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Flying is no ordinary job. Neither is servicing an aircraft, isn't it?

If the risk factor can be played up for a hefty flying pay hike, leaving aside the fact that today's aircrafts are much safer, why ignore factors such as higher qualifications and workload when it comes to engineers and technicians. They should get the recognition due to them.



Wg Cdr D.P. Sabharwal

MORALE and faith are the two essential factors in the life of a soldier. Today, for 90 per cent of the IAF personnel comprising ground duty officers and airmen, the morale is at a dangerously low-level. And the faith in their commanders is getting eroded fast, like the sand running out in an hour-glass.

The seed for discontent and uprising has been sown, watered and nurtured over the years. Various Chiefs of Air Staff, traditionally from the fighter stream, had been getting special benefits for the pilots (free breakfast rations, free aircrew transport, enhanced higher posts, etc).

Over the years, they have started considering themselves as kings, forgetting the basic motto of "Service before self". They have also forgotten the Service oath — "To look after the interests of those serving under me."

The only reason for flying pay increase has been the risk-factor. Look at simple facts. Present day aircraft are much more safe to fly. The fatality rate of fighter pilots has been just seven per year (180 deaths since 1972) and more than half of these are due to their own mistakes, termed "error of judgement".

Now consider the other side. World over, salaries and allowances are never linked to any single factor alone. If the risk factor can be played up for getting a hefty hike, why not other factors such as higher qualifications, enormous workload, long and odd working hours, working in potentially dangerous areas and unfriendly environment, for the engineers and technicians. One would like to know whether the top brass wasn't aware of this or was it so callous, inept and arrogant to give it a thought.



Each aircraft is handled by atleast 300 different hands during a month. The aircraft consists of thousands of parts which are serviced and maintained by technical personnel. It is through their tireless efforts that the aircraft gets high levels of safety and reliability.

For every 30-40 minutes sortie, technicians have to spend eight to 10 hours checking the aircraft and servicing its systems. What is worse, when the pilot lands at 10:30 p.m. and packs up for the day, technicians have to stay back to service the aircraft and prepare it for next day's sortie.

An engineer's job is further increased in view of ageing aircraft and dwindling availability of spares, and he is required to repair "somehow or the other" the old equipment. This fact apparently is not appreciated by the pilots. The situation would be grim and aircraft availability will come down drastically if technicians do exactly as written in technical manuals. Such reduced availability of aircraft or grounding of a particular fleet would adversely affect the operational preparedness of the Air Force.

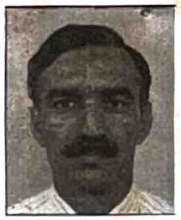
The only remedy lies in assuaging their feelings, giving the recognition due to them and above all, shedding away the pilot's false notion that "we are the Air Force".

The need of the hour is to understand the gravity of the situation, the psyche of the men really behind the machine and to gauge the extent of hurt and mental agony the vast ranks of the IAF are going through.

Wg Cdr Sabharwal is a retired Technical Branch officer

DOGFIGHT

With the risk involved, a flying pay of Rs 7,000-9,000 is too meagre, especially when compared to civilian pilots. However, only those actively involved in flying in hostile environment, and not pilots on ground duty, should be given the risk element pay.



Gp Capt Pradeep Kinra

FLYING a combat aircraft is a high-risk affair and requires high levels of physical fitness and mental alertness. This calls for recognition and commendation.

It is fighter pilots who actually penetrate enemy defences and carry out air raids behind enemy lines during a war. All efforts are aimed at honing professional expertise and combat skills for that one time that a fighter pilot goes to war. Needless to say, it is one of the most demanding and stressful jobs.

Again, flying transport aircraft and helicopters, too, has its risks. Machines are being pushed beyond limits, specially in the Siachen sector. In war, choppers and transports are required for assault roles and paradropping men and supplies in war zones. Given the risks involved, a flying pay of only Rs 7,000 or Rs 9,000 is too small an amount to even talk about, specially when you compare it to what the civilian counterparts are getting. A captain with 10-15 years experience in the civil market would be drawing anything between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 3.5 lakh per month.

And a civilian pilot gets it while flying in a virtually "zero-risk" environment and leading a comfortable life even when away from home. Compare it to places like Nal, Naliya, Chhabua or Thoise (unheard of places by most civilians, I'm sure!) Hence, flying pay needs to be increased further, and not reduced.

There should be no disparity in the flying pay between fighter pilots and other pilots. However, there should be a risk element pay which should be given to pilots actively involved in flying in hostile environment. This could include:

- Fighter flying
- Helicopter flying in mountainous terrain
- Flying over seas
- Flying during actual hostilities or during war-like situation

This would obviously not be available to pilots doing ground jobs. Flying pay for officers of the rank of Captain and above could be done away with, unless an officer is actually required to fly. This could easily be identified based upon the appointment held.

For example, a Group Captain posted in Air HQ or command HQ or TAC or DSSC is not required to fly, whereas a Chief Operations Officer or Chief Flying Instructor, holding an equivalent rank, is required to fly. In any case, most of the senior officers fly only for self-ego and their flying is of no use to the IAF because they will never be required to go to war.

The hours flown by these senior officers would be much better utilised by the young pilots who do need much more practice. Moreover, pilots have to pay additional tax on flying pay. Since flying allowance is meant to compensate risk to life, it should be tax-free.

Gp Capt Kinra is a former fighter pilot

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