



# First Flight Takes Wing with New Aircraft

The home-grown courier company goes for ATP aircraft to boost its services and delivery schedules.

**(L to R): RK Saboo, O P Saboo and S Gopalakrishna at the launch of the new service**



First Flight Couriers has taken a momentous decision. One of India's largest domestic courier operators. First Flight Couriers recently announced the commencement of its aviation operations with flights between Delhi and Chennai. The service will have a crossover hub at Mumbai and will operate with two ATPF aircraft for now. With the operation of its two eight-ton capacity ATPF aircraft, First Flight enters the exclusive league of courier companies operating cargo aircraft in the country.

The founder-chairman, O P Saboo who was present at the inauguration of the flight operations said that while he was in the closing stages of the deal with the aircraft providers, "people from different walks of life asked me about the feasibility of launching such a major step. They asked questions, particularly about the timing of the acquisition, especially since there are so many commercial aircraft, which could offer unlimited capacity." But, said O P Saboo, "We were absolutely certain that this would be the only logical step forward in such a competitive market."

Speaking of the strategy behind the venture, R K Saboo, deputy Managing director of First Flight and the prime mover of the company's aviation foray said:



"In-house aviation capability gives us a unique edge in the market. We will now offer full custodian control for all shipments moving within the country."

According to R K Saboo, the fast pace of economic growth

in the country, with a major percentage of the economic activity taking place in the newer emerging markets, necessitates fast connectivity between the regional centres of growth. "Domestic market is expanding and businesses is no longer restricted to time-definite shipments only for international destinations. Customers are increasingly looking for reliable and quick domestic distribution support to keep their supply chain moving. The Delhi - Mumbai - Chennai cargo service will enable better metro to non-metro connectivity as these flights will connect to neighbouring big and medium business centres like Nashik, Pune, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Nodia, Pondicherry, etc. The aircraft operations will allow First Flight late pick-ups and early delivery through systematic planning of flight timings," he added. He also said that expanding regions connections through the metro aviation links would ensure full payload utilization at all times. The company airlifts about 1000 tons of consignments daily through commercial air services and expects to achieve an increase of 30 per cent with the launch of its own aircraft.

The criss-cross service launched by First Flight will originate and terminate at Delhi with Chennai as its other terminus and Mumbai as its crossover hub. According to Air Vice - Marshal (Retired) S Gopalakrishna, the COO of First Flights Aviation division, "One aircraft will be based at Chennai and the other at Delhi. The two will carry out six flights weekly. Mumbai will see 12 landings," he said.

The company has invested Rs 50 crores in its aviation venture and would be adding a third aircraft shortly, with which the cargo flight operations would be expanded to include Hyderabad. In fact, the third aircraft is undergoing the necessary formalities with the Director General of Civil Aviation. Gopalakrishna said that with the fleet of three aircraft, First Flight would cover 75 per cent of the total load factor of domestic cargo movement made by the company within the country.

Incidentally First Flight took delivery of its first aircraft, at Bangalore in June this year. The company has signed long-term leases with BAE Systems Regional Aircraft for the three ATP Freighters. In addition to leasing the aircraft, First Flight has signed up for a Material and Component Repair and Overhaul support contract, as well as a full suite of customer training packages from Regional Aircraft.

The courier company, which was founded in 1986, has a vast network of 700 + offices covering 1800 destinations in the country. It handles over 325,000 shipments per day and more than 150 million shipments every year.

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