

Air force pilot training is defective: CAG

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MUMBAI: The Indian Air Force's (IAF) training facilities for its pilots are in a sorry state and accounts for the large number of accidents involving its fighter aircraft, notes the 1997 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

According to this report, the basics of the training were defective and unreliable. Trainee pilots have to undergo training on MiG-21 fighters in the absence of an advanced jet trainer (AJT).

"The non-availability of an AJTs, coupled with the unsuitability of the MiG-21 for transitional training and the non-availability of simulators, continued to take heavy toll of training-related accidents besides affecting adversely the combat training of pilots," the report has stated.

Doubts have also been cast on the competence of instructors in flight training establishments. Quoting the director of flight safety in January 1997, the report states that chief flying instructors and senior flying supervisors in flying training establishments did not hold what is known as "institutional expertise" and were among those who had either been overlooked to take over command of a flying squadron or ignored for their next promotion.

According to the report, the synthetic training equipment like flight simulators, computer-based training equipment and "hot shot" training aid were either not operational or were not acquired, thus depriving trainee pilots the benefit of modern training equipment.

Four of the five simulators which had been imported at a cost of Rs 12.90 crore and installed in the 1970s for imparting training on MiG-21 aircraft were lying unserviceable for a long time. The performance of the fifth simulator, which was partly serviceable, was unreliable. Following the recommendation of a particular committee, one simulator was upgraded and till August 1997 the remaining four were still unserviceable.

It has stated that 41 per cent of the mishaps were because of human error and 44 because of technical defects. Referring to accidents which were traced to human error, the report points out that these were mainly because of inadequate flying skills, error of judgment, poor airmanship and supervision, inadequate briefing, lack of situational awareness and inability to negotiate even relatively innocuous weather condition.

The report, quoting officials at the air headquarters, blamed the lack of an advanced jet trainer (AJT) as one of the reasons affecting the performance of pilots. "The use of an operational trainer such as the MiG-21 for advanced jet training exposes young inexperienced

pilots prematurely to an operational type without essential transitional training on AJT," the report states.

Says the report, "While the overall accidents per 10,000 flying hours have declined from 1991-97, the accident rate of the fighter stream,

particularly the MiG-21 variants continue to be high. The accident on fighter aircraft was maximum and ranged between 63 and 79 per cent of the total accidents, whereas that of trainer aircraft ranged between eight and 23 per cent," it states.