



HEMANT BHATNAGAR

# A Partnership That is Taking Off

By LAURINDA KEYS LONG

A year of U.S.-India aviation cooperation has produced many firsts.

**T**he tremendous growth in Indian aviation and the importance of this traffic to South Asia and the United States has prompted the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration to send its first representative to New Delhi. A lot has happened since Randall S. Fiertz arrived in July 2006.

“There are several very critical agreements that have been signed since I’ve been here that we’ve been negotiating for a long time, for many years,” says Fiertz, celebrating his anniversary as senior FAA representative for South Asia by moving into a new office on the Embassy compound. “Whether it’s just the fact that it was time for those agreements to be signed or whether it’s the fact that we’re here on the ground and that gives some comfort to the Indian government, I don’t know.”

The U.S. government has shown a commitment by establishing this office, says Fiertz. “U.S. Ambassador David C. Mulford feels that aviation and our work together with our Indian counterparts is one of the stars in our bilateral relationship.” Previously, India was covered by the FAA office in Singapore, but now Fiertz reports to the Asia-Pacific director

there. India is now one of only 15 countries that has an office of the FAA, which is mandated by the U.S. Congress to provide aviation safety worldwide.

“Aviation safety means a whole variety of things,” says Fiertz. “For instance it could mean assisting India’s Directorate General of Civil Aviation, the part of the Ministry of Civil Aviation that’s responsible for safety oversight. They make sure that the airplanes and the pilots meet certain safety standards, and not just commercial, but general aviation, helicopters, everybody.

“We work with them,” Fiertz explains, adding that the key is two-way cooperation. “One thing India and the U.S. share in aviation that’s relatively unique is conductive weather—lightning and thunderstorms. Europe doesn’t really have that. It’s a big aviation issue. The Indians have some experience in that and we want to share experience because we can both learn.”

Another safety issue is air traffic control, which is directed by the Airports Authority of India, also an arm of the Ministry of Civil Aviation. A new Memorandum of Agreement between the ministry and the FAA broadens a decades-old agreement that limited the range of

aviation topics on which the two agencies could work together. Now, everything the FAA does can be done in cooperation with Indians. “Under this agreement we can help, for instance, with air traffic control methodologies, whether it’s equipment or procedures,” says Fiertz. “It’s not that we would necessarily give them equipment, but we might show them technology that they could be interested in purchasing.”

American manufacturers always had the right to show the Indian authorities their products, but without this new Memorandum of Agreement, the FAA could not have provided its expertise on which type of devices or methods would be best in the local situation.

“We are here to promote aviation safety; we’re not here to promote any particular products. We are prohibited from doing that, actually,” says Fiertz.

Under another new agreement, however, the FAA is able to work with a team of American companies to present joint solutions for aviation safety problems. The result is more flexibility and more possibilities under what is called an Aviation Cooperation Program. A Memorandum of Understanding for this program was initialed in April during the

visit to India by Federal Aviation Administrator Marion Blakey, bringing it into effect. The formal signing ceremony took place in Washington, D.C. on June 22 between Indian Minister of Civil Aviation Praful Patel and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency.

Because of U.S. laws meant to block formation of cartels and monopolies, it is difficult for U.S. competitors in an industry to work together with a government agency in the way this program envisions, but the first Aviation Cooperation Program, set up three years ago in China, has been very successful, Fiertz says. "So when the U.S.-India open-skies agreement was signed by then-Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta in 2005, he announced that we were going to set up this program here in India. All sorts of U.S. agencies and seed money have been kicked in for this, through the U.S. Trade and Development Agency," says Fiertz, who is the local co-chairman for the program, along with Vivek Lall, Boeing's senior commercial sales representative in India.

"What this will allow us to do is offer training. It provides us with money that we could offer the Indians if necessary for them to travel to the U.S., or for Americans to come to India to share expertise, for the Indians to see U.S. technology already implanted and working and assess what various corporations might be able to offer to them."

Another accomplishment in the past year was the first U.S.-India Aviation Partnership Summit, in April. "It was an opportunity for the U.S. government and U.S. industry and their Indian counterparts to learn from each other, learn what was happening here, learn about some of the experiences in the United States and elsewhere in the world and an opportunity to meet each other and make some connections," says Fiertz. "By any measure that I can think of, it was a tremendous success." At the opening ceremony there

were some 450 people, all the major players in Indian aviation, and from the United States, FAA Administrator Blakey, the deputy director of the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, representatives from the Export-Import Bank, the U.S. Departments of Commerce, of State and of Defense.

Fiertz said a principal accomplishment of the conference, at which half the speakers were Indian and half were American, is that "very senior people from the FAA were here and it gave them insight into Indian aviation. This will help the FAA determine where we can best work together with the Government of India, so when we go back to Washington and try to figure out how to allocate our resources, which are not unlimited, the senior leaders of the FAA have a sense of what we might be able to accomplish here."

And what is it that needs to be accomplished?



"The challenge that India is facing, that we can work with them on, is how we can accommodate this tremendous growth from an infrastructure perspective."

*Randall S. Fiertz, senior Federal Aviation Administration representative for South Asia.*

The aviation traffic in India has been growing by leaps and bounds. This is a boon to the country and also raises new challenges. "Minister Patel in his speech at this conference said he expects the overall passenger growth rate to grow by 25 percent per year in the next 10 years. That's huge," says Fiertz. "In the United States, we're at a couple of percentage points and we're trying to figure out how to address that. And here there's been very limited investment in the infrastructure that's needed in the airports and the

air traffic control over the last decade."

Liberalization of civilian aviation has allowed this growth. "India has moved essentially from four airlines to approximately 15 in just the past couple of years," notes Fiertz. "And to give you an example of the number of aircraft—in 2005 Boeing sold more aircraft in India than in any other country in the world. It's astounding. These aircraft are going to be coming in over the next 10 years, that's true, but there are airlines that are receiving a new plane every month here."

From 2005 to 2006, India's air passenger traffic grew from 22 million to 32 million, almost a 46 percent increase. "So the challenge that India is facing, that we can work with them on, is how we can accommodate this tremendous growth from an infrastructure perspective," says Fiertz. "To give you an example, aviation experts have suggested that in India they can land 30 flights an hour in an airport with essentially one runway. In the United States, we can run double that in a similar configuration."

Whether or not the goal is 60 flights an hour at an Indian airport, the FAA can "look into their procedures and their technology and see if there are things that we could suggest, or training for air traffic controllers or other things we could do to help them increase capacity in a safe way," says Fiertz. "Safety is

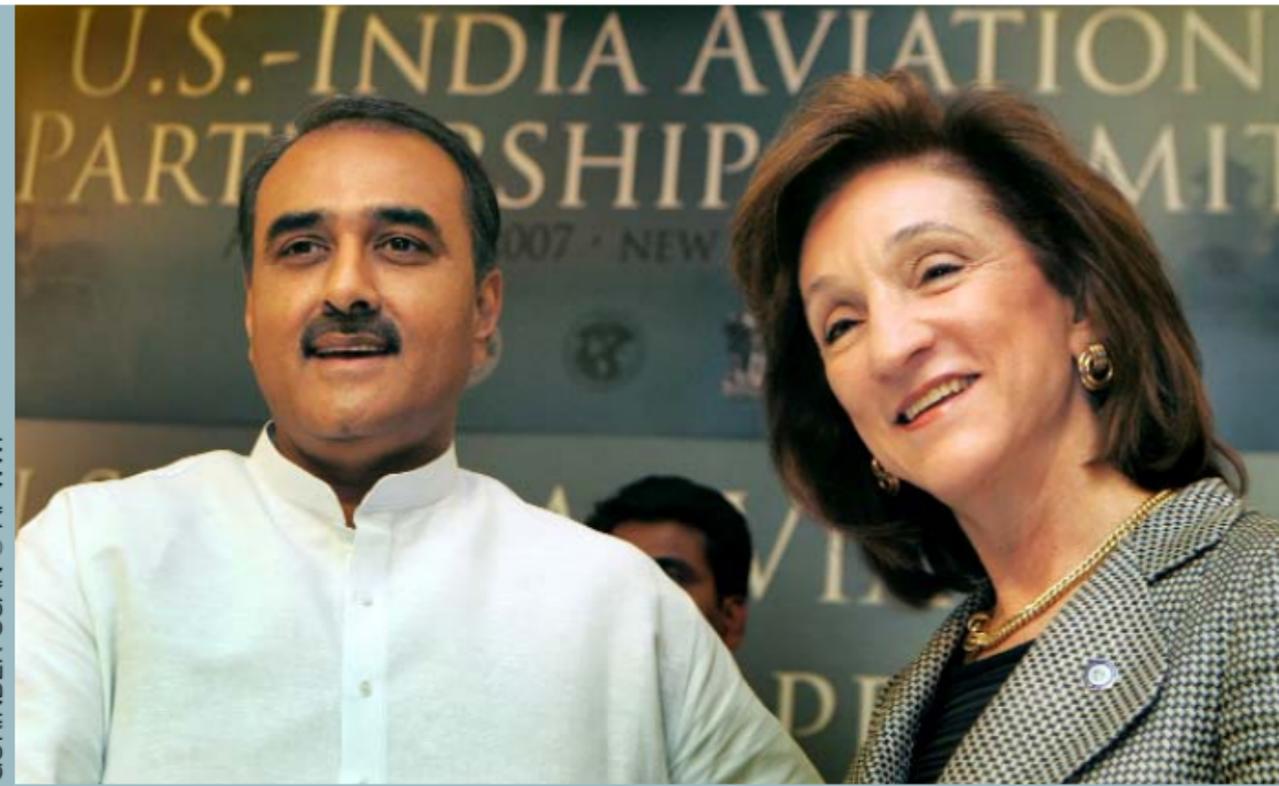
always the Number One. There is natural concern that when the size of the fleet—the number of aircraft and number of airlines—increases as fast as this one does, is the safety oversight capability able to keep up with this growth. And I don't for a second mean to say it's not. The FAA has no information to say it's not safe, absolutely none. We want to make ourselves available to let our Indian counterparts use our expertise if there is any way that they see where they could gain some benefit from working with us."



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**M**arion C. Blakey, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administrator, met with Indian Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel and hundreds of other representatives of the fast-growing Indian aviation industry at the first U.S.-India Aviation Partnership Summit in New Delhi, on April 23, 2007.

“With that growth comes challenge, and I say that from experience,” Blakey said. “In the United States, our National Airspace System manages more than 55,000 flights a day. During peak hours, that could mean anywhere from 5,000 to 7,000 aircraft flying around. With traffic levels like that, you can understand why we’re continually looking for ways to improve our infrastructure. While predictions call for U.S. passenger traffic to grow a hefty three percent a year between now and 2020, that is dwarfed in comparison to the numbers coming out of India....While everyone faces different issues and questions, we’re all looking for the same answers—a way toward a safer, more efficient system.”



# World Sky Race

The World Sky Race, a global race for lighter than air skyships and Zeppelins, will trace a route over heritage sites across the world between August 2008 and March 2009. Developed by the Houston, Texas-based World Air League, the race will start at Lakehurst, New Jersey (the home of the U.S. Navy Lighter-than-Air Center) and, after completing a global tour, end in New York City.

Proposed Indian sites on the route include the Qutab Minar and Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi, Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan, Fatehpur Sikri and the Taj

Mahal in Uttar Pradesh.

The skyships will also land next to the Great Pyramids in Egypt; cruise past the Big Ben in London; land on the Prime Meridian in Greenwich; circle the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur; soar over the Statue of Liberty in New York and the Coliseum in Rome; and line up above the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

Billed as the largest event in history to be witnessed by the greatest number of live spectators, it is also to be the first full global circumnavigation by a lighter-than-air skyship. —D.K.



*Ameriquest  
skyship cruising  
above the Golden  
Gate Bridge in  
San Francisco.*