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# Airlines stare at shortage of engineers

ARINDAM MAJUMDER  
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**H**R Jagannath, chief executive officer of Air India Engineering Services Ltd (AIESL) — the maintenance repair subsidiary of state-owned Air India — had a tough time in convincing the board about his decision to hire retired engineers. “The board asked many questions... I said if we were not going to take them back, the shortage will be severe,” he recounted.

Faced with a severe shortage of fresh talent in the market, AIESL decided to rehire 150 retired aircraft maintenance engineers (AMEs). AIESL provides maintenance, repair and overhaul services to AI and global majors like Qatar Airways and Cathay Pacific. It is finding it difficult to find qualified engineers. Jagannath said the shortage will soon plague the entire sector.

This is primarily because of a Directorate General of Civil Aviation guideline restricting independently-trained AMEs from applying



for a licence, a regulation the sector wants changed. “This makes things difficult for us. If we take a fresh graduate, provide him on-the-job training for specific aircraft, it takes four years. But, I cannot put him on-job while training, as the sector demands certified

engineers,” said Jagannath.

Apart from AIESL, private carrier IndiGo has its own maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO) unit. “Graduates of private colleges should be allowed to go for a verbal examination and be eligible for employment. Then

we can provide them training on aircraft and cut the training period,” said Sharad Agarwal, deputy general manager, AIESL.

Under the National Civil Aviation Policy, the government has provided infrastructure status to the MRO

## STAFF CRUNCH

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- Decided to rehire 150 retired aircraft maintenance engineers (AMEs)
- This is due to a DGCA guideline restricting independently-trained AMEs from applying for a licence
- IndiGo also has its own MRO unit
- Fleet size of carriers might increase to 1,740 planes in 20 years
- MRO market is projected to be worth \$5.2 billion by 2026

tion of the provisions of NCAP 2016, with other structural reforms in the MRO segment, would endow the sector with the capability to generate up to \$975 million in annual revenue, against the current \$92 million,” consultancy firm KPMG said.

Vivek Gour, CEO of MRO firm Air Works, blamed the lack of collaboration between academic institutions and the sector for this talent shortage. “Except IndiGo, no other airline grooms a fresher.”

With an expected increase in fleet size of carriers to 1,740 planes in 20 years, the domestic MRO market is projected to be worth \$5.2 billion by 2026, KPMG added.

Indian aviation is passing through a boom phase, helped by low fuel prices. Air India will deploy 100 new aircraft in four years, which include Boeing 777, 737 and Airbus A320.

“With so many aircraft coming in, there will be a demand-supply mismatch of engineers, leading to poaching, which will harm the sector,” Jagannath warned.

segment.

Tools and tool kits used by the segment have been exempted from Customs duty and the duty-free storage period for spare parts by MRO entities has been extended to three years.

“Successful implementa-