Operating on a Wing and Prayer

India is the world's fastest-growing air passenger market. The burgeoning middle class with increasing disposable incomes is fuelling high demand for air travel. But, surprisingly, this is not actually translating into profits for the airlines!

The airline business is not only capital-intensive, but has emerged as the most difficult market for operators!





**India's domestic air passenger traffic is expected to double in the next six years, reaching 300 million by the end of 2030.**  
 - *Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minister of Civil Aviation, Govt*



**According to Sydney-based consultancy firm, CAPA Centre for Aviation, the Indian aviation market will have to cope with 1.3 billion passengers a year in the next 20 years and will grow from the size of Las Vegas to the size of the USA within 40 years.**



**INDIA'S AVIATION SECTOR** is booming with robust growth in terms of passenger traffic, aircrafts and airports. Already the third-biggest domestic aviation market, the leading industry body, International Air Transport Association (IATA) predicts that India will surpass China and USA to be one of the largest markets for air passengers by 2030. The increase in passenger traffic numbers is truly impressive – growing 8.34% year-on-year to 152 million in 2023.

Last year witnessed two of the largest aircraft orders, 470 aircrafts ordered from Airbus and Boeing by Air India and IndiGo finalised 500 Airbus aircrafts.

*Does this mean that the airline business is thriving and the airlines are laughing all the way to the bank?*

*Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth!*

As per rating agency ICRA's estimates, the airlines in India incurred a

combined loss of Rs 110 billion to Rs 130 billion, in 2022-23. The number stood at Rs 235 billion in the previous year, largely due to disruptions caused by the Covid pandemic. CAPA further projects that India's airlines will incur losses between \$1.6 billion and \$1.8 billion in 2023-24 despite the improved yields and stable cost environment.

**In Hot Water**

Aviation in India has always been a risky, challenging and largely, unforgiving business. The highly-demanding

environment is defined by severe volatility and competition which has led to over a dozen airlines folding in less than five years of operations. The battle in the skies has become so intense that smaller and regional airlines are constantly struggling to stay afloat.

*Who would have imagined that Jet Airways,*

**India's market is brutal and tough to make money unless the airline has scale, is nimble, and very hard-nosed in cost control.**

- *Shukor Yusuf, head of Endau Analytics, a Malaysia-based aviation consultancy firm*

which was the single largest full service carrier till 2017-18, would go bankrupt and shut shop after more than 25 years of operations!

Why do airlines struggle to survive? What contributes to the high operating costs? Why are so many aircrafts grounded every year?

**Rising Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) Cost** – ATF accounts for about 45% of an airline's operating expenses. The elevated prices are compounded by the high taxes on fuel - some states charge as much as 30% taxes on jet fuel - which significantly impacts the margins of the airlines.

**Airport Charges** – Airlines have to pay for using airport facilities like terminals, runways and even aerobridges. The privatisation of airports is raising concerns about increase in the fees as it already accounts for 5% of airline overheads.



**The Indian aviation market has always struggled with high costs, as it is not considered a necessity but a luxury service.**

*- Alok Anand, Chairman and CEO, Acumen Aviation, an aircraft asset management and leasing company*

**Spare Parts and Services**

– Challenges in the global supply chain have become a significant concern in handling engine and other issues. Many aircrafts have to be grounded simply due to unavailability of essential parts from the suppliers leading to flight disruptions. Delays in aircraft deliveries add to the burden.




Moreover, the aircrafts have to seek component and engine maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) services on foreign shores which amplifies the costs.

**Leasing Charges** – Nearly 80% of India's commercial fleet is leased. India has still not ratified the Cape Town Convention. Without this, the creditors face higher level of risk of loss of investment. Thus, they levy significantly higher leasing rates – the airlines pay annual lease rents of about Rs 10,000 crore, making up almost 15% of their revenues. In addition to this, the Indian rupee has depreciated almost 20% against the dollar since the beginning of 2019. This raises the cost of leasing planes

from abroad which has a major bearing on the cost structure of the airlines.

**Lack of Staff** – There is a severe shortage of experienced pilots, maintenance engineers and cabin crew which translates into operational disruptions like increase in turn-around time of airlines. Training airline crew is an expensive affair for the carriers. And it is estimated that they will require around 34,000 more pilots and 45,000 aircraft technicians by 2040.

*The overworked and tired staff finally take up protests and miss work – like the recent case of Vistara pilots – leading to huge disruptions in operations.*



**There is a need to upgrade civil aviation academies and flying schools so pilots can train here instead of going abroad.**

*- Arjun Subramaniam, former Air Vice Marshal, Indian Air Force*

**Low Ticket Prices** – Passengers may complain about excessive fares, but the fact is that airfares in India are already 15% below the break-even point. This makes it economically unviable for the airlines – as many as 17 carriers have gone out of business due to financial difficulties arising from the dirt-cheap fares. Indeed, the airlines are operating on razor-thin margins and most of them face a severe liquidity crunch.

The Covid disruptions compounded the situation when many airlines had to borrow heavily to pay lease rentals, airport dues and salaries while their operations were halted. Financing is especially hard to come by even now as investors are wary of the aviation sector.

**Regulatory Challenges** – The policy and regulatory factors weigh down the industry. Opportunities exist, but the entry barriers for new players are extremely strong. Furthermore, there is lacunae in the policies as the Aircraft Act, 1934 and Aircraft Rules, 1937 have not kept pace with modern technology in aerospace.

Despite a rocky return to normal after the pandemic, it is obvious that the airlines continue to struggle in the face of numerous challenges. Yet, not only does the government seem to be hesitant to provide direct support, the carriers are actually being pushed to cut fares even further. Why don't the authorities align the ATF pricing and taxation with global benchmarks? Why aren't the archaic legislations replaced by new ones? The government needs to step up and bolster the industry by prioritising financing mechanisms, taxation policies and MRO capabilities to ensure that the aviation narrative continues its upward trajectory. ▶





A snapshot of success stories of consumer activists who are relentlessly battling for consumer rights. We will highlight decisions and awards in favour of the consumers. This should motivate other youngsters to take up the cause of the consumer for not only social benefit, but their own good too! Jai Ho Grahak!

# Empowered Consumers Confront the Trials of Air Travel - Jai Ho Grahak!

When a consumer faces any kind of issue in booking tickets, cancelling tickets, getting refunds or other delays, he/she has the right to make a complaint. You can and will win in the battleground of consumer protection against airlines.

**PASSENGERS SHOULD KNOW** their rights as a consumer and the liability accorded to the airlines/booking platforms by law. Do not hesitate to voice your concerns or problems. Always take proper action in case of any mishap – only when we take action in the proper forum will the airline industry be forced to sit up and take notice.

There are many instances wherein the courts and consumer commissions have ruled in favour of the airline passengers.

**Failure to provide water and rude behaviour -** Consider the case of Anuj Aggarwal vs. Emirates Airlines (Delhi State Commission - FA/556/2017). The complainant, along with his wife and children, was travelling from Dubai to Amman. During the flight, his son asked for water from the crew member, who ignored the request and behaved rudely. The complainant sent many notices seeking compensation

for the mental agony caused, but did not receive any response. Finally, he filed a consumer complaint with the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission which directed the airlines to pay Rs 20,000 compensation and Rs 5000 as litigation charges. The complainant challenged the order by appealing to the Delhi State Commission which enhanced the compensation to Rs 1,00,000 and litigation cost to Rs 50,000.

**Failure to confirm a flight ticket -** Pradeep Sunkari booked a ticket on Goibibo for a Jet Airways flight from Hyderabad to London via Mumbai in March 2019. The receipt was generated but the ticket was not confirmed. He approached Goibibo and the third party (Jet Airways) multiple times to claim a refund,

Finally, he lodged a complaint and a legal notice was issued in July 2020. (Pradeep Sunkari vs. The Chief Executive Officer, Goibibo Corporate Office - CC No. 55 of 2020) However, neither Goibibo nor Jet

Airways responded to the notice. Goibibo even went to the extent of terming the allegations as baseless. It defended to the Commission that it is only a service provider that transfers money to the third party, and is in no way concerned regarding the cancellation of a flight ticket.

The Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Mahbubnagar, Telangana noted that Goibibo failed to furnish any evidence of the said amount being transferred into the account of Jet Airways, as a result of which it dismissed the complaint against the latter. It ruled that Goibibo should refund the ticket amount along with Rs 25,000 compensation (total Rs 72,399) for failing to confirm the flight ticket and not refunding the amount.

**Inordinate flight delay and cancellation** – Mohit Nigam was to travel on an Air India flight from Bangkok to Mumbai in 2018. The flight was to arrive from New Delhi to Bangkok and then depart to Mumbai. He

physical and mental agony, loss of work, but not fully what he has paid i.e. refund of ticket at both ends. It will be proper to impose costs of litigation upon the opponent." Accordingly, Air India was directed to pay Rs 85,000 compensation.

**Failure to refund tickets cancelled during the pandemic** – Mayur M booked flight tickets to New York and back for his wife and himself in January 2020 on Etihad Airways - the intended dates of travel were 2nd April and return on 10th May.

With the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, the tickets were automatically cancelled as travel was not allowed during the lockdown period. He received an email from the airline instructing him to rebook the tickets before 30th September for travel dates before 30th April, 2021. It was mentioned that the change penalty would be waived and the fare difference would be applied.

However, due to the shutdown in the US for international travel until late November 2021 and Etihad



arrived at the airport three hours before the scheduled departure of 8 pm, collected his boarding pass and waited at the boarding gate. But the flight was delayed and the passengers were informed that the flight would depart at 3 am. Everyone boarded the plane and waited for departure. However, later, it was announced that the flight had been cancelled and the fliers were provided accommodation.

33-year old Nigam complained that the flight which was supposed to depart Bangkok on Sunday evening and land in Mumbai on early Monday, took off from Thailand on late Monday evening causing him to miss work on account of the 24-hour delay.

Based on the RTI document filed by the complainant, the Mumbai Suburban District Consumer Commission ruled that the delay of almost 24 hours in departure of the flight was caused because the airline did not follow the scheduled mandatory requirements at New Delhi Airport, which should have been done before departure of the flight. The order stated that, "As the complainant has pointed out deficiency in service of the opponent, he is entitled to get compensation for

Airways not commencing its flights to the US until early 2022, it was not possible to make any rebooking within the mentioned timelines.

A few months later, when international travel to USA commenced once again, he made repeated calls and sent emails enquiring about rebooking, but got no response. The airlines even cancelled his PNR number making it difficult to raise complaints.

Finally, he filed a complaint (Mr. Mayur Mullaguri and Anr. vs M/s Etihad Airways and Anr. - CC No. 125 of 2023), that the airline was unwilling to rebook the flight or even refund the amount despite government guidelines and the Supreme Court's directives.

The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission-III, Hyderabad ruled, "This is nothing but deficiency of service and unfair trade practice on the part of the opposite party." The airline was asked to refund the booking amount of Rs 2.76 lakh with an interest of 12% per annum (around Rs 50,000) from the date of complaint to the date of realisation. Apart from this, Rs 5,000 was awarded towards the legal cost of the complaint. ▶

UPDATE ...



Moving a Step Ahead

Update on the March edition

# ITIs to Introduce 'AI for All' Curriculum

**THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL** of Training is leading an initiative - with support from Future Right Skills Network - to make India's youth future-ready and enhance their employability.

Accordingly, all the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) across India will soon introduce the curriculum 'AI for All' aimed at building awareness on Artificial Intelligence (AI). A new curriculum will be designed for comprehensive understanding of AI, its history, principles, types, etc. Additionally, learners can also explore the use of AI and Generative AI tools in creating various digital contents and in education. This will initiate a journey of fostering AI awareness and is a crucial step in aligning academic programs with the evolving needs of industries.

The overarching aim is to empower up to 2.5 million learners across 15,000 ITI's, equipping them with essential future skills such as digital literacy, green mindsets, problem-solving, critical thinking and workplace readiness, amongst others.

Union Minister of Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Dharmendra Pradhan said, "For new entrants in the job market skilling is critical and for ones who are already working, reskilling and upskilling is critical." He further added, "Our present era is a disruptive era. Whoever is able to see it and tries to understand this, will remain relevant." ▶

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**WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY**  
15th March, 2024

## Fair and Responsible AI for Consumers

**INTERVIEW**  
ASHWINI VAISHNAV  
Minister of Electronics & Information Technology

**OUT OF THE BOX**  
Unveiling the Shadows Surrounding GenAI

**THE LAST MILE**  
Will You Lose Your Job to AI?

**INTERVIEW**  
SANDEEP RAUT  
Founder & CEO, Going Digital

**PLUS** ROUND UP • RESEARCH FEATURE • MY MARKET



GenAI isn't just a technology – it's a key part of an ecosystem where people and machines work together!

## Webinar on

# Fair and Responsible AI for Consumers

**THE MARCH MAGAZINE** edition was a starting point for creating awareness about the need for 'Fair and Responsible AI for Consumers', in tune with the theme of the World Consumer Rights Day. We followed up on this by organising a national webinar - in association with RJS Positive Media - on 17th March, Sunday at 11 am.

The event was graced by the presence of Mr. Sandeep Raut as the keynote speaker. Founder & CEO of Going Digital, Mr. Raut is a leading global digital transformation thought leader and influencer who advises organisations on how to set an attainable vision and digital strategy. The Chief Guest was our editor and leading international consumer policy expert, Prof Bejon Kumar Misra.

Almost 60 noted national and international personalities across domains attended the online webinar – like, Dr. Ramaiah Muthyala, Mr. Rajan Verma, Mr. Partho Ray, Mr. Sunil Panchal, Dr. Jagashetty, Dr. Yamini Tripathi, Mr. Rajesh Bhaskar, Ms. Bina Jain, Mr. Binod Sahu, Ms. Poornima Gaitonde, Dr. Shishir, Mr. Rajesh Bhaskar, Mr. Raja Datta, Ms. Priti Shah and others.

Event moderator, Dr. Jyoti Tiwari, an Assistant Professor in Army Institute of Education, Noida, started the webinar on a beautiful note by invoking a shloka from the Bhagavad Gita. Mr. Prafull D. Sheth, Vice Chairman, PSAIF, brought the burning issue to the forefront – Is AI a boon or bane? - in his welcome address before introducing the dignitaries.

Mr. Sandeep Raut hailed AI (artificial intelligence) as the most transformative phenomena of the century. He applauded the excellent innovations in technology before highlighting that leading personalities like Elon Musk, Bill Gates and Prime Minister Modi were calling for governance in the development of AI.

While underscoring the various benefits of AI across healthcare, vaccine development, marketing and other genres, he also emphasised that the use of GenAI – the almost



ubiquitous ChatGPT – is killing the creativity of students. He shed light on the problems of bias when limited data or instructions are provided to the AI algorithms. He spoke about the privacy concerns as the data can go into the wrong hands and the looming challenge that AI can start taking control if it learns human emotions.

Mr. Raut spoke about the elephant in the room – the growing fear of losing our jobs to AI. He assured the audience that AI can only replace mundane and repetitive jobs; the real decision making and strategic thinking tasks will still be carried out by humans. He assured the attendees that new jobs will open up, like prompt engineering, the hot new opportunity in GenAI!

Prof Bejon Misra opened his talk by voicing that we have a tendency to oppose deployment of innovations – from computerisation in government offices to other technology applications – but they only ended up improving efficiency and effectiveness by leaps and bounds. He emphasised the benefits of enabling AI and cautioned that it should not be used for profiteering or violating ethics. He highlighted the use of AI in consumer interests, like ensuring resolution of consumer complaints within 45 days and making sure that the 'Do Not

Disturb' option of telecom sector is actually effective. He stressed that fair and responsible use of AI can bring transparency, accountability and productivity improvements all around.

The attendees were enthused by the interesting and informative talks. They raised a number of pertinent issues and engaged in a thought-provoking discussion. Dr Ramaiah stated that natural intelligence is the mother of AI and it is the responsibility of the parent to nurture it in a responsible manner for the betterment of the society and consumers. Ms. Poornima highlighted how AI can be used beneficially in insurance and other sectors while Dr. Jagashetty called for using AI in food and drug regulation for safeguarding the health of the consumers. Mr. Deep Mathur made a valid point by inquiring how AI can be used for dealing with mental health issues, spiritual development of the consumers and adding value to life.

Mr. Partho brought the right of ownership into the spotlight. He unequivocally stated our data is our property and we should profit from it; not some outside sources that unethically sell our data and make money! Mr. MM Sharma also called for the monetisation of data. He invoked the case of search engine giant Google being made to pay for the data of content creators in Australia and urged that India should also fight for charges for content usage.

Mr. Sudeep Sahu hit the nail on the head by talking about the water crisis in Bengaluru and asking if AI can be used to overcome the issue by delving into the blackmarketing of water and other underhand tactics that hurt the consumers. Dr. Tripathi raised another pertinent query by calling for institutionalising of prescription audits with AI and also collecting prescriptions of Ayush doctors for Panchakarma and other therapies, thus helping in weeding out fake insurance claims while benefitting the genuine claimants.

The webinar was stimulating and sparked a momentum to take things forward on a positive note. ▶

# YOUR OPINION MATTERS

We are truly humbled by the praise and acknowledgment that is flowing in from varied sources. Please feel free to send in your comments, views or feedback on The Aware Consumer magazine at [bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in](mailto:bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in) – we will publish your opinions and implement your feedback while ensuring that your voice is heard on the right platforms.

# letters to the

# editor

(March issue:  
Fair and Responsible AI  
for Consumers)



I am delighted to have in my hands the March '24 edition of 'The Aware Consumer' magazine. The contents of the magazine are top-notch and much informative. In fact, there is not much literature available in the market to cater to consumer's

concerns/grievances/ inquisitiveness. The Aware Consumer is indeed serving the consumer with its unique offering of write-ups & analysis encompassing the latest new developments, laws, provisions, etc concerning the average consumer.

The March edition is a wonderful bouquet of delightful articles & write-ups featuring the latest fad in town - Artificial intelligence. The March edition is a powerhouse of information surrounding AI. The analysis is breathtaking & for me, the punchline was what the great Physicist Stephen Hawking said "AI will become so powerful, that humanity may irreversibly lose control of it and this can spell the end of human race". However, in my view, any & every technological advancement is inevitable & it all depends on humans, how they handle it. We must not forget in the commotion & melee that at the end of the day - Man is the father of all scientific/technological advancement and nothing can beat the human brain & imagination. If at all we get subsumed by AI or any such tool in future, it would mostly be on account of human greed & lust for power and money.

I wish the entire team of The Aware Consumer the very best.

- **Nishit Kumar**,  
Advocate, Supreme Court Of India  
[nishitattorney@gmail.com](mailto:nishitattorney@gmail.com)



Very impressive edition! Golden nuggets of education on AI. Keep up the great work

- **Rajiv Nath**,  
MD of Hindustan Syringe &  
Medical Device Ltd  
[rajivnath@mac.com](mailto:rajivnath@mac.com)



Millions of congratulations on coming out with the special edition of 'The Aware Consumer' on the occasion of World Consumer Right Day being celebrated worldwide on 15 March 2024!

This is the first time I am coming across a large number of articles being covered (in a single edition) in any monthly publication in General and Consumer magazine in particular. Kudos for the mammoth efforts,

real time (not artificial) intelligence, and in-depth research work by covering in a single edition. Amazing work in making this into a Consumer Digest on Artificial Intelligence!

It is an eye-opener while going through the research work of your team by covering the following topics:

1. Using AI to Reduce Pendency of Consumer Cases
2. IT Ministry Seeks Ideas To Build Responsible AI
3. Brain-Computer Interface Chip Implanted in a Human Beings
4. Empowering Consumers to Ace the Safe AI Game
5. Reining in the Power of AI with Regulation
5. Number of AI-Related Bills Passed into Law Globally (Total 37)
6. While it cannot be denied that AI should be regulated, regulators worldwide are confounded by what to regulate and how to regulate it.
7. Consumers' Confusions - "AI is too important not to regulate - and too important not to regulate well." – Google
8. Responsible AI at a Crossroads
9. Nurturing Potential vs Regulation
10. Mr. Ashwini Vaishnaw: There are "concerns around IPR, copyright, bias of algorithm" when it comes to platforms, such as ChatGPT, which use 'Generative AI' tools to give human-like responses within seconds.
11. The Flip Side of AI – Delving into the Emerging Challenges
12. Unveiling the Shadows Surrounding GenAI
13. Fair and Responsible AI for a Better Tomorrow
14. Artificial Intelligence for Consumer Protection
15. The Reshaping of Healthcare with AI
16. Will You Lose Your Job to AI?

This publication is going to be used as a reference document/publication while final framing/fine tuning the Indian regulations on artificial intelligence.

Once again, millions of congratulations to the entire research team for this valuable publication.

- **Harbans Wadhwa**, New Delhi • [hswadhwa@gmail.com](mailto:hswadhwa@gmail.com)

The scare and concern is about misuse of AI in the hands of crooks and of the mental development of the next generation. As calculators have got this generation to forget calculations, which in turn is a concern for brain development. But, we should keep in mind that the moment there are controls there is a tendency to find a bypass.

- **Advocate Anand Patwardhan**, Pune  
(AI webinar attendee)

AI is playing an excellent role in healthcare system innovative new procedures. AI is safe when community uses in a right way. It's also helping the clinicians in clinic trials & researches and patient informative by using NPL modules 'engaging patients for patient safety'.

- **Ms. Sunitha**  
(AI webinar attendee)

Despite all the developments in AI, USA has source codes of all data which is eventually used to draw critical user data (all this technology owned by DARPA) and further used to sell products/services specified with the customer.

Alarming thing is till 2022 the ads were according to the words said by customer, after that it's even showing you ads about what you think. So, the most alarming issue is these big tech's algorithms through its echo chambers is driving social engineering upto unimaginable extent. It's a mass psychological warfare apart from the beneficial uses of AI.

- **Pritish Satpathy** • [pritch135satpathy@gmail.com](mailto:pritch135satpathy@gmail.com)

# WATCH OUT!

**OUR JUNE ISSUE** will be on the theme of how the medical laboratory and testing services play an important role in healthcare. We will be focusing on the importance of the Clinical Establishments Act, 2010 which has not been properly enforced in most of the states of India. This will coordinate with the

**World Accreditation Day on 9th June**

**Theme - Accreditation: Empowering Tomorrow and Shaping the Future.**



We will spotlight the contributions and achievements of National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL), a constituent board of the Quality Council of India.

We invite our readers to share their views, suggestions and articles as per your preference at [bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in](mailto:bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in).

You can also participate in our online webinar on this month's theme of 'Navigating Consumer Protections in the Skies' on 26th May at 11am. Please contact us on [bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in](mailto:bejonmisra@theawareconsumer.in) to receive the link to the webinar.

## SOURCES / REFERENCES

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