

India's international airline is this year celebrating the tenth anniversary of its inception in June 1948.

एअर इन्डिया

AIR-INDIA *International*

By K. U. Matthew

Burmah-Shell Oil Storage and Distributing Co. of India Ltd.

AN INDIAN NATIONAL, when he calls on an Air-India International office at London, Prague, or Tokyo, feels he breathes his own—his native air. Here, in this airline, is a solid and distinguished achievement which India has added to her credit; Air-India, to many progressive and forward-looking Indians, is Mother India in one of her finest manifestations.

For instance, the Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru, who is no respecter of sloth, languor and inefficiency, even in the most sacrosanct of national institutions, and who is no liberal distributor of testimonials, finds time when he is travelling AII to go to the cockpit and indulge in an aside with the captain and the crew. He makes a point of filling in the suggestion card and he readily poses at the end of the trip for a photograph with the crew.

Why does Air-India International evoke such pristine loyalties? Why does the modern Indian find in an airline company some of his own reflected glory which seems to satisfy so much of his *amour-propre*? The fact of the matter is that Air-India is the most visible, the most 'presentable' item of export from India at the present time. Not perhaps in

terms of turnover or capital assets nor even in the number of people employed, but here are glittering, modern aircraft, manned and operated wholly by nationals, making a name for efficiency, promptness and service in the world's capitals, flying the Indian flag in competition with some of the most experienced airlines in the world, and the Indian feels that his qualities are being demonstrated to the world.

Nothing succeeds like success, but when Mr. J. R. D. Tata, Chairman of Air-India International Corporation, 26 years ago talked about civil aviation and its possibilities many people thought and said that he was building castles in the air. A word about Mr. Tata—known to many in his country and in international aviation as simply J. R. D. The name of Tata is a byword for progress in India in many industries—in steel, in hydro-electric works, in textiles and in hotel management. Foreign governments are happy to lend money and capital goods to any enterprise which bears the name of Tata. J. R. D. is now 51; his manner is incisive, assured and good-natured. The 'fire in his belly' is kept well under control except when the good name of Air-India International is at stake. He has rigorously eschewed the will-o'-the-wisps of politics, though, considering his tremendous prestige and business acumen a distinguished political career was clearly open to him. He plays a certain amount of golf, has an insatiable appetite for work, but aviation has been and will continue to remain his absorbing passion in life. He is the first Indian to hold a commercial 'A' licence, and is the first Chairman of the Air-India International Corporation, constituted by the Indian Government over the signature of the President of the Union on 1st August 1953. He is the President of IATA this year.

The name of Nevill Vintcent is to Indian aviation what A. O. Hume is to the Indian National Movement. Nevill Vintcent was one of those persons who could not resist the lure of the song of the clouds; he flew a De Havilland 9A all the way from England and landed on the mud-flats at Juhu, near Bombay, on a summer day 29 years ago. J. R. D. and Nevill Vintcent soon produced a scheme and with great anxiety in their hearts presented the project to the late Sir Dorab Tata, who saw immediately what the possibilities were and surprised the eager, anxious young men by saying 'Go ahead right away!'

Tata made the airline's first flight in October 1932, as pilot of a De Havilland Puss-Moth which carried a load of mail from



Mr. J. R. D. Tata,
Chairman of Air-India
and President of IATA.

Karachi to Bombay. Other mail routes were established and flown successfully, but it was a tough job both operationally and financially. There were no paved runways and not much by way of radio aids, and few other facilities in those days. Aircraft of this type were fuelled with gasoline poured from two-gallon cans, which were handed up one at a time. There was no talk of high octane, leaded fuel or hydrant fuelling, and few apothecaries, if any, sold an air-sickness pill.

For the first three years the mails used all the payload and there were strict Government regulations which enjoined that mail and passengers must be strictly separated; literally and figuratively, it was difficult for the airline to make both ends meet.

The airline carried its first passenger in 1935. In this first year, only eight passengers were carried by Tata Airlines. The people were cautious and Jeremiahs shook their heads and saw no future in the whole enterprise; meanwhile the airline remained very poor, and phrases like 'passenger comfort' were, of course, unheard of. Undaunted however, by the many obstacles which they had to face, the company progressed steadily, and in 1938, Tata Airlines carried 658 passengers and 431,769 lb of mail—no mean record for those days.

What was the effect of the second world war on Indian aviation and Tata Airlines in particular? Certainly the war deprived the Tata Airlines of the majority of its fleet which was naturally used for more immediate and urgent purposes. It also brought about the death of Nevill Vintcent. This was a grievous loss but on the credit side valuable experience was gained so that when hostilities ceased it was possible almost overnight to expand the skeleton services to serve India's peace-time needs. Surplus American aircraft came in handy. A fleet of 10 Douglas C-47s and C-53s was purchased, and the commercial services which were suspended during the war were resumed and frequencies increased. The fleet was later enlarged by the purchase of Vickers Vikings which have earned for themselves such an enviable reputation over the last 10 years. There was enough optimism in the air to

prompt the management of Tatas to form a public company under the name of Air-India Ltd. in July 1946. Flight service by trained hostesses was inaugurated with the assistance of TWA, and work by Indian girls in this type of job was the beginning of a social revolution which has since gathered much momentum.

Students of Indian affairs will recall that 1947 was a critical year for the Union and its people. There were innumerable problems which a country suddenly emerging into independent status had to cope with; there were the problems of partition and the mass exodus of millions of refugees. The machinery of government was sustained by a group of senior civilians who literally worked day and night. It is a great tribute to the foresight of the Government of India that as early as October 1947, two months after attaining independence, they were able to arrive at an agreement on the formation of a new company to cater for air services to foreign lands. The Government undertook to take up 49% of the capital with an option of acquiring 2%. The new Company was officially registered on 8th March 1948.

Inauguration of Bombay/London Service

On 8th June of the same year, AII's first Bombay/London service was inaugurated. The initial frequency of one flight a week via Cairo and Geneva was stepped up gradually to four flights a week. A new service from Bombay to Nairobi was inaugurated on 1st January 1950.

Resources were still very limited and there were many friends of Indian aviation who feared that it would be beyond the ability of the new airline to compete with established international operators, particularly as many of these were enjoying heavy Government subsidy.

Typical comments were:

'Aren't AII over-reaching themselves by trying to maintain regular services over the route from India to England with two or three aircraft?'

'Isn't it, in fact, an impossibility for the costs of such a big

Fuelling one of Air-India International's Super Constellations from Burmah-Shell's new hydrant system at Santa Cruz airport, Bombay.





organization to be carried on the wings of just a few aircraft?"

These were genuine doubts expressed without malice or rancour, but luckily even after 20 years of pioneering work the original band of Indian aviation enthusiasts had lost none of that early spirit and zeal, and they were determined to succeed.

By an Act of Parliament, all the airlines in India were nationalized on 1st August, 1953, and Air-India International Ltd. was taken over by the reconstituted Air-India International Corporation, with Mr. J. R. D. Tata as Chairman.

Now, the relationship between Government and an autonomous corporation is a subtle one. The very essence of the success of the working of a corporation like this is that its autonomous character should be respected; otherwise it becomes a mere department of Government and does not have the resilience and freedom from red-tape which are so necessary to the functioning of an airline, and particularly an international airline. India was a young democracy and did not have a great deal of experience in the work-a-day relationship between Government on the one hand and autonomous corporations on the other, but with the appointment of Mr. Tata himself as Chairman, it was ensured that the new Corporation was not left bruised and bereft of adequate leadership.

The Nehru Government, even today, when an important and worthwhile job has to be done, places a great deal of reliance on its Indian Civil Service officers, whose number is gradually diminishing. In Mr. B. R. Patel, the Government had a distinguished civilian of proved ability and his appointment as Vice-Chairman and General Manager of the new Corporation was welcomed both by the staff of AII and the Indian public interested in aviation. Mr. A. C. Gazdar and Mr. S. K. Kooka and others who were associated with J. R. D. from the early days, were given important assignments in the newly constituted Corporation. Many members of the European staff who were associated with the enterprise from the early days had left, but Mr. Eden, who is in charge of catering arrangements, is a popular member of the staff and customers have often talked about this 'other Eden' after obvious gastronomical satisfaction. They worked as a team which soon showed results.

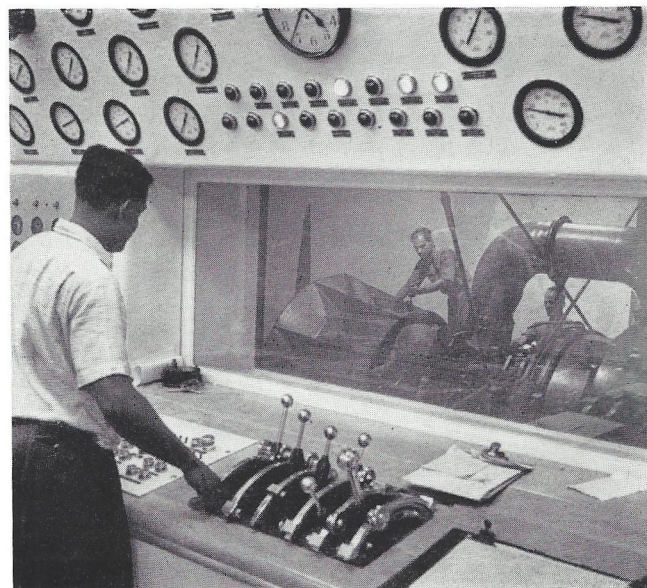
In 1948 they flew 424,991 miles, but during the financial year 1956/57 this rose to 6,314,745 miles. Again, in 1948 they carried 2,690 passengers, whereas in the last year for which statistics are available the figure was 87,434. At least half of AII's passengers are Europeans and every year more of them

come to appreciate the unique standard of hospitality and service for which AII have made a name for themselves. 86,195 lb of cargo were carried in 1948, but during last year it had risen to 3,775,571 lb.

How does AII stand in relation to other major operators of similar equipment? The following statistics for 1957 are interesting:

	Daily Utilization of Aircraft	Number of take-offs per delay	Flying hours per delay	Premature Engine removal per 1,000 engine hours
A.I.I.	7.99	21.64	104.63	.44
Airline A	7.96	13.37	81.49	.30
Airline B	9.38	13.86	69.84	.54
Airline C	8.13	14.58	63.20	.63

In the airline business however, you have, like Alice, to run twice as fast to remain where you are. The volume of operations cannot stay static and the Corporation must take steps to ensure that it gets its share of the continued growth of traffic. A rouble route to London via Peking, Moscow,



The new powerplant test house at Santa Cruz, showing the control panels. An extension is planned for testing RR Conway engines.

Prague, is under consideration, and the Russian bear will soon taste of Indian honey if the present negotiations for a TU 104 flight from Delhi to Moscow are successful.

There is the distinct possibility of a service to the United States, but whatever the route, however small or great the traffic potential, constant watchfulness of new types of aircraft and their suitability for the corporation's requirements is essential for survival. The corporation has decided to add to its fleet, by early 1960, the intercontinental Boeing 707s with an 80 in. body extension, which will be certified for a maximum gross weight of 295,000 lb for take-off. With the help of the Government of India, the Corporation was successful in securing a loan of 16.8 million dollars, which will cover the total dollar cost of the project.

When Mr. William M. Allen, President of the Boeing Airplane Co., said that the 'introduction of the Boeing jet transports on air routes of the world will in fact make the world 40% smaller', he was not indulging in hyperbole. The Boeing 707 will fly at 575 to 600 miles an hour, cutting down flying time of all routes by more than half. Air-India will offer 28 slumberettes and 90 tourist seats in each Boeing.

The characteristics and geometry of the 707 series were considered in great detail before the final order was placed. The Board was satisfied that the Boeings bring to air transport a simplicity never before achieved on so large an aircraft. It suited Air-India International particularly, because it was an aircraft with excellent high-speed performance and at the same time retained excellent low-speed capability. It possessed the ability to operate with efficiency on short and medium sectors as well as over the longest intercontinental routes.

Training Plans and Future Problems

Air-India are now going ahead with the training of flight and ground personnel. Some of them are sent abroad but naturally the majority will have to be trained locally by the manufacturing company's representatives with the aid of the electronic simulator which will be available well in advance of the inauguration of the Boeing service. There are runway problems, particularly at Santa Cruz, Bombay, but by 1959 it will have a length of 10,500 ft, and by 1960, 12,200 ft. Vast improvements to the Santa Cruz Airport, which require an expenditure of approximately £3,000,000, are being undertaken. The management of Air-India International are giving anxious thought to many things such as efficient fuelling arrangements, cleaning of cabins, checking of passports, health certificates, and the completion of other formalities which have to be carefully attended to when you carry on board almost a township of 130 to 140 people at a time.

On a purely operational basis, the cost per seat mile is less in the Boeings than in the 1049s, and the general economics of the whole venture indicate favourable working results. But against this, one must remember the severe foreign exchange shortage in India today, which has compelled the Government of India to cut down drastically on all applications for foreign exchange in connexion with travel abroad, and foreign travel is indeed a two-way business.

The management of Air-India will tell you quite frankly that their geographical situation with Bombay as headquarters near the mathematical centre of world air traffic, has been a very important factor in whatever operational efficiency they have been able to achieve; at the same time, to run international traffic with a base thousands of miles away from the manufacturers of airframes and engines is definitely a handicap.

India has certainly much to offer to the tourist by way of colour, excitement, unforgettable sights and sounds. What does AII do to retain its essential national character and yet attract international business?

First of all, in the little 'Maharaja', with his eyes downcast in courteous welcome, the corporation has a wonderfully



A.I.I. now operate five L.1049Es (above), three L.1049Gs, and a DC-3. On order are three Boeing 707s and two more L.1049Gs.

flexible symbol. It is given to very few advertisers to possess a symbol which while expressing their genius, their soul as it were, has at the same time enough inherent adaptability to be used effectively as a commercial advertising medium. Happily, the Maharaja fulfils both these requisites. He can be seen on posters, magazines and press advertisements and even on door mats without losing an iota of his character and personality. He is equally capable of donning other costumes—ski-ing clothes in Switzerland, a Father Christmas outfit to advertise Christmas in Europe, and even cricket wear, but for whatever purpose the studio uses him he is natural, one hand at his heart, his expression and charm remaining unfailingly constant.

This is the essence of AII's publicity, and like all good publicity, is the expression of the advertiser's personality. They say to themselves: 'We are an Indian Corporation and we have to be true to our origin and our roots, but we are in an extremely competitive international business and if we are to survive as an efficient unit we must be up-to-date, and this requires the capacity for adaptability—for change'.

Truly Representative

They invite you to see the dazzling fireworks display at 'Divali' but they are equally proud of the restful comfort of their Slumberettes. It is good advertising 'copy' to talk about the sprinkling of coloured water on 'Holi', the spring festival, but this is backed by excellent cabin service where their hostesses ply you with food and potions of many hues and from different cuisines. Indian palmistry is always a good talking point, but AII's staff at Hong Kong know the intricacies of that airport like the palm of their hands. National pride enjoins that cabin announcements should be in Hindi, but this is followed by a rendering in excellent, chaste, Queen's English.

It is difficult to think of an institution more truly representative than AII of modern India's outlook and aspirations—the India which tries to propagate Ayurveda and plastic surgery at the same time, the country which tries to resolve the conflict between a cottage industry economy and three steel mills in the 2nd Five Year Plan. Air-India International are particularly lucky in the Maharaja, who lends his benign personality to provide a link between past and present, between East and West; he is not merely an advertising symbol but is the visual expression of an act of faith in India.