

'Aviation ministry misled Parliament on UN air safety report' (India)

CASAC says the aviation ministry misled Parliament about a safety audit draft report by a UN watchdog



A file photo of civil aviation minister Ajit Singh.

The aviation ministry misled Indian Parliament about a safety audit draft report by a United Nations watchdog, the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC) said in a letter to aviation minister Ajit Singh and aviation secretary K.N. Srivastava.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (Icao), of which India is a member, completed an audit of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) in December and found it wanting in its ability to oversee safety issues, Mint reported on 11 March. The organization then clubbed India with Angola, Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Malawi Sao Tome and Principe as far as safety levels were concerned.

A DGCA spokesman had then said the regulator was taking corrective action on the report "which has been accepted by Icao. This will be implemented by June 2013. Then we will invite Icao's team to verify the action taken".

However, the aviation ministry, under which DGCA operates, told Parliament on 13 March that it wasn't aware of any such report. This was in response to a question (number 2748) by parliamentarian Shivaji Adhalrao Patil and four others with the subject line Icao audits of DGCA in the Lok Sabha.

The question was: "Whether in its audit report Icao has pointed out the poor performance of DGCA in hiring and training of staff thereby jeopardizing safety of the passengers and if so the details in this regard with the reaction of the government thereto."

The aviation ministry said Icao had not given it the report yet.

"The International Civil Aviation Organisation has not made available the draft report to India of the audit carried out by them from 12th to 20th December 2012," the ministry said.

CASAC, which was established in the aftermath of the Mangalore crash of Air India Express in 2010 that killed 158 people, questioned the ministry's reply.

"I am shocked to find that a false statement has been filed in the Lok Sabha based on the data submitted to you by the DGCA. You are aware of the concern we have raised regarding the DGCA's action in condoning fudged log books, fudged simulator hours and fudged data. We have seen no action to correct that. I am copying, below, the answer provided by the ministry of civil aviation for an unstarred question in the Lok Sabha," Mohan Ranganthan, member of CASAC, wrote in a letter on Thursday to Singh and Srivastava.

He said Parliament was being given false data, making any action on passenger safety questionable.

"If the Parliament can be misled by false data from DGCA, there is no hope for safety in Indian aviation. India comes in the lowest 5% of member states in Icao (13 states black-flagged in the list of 194 states), and where even the small neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan have a clear rating, it is a shame that India needs urgent and drastic correction," he wrote. "Officials in DGCA and AAI (Airports Authority of India) who have brought us down to this level must be held accountable."

Singh's office said he was in Parliament and could not be reached for immediate comment.

Aviation secretary Srivastava declined comment. He is slated to travel to Montreal in the next few days to meet top Icao officials and has other engagements there also, according to a ministry official, who declined to be named.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/TQObQ0LrCTbKaTncVrlm7N/Aviation-ministry-misled-Parliament-on-UN-air-safety-report.html>