

4.3 Methodology followed by AFC and DGCA

The **Airports Facilitation Committee (AFC)** and the **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** in India follow a systematic methodology for managing and allocating airport slots, particularly at congested airports. Their approach is designed to enhance operational efficiency, ensure fair access to airport resources, and align with international standards. Here's an outline of the typical methodology they follow:

1. Planning and Submission

- **Seasonal Scheduling:** Slot allocation is generally done on a **biannual basis** for the summer and winter seasons.
- **Slot Requests:** Airlines submit their desired slots to the DGCA in advance, detailing their preferred takeoff and landing times, aircraft types, and frequencies.
- **Capacity Assessment:** The DGCA and AFC, in consultation with airport operators, evaluate the airport's capacity, including **runway, taxiway, terminal, and airspace availability**. This assessment helps determine the number of slots that can be safely accommodated.

2. Prioritization and Slot Allocation

- **Historic Rights:** Airlines that have consistently operated during certain time slots in previous seasons often receive **grandfather rights** to those slots. To retain these, airlines must adhere to the **80/20 rule**, meaning they must use a slot at least 80% of the time to maintain it for the following season.
- **New Entrants:** The DGCA reserves a portion of slots for **new airlines** or those looking to expand their services. This practice promotes market competition and ensures fair access to airport facilities.
- **Slot Prioritization:** In cases where two or more airlines request the same slot, the DGCA considers factors like **flight frequency, passenger load, and historical adherence** to determine allocation.

3. Coordination and Negotiation

- **Conflict Resolution:** When multiple airlines request the same time slots, DGCA and AFC facilitate negotiations, encouraging airlines to adjust schedules as needed to avoid peak congestion.
- **International Coordination:** For international flights, the DGCA collaborates with the **International Air Transport Association (IATA)** and foreign regulatory bodies to align slot times and adhere to global aviation standards.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The DGCA and AFC work closely with **airport operators, air traffic control authorities, and airline representatives** to ensure that slot allocations are practical and meet operational requirements.

4. Final Slot Allocation

- **Allocation Confirmation:** After considering all requests, the DGCA issues **final slot allocations** to each airline. This includes specified times for take-offs, landings, and ground movements (such as gate occupancy).
- **Publication and Communication:** Slot allocations are published, and airlines receive official communication of their assigned slots. They are expected to align their flight schedules accordingly.
- **Compliance Requirements:** Airlines must adhere to their assigned slots and operate within the allocated times. Consistent misuse or failure to operate in allocated slots may lead to **penalties or slot revocation**.

5. Monitoring and Compliance

- **Slot Monitoring:** The DGCA and airport operators continuously monitor airlines to ensure compliance with allocated slots. This helps minimize delays, reduce congestion, and maintain operational efficiency.
- **Slot Adherence Rules:** Airlines are expected to meet the **minimum usage requirements**, such as the 80/20 rule, to retain their slots for future seasons.
- **Sanctions for Non-Compliance:** Persistent non-compliance may lead to penalties, such as fines or the loss of slot rights. This encourages airlines to adhere to their schedules.

6. Seasonal Review and Adjustments

- **Post-Season Analysis:** At the end of each season, the DGCA and AFC review slot usage data and airport capacity to assess the effectiveness of the slot allocation.
- **Adjustments for Next Season:** Based on the review, adjustments may be made for the upcoming season. This might involve reallocating underutilized slots, modifying slot times, or incorporating changes based on increased airport capacity or revised traffic patterns.
- **Feedback and Improvement:** Feedback from airlines and airport operators is considered for improving the slot allocation process. The DGCA may adjust its policies to address operational challenges and improve efficiency.

7. Data Integration and Technology Use

- **Slot Management Systems:** Advanced **slot management software** helps automate parts of the allocation process, optimize slot utilization, and enable real-time adjustments when necessary.
- **Data-Driven Decisions:** The DGCA and AFC use data from various sources, including **air traffic control systems, airport operations data, and historical slot usage patterns**. This data informs better decisions regarding capacity planning and resource allocation.

8. Policy Development and Coordination

- **Policy Advisory:** DGCA frequently updates the **Ministry of Civil Aviation** on trends and challenges related to slot allocation and proposes policy changes as needed.
- **International Compliance:** The DGCA ensures that slot allocation practices align with global standards and ICAO recommendations, facilitating smoother international operations.

Through this structured approach, the DGCA and AFC aim to maximize airport capacity, reduce delays, and ensure equitable slot distribution among airlines, ultimately supporting the overall growth and efficiency of India's aviation industry.

4.4 Management of Bilateral

The management of **bilateral air service agreements** (bilateral) is a crucial aspect of international aviation relations. Bilateral are treaties between two countries that establish the framework under which airlines from each country can operate international services between them. In India, the **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** and the **Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA)** oversee the management and negotiation of these agreements.

Key Aspects of Bilateral Air Service Agreements

1. Purpose of Bilateral Agreements:

- **Access and Connectivity:** Bilateral define which routes airlines can operate, the frequency of flights, the airports they can serve, and any traffic rights such as fifth freedom rights.

- **Regulatory Control:** These agreements enable governments to regulate which airlines have access to their country's airspace and under what conditions, often to ensure safety and security.
- **Economic Impact:** Bilateral influence trade, tourism, and economic relations between the two countries by enhancing connectivity and opening up new travel and business opportunities.

Management and Negotiation Process

1. Assessment of Demand and Market Potential

- The DGCA and MoCA assess **market demand** for flights to and from various countries. This involves analysing passenger traffic, trade volumes, tourism, and overall bilateral relations.
- **Consultations with Stakeholders:** The government consults with Indian airlines, airports, tourism authorities, and other stakeholders to understand market needs and identify countries with high potential for expanded air services.

2. Negotiation Framework

- **Delegation and Authority:** Bilateral negotiations are typically conducted by a team from the MoCA and DGCA, with technical and legal experts involved to address specific issues.
- **Scope of Agreement:** Key elements are negotiated, including:
 - **Route Rights:** Designated routes on which airlines from both countries can operate.
 - **Frequency of Flights:** The number of weekly flights allowed for each side.
 - **Fifth Freedom Rights:** Permission for an airline to carry passengers between two foreign countries during flights originating or ending in its own country.
 - **Capacity Sharing:** Agreements on the capacity to be shared by airlines of both nations, which may include seat or tonnage capacity.

3. Traffic Rights and Freedoms of the Air

- Bilateral usually specify **freedoms of the air** rights, such as:
 - **Third and Fourth Freedoms:** Rights to carry passengers between the two countries involved in the bilateral agreement.
 - **Fifth Freedom:** Rights for airlines to pick up and drop off passengers in a third country en route.
- **Balancing Rights:** The MoCA and DGCA aim to balance traffic rights, ensuring that Indian carriers have fair access while also negotiating for reciprocal rights for foreign carriers.

4. Fair Competition and Regulation

- **Fair Competition Clauses:** Bilateral often include provisions on competition to prevent one country's airlines from unfairly dominating routes or routes being overserved, which can lead to issues such as dumping.
- **Safety and Security Compliance:** Both countries must agree to uphold certain safety and security standards, often in line with **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** standards.
- **Ownership and Control:** Typically, only airlines that are substantially owned and effectively controlled by nationals of one of the parties can benefit from the agreement.

5. Finalizing and Implementing Agreements

- Once terms are agreed upon, the **bilateral air service agreement** is signed by representatives of both governments. It may also be subject to approval by each country's respective regulatory bodies.
- **Publication and Communication:** The terms of the bilateral agreement are communicated to relevant stakeholders, including airlines, airports, and tourism bodies, to inform them of new opportunities or restrictions.

6. Monitoring and Compliance

- **Monitoring:** The DGCA monitors airline compliance with the terms of bilateral agreements, such as frequency limits and traffic rights. Any deviations or violations are addressed in coordination with the foreign country's aviation authority.
- **Market Surveillance:** The DGCA and MoCA continuously monitor market demand and the utilization of existing bilateral, making adjustments as necessary.
- **Performance and Utilization Review:** Regular reviews are conducted to assess whether existing bilaterals are being fully utilized or if any changes are needed to optimize market access.

7. Review and Renegotiation

- **Periodic Review:** Bilateral agreements are often reviewed periodically to ensure that they continue to meet market needs and align with each country's aviation policy goals.
- **Adjustment and Expansion:** If market demand increases, the MoCA and DGCA may initiate renegotiation to expand flight frequencies, add new routes, or modify other terms.
- **Addressing Challenges:** Sometimes, issues arise, such as unequal utilization of rights by airlines of both countries. In such cases, the DGCA and MoCA may discuss amendments or adjustments to ensure a balanced and fair agreement.

Strategic Objectives in Bilateral Management

- **Promoting Indian Aviation Interests:** By negotiating favourable terms, the DGCA and MoCA seek to promote the growth and competitiveness of Indian carriers in international markets.
- **Enhancing Connectivity:** Expanding air service agreements aligns with India's goals to boost tourism, facilitate business travel, and foster stronger international economic ties.
- **Ensuring Reciprocity:** India ensures that its airlines receive equitable access and rights in foreign markets to support a level playing field for competition.

By following these steps, the DGCA and MoCA help foster a balanced international aviation environment, encouraging the growth of the aviation industry while supporting the broader economic and strategic interests of India.