

**THE CEREMONIAL ORATION AT THE “DIPLOMA AWARD  
CEREMONY 2020”, CATC**



*Delivered by*

**Major General (Rtd.) G. A. Chandrasiri RWP USP VSV ndc psc**

**CHAIRMAN**

**Airport & Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) Ltd.**

Vice Chairman, and other distinguished members of the Board of Directors of AASL

Other distinguished invitees

Heads of divisions and other senior officers of AASL

The academic and other Senior Staff of our Civil Aviation Training Centre

Dear Parents

Young ladies and gentlemen who are to receive the “Diploma in Aviation Studies”

It is indeed a pleasure for me to deliver this ceremonial oration at this occasion where the students of the 7<sup>th</sup> batch who have successfully completed the “Diploma in Aviation Studies Programme” conducted by our Civil Aviation Training Centre during the academic year 2019/2020. It is a happy occasion for you and for us too, as the institution that accommodated you, educated and trained you to successfully earn your diploma.

I was appointed as the Chairman of this organization very recently. Before that I have had a long and distinguished career in the Sri Lanka Army and also served as the Governor of the Northern Province. One of the many things that my long career has convinced me is the immeasurable value of skilled and competent personnel to an organization. Airport & Aviation Services has invested in its own training institution from its inception probably due to the recognition of this value. Our Civil Aviation Training Centre makes a tremendous saving in our human resources expenditure by effectively catering to our company’s specialized training needs.

I am particularly pleased by the sight of these young ladies and gentlemen who have taken an interest in the discipline of aviation and chosen to pursue an academic programme in aviation. You have benefitted by our Civil Aviation Training Centre's endeavor to provide education and training on commercial basis, in addition to training our company employees. I am happy that our company has also been able to contribute to develop the national human resource workforce external to our company.

My dear diploma recipients,

Ever since the Wright Brothers made that historic powered, sustained and controlled human operated flight which opened a new dimension in human civilization, a series of challenges unfolded. What we call the Civil Aviation Industry today is actually the aggregate of solutions that were devised to face these challenges. These challenges continued to arise to this date and will do so in the future as well.

To start with, there are challenges posed by nature over which we have little control. Weather is one single challenge to which the aviation industry is extremely susceptible. Climate and natural phenomena like volcanic eruptions also have a profound effect on aviation operations.

As technology evolves it continuously poses a challenge to the Aviation industry which must keep abreast with and adapt to the new trends. Little needs to be said about the enormous economic challenges posed by the scarcity and ever increasing price of fuel.

Then there are environmental and ecological challenges posed by a world that is becoming increasingly environment conscious.

While all the challenges I mentioned are formidable and the industry is dealing with them effectively, I chose to speak to you today about a very important challenge that hovers above all other challenges. It is not natural, but man made, and it is faced by the civil aviation industry on a global scale.

Dear diploma recipients,

I would like to tell you about a situation that arose in the 70s decade. None of you were even born, but your parents would recall. Due to its frequent use by the media, a new English verb was coined which soon became a household word ..... and that word was “**skyjacking**”.

Skyjacking or the highjacking of aircraft refers to the unlawful takeover of an aircraft by force. Thereafter the aircraft is de-routed and taken to a destination of the skyjacker's choice. It often involves much more than mere robbery or theft because the motive is to take the passengers and crew as hostages so that a commanding position can be attained to exert unreasonable demands. The demands are usually of political nature which a state would not concede to at a conventional peer to peer negotiation table.

The first recorded skyjacking took place in 1931 in Peru. Since then the world has experienced over 1000 recorded incidents of skyjacking.

The majority of these incidents occurred during the period from 1968 to 1972 and this period is commonly but inappropriately known as the “Golden age of hijacking”. It was during this period the international civil aviation industry was compelled to adopt extraordinary measures to curb the increasing threat. Until then skyjacking was dealt with on incident by incident basis. There were many uncertainties such as who should be responsible for the safety of passengers who often come from many countries and which country’s law should apply when dealing with the incident. In 1973 the Federal Aviation Administration of USA introduced measures to deal with skyjacking which brought the so called golden era to an end, but hijacking of civilian aircraft continued at a lower rate. It is important to understand why it was not possible to eliminate the threat completely.

In the 70s that is nearly 30 years after the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, many countries in the world had to wage a different type of warfare. That was the war against terror. Now, that is not something unfamiliar to us Sri Lankans, having been through a painful and agonizing war against terrorism for nearly 30 years. Nevertheless, you would be interested to know a brief history about this type of warfare.

The word ‘terrorism’ originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, during the time of the French revolution. However, it became widespread only during the 70s. The definition of ‘terrorism’ is always debatable but one common definition is as the use of violence at international level, often for political purposes. While conventional armies fight each other during times of declared war, terrorist organizations often target non-combatant civilians and perform violent acts even in the absence of a declared war. These organizations have trained cadres, possess weapons, ammunition and other military hardware, and have

widespread intelligence networks just like conventional armies. However, they do not adhere to accepted norms and conventions that legitimate armies are bound to follow.

Holding civilians to ransom is one of the most common acts of terrorism. Needless to say it brings enormous pressure on states and governments because no civilized country would ever choose to forfeit the security and wellbeing of its citizens.

Taking control of civilian aircraft falls into this category. Once an aircraft is airborne and cruising at altitudes of 35,000 feet or higher, it is isolated from the rest of the world and is easy prey for offenders. A handful of individuals who can get into the aircraft under the guise of passengers can easily intimidate the crew and passengers using small arms and explosives smuggled onboard secretly. Up in the air there is no way for the crew to request assistance from authorities as done on ground. It would also be futile for passengers or crew members to resist, confront, or try to overpower the offenders because the resulting brawl could result in passengers or crew members being fatally wounded or killed and even worse, cause damage to the aircraft superstructure that could lead to a crash or midair explosion. The hijackers are generally willing to sacrifice their lives for their cause and therefore any resistance towards the combat skilled offenders could result in instant calamity. High up in the air and in the face of intimidation by hijackers the passengers and crew are well and truly helpless and have absolutely no choice other than to follow the directions of the hijackers. At the same time the airline, the state owning it, and the states of nationality of the passengers are plunged into a deep crisis.

In the face of this grave danger, the civil aviation industry soon realized that the only way to prevent skyjacking is to prevent offenders from boarding flights posing as genuine passengers and to prevent offensive items from being brought onboard. The Federal Aviation Administration and the International Civil Aviation Organization introduced a series of measures that made screening of passengers and baggage mandatory. Thus, began a new era in civil aviation where airport service providers and airline operators were saddled with the unpleasant task of viewing every passenger, who is their customer and their primary source of livelihood, as a potential offender. It completely changed the customer interface of the aviation industry.

Screening passengers for authenticity and ascertaining their true identity was not an easy task in the 70s. The technology and communication infrastructure of those days were far inferior to those available today. It was easy for offenders to forge travel documents and get through the screening mechanism and emigration control as genuine passengers. As a result, it was near impossible for immigration authorities, airport operators and airlines operators to screen passengers based on travel documents.

A far more serious challenge was the prevention of small arms and offensive items from being taken aboard flights. Walk through passenger screeners were available as way back as 1973 but for baggage, physical inspection was the only way to detect such items. This seriously affected the simplified passenger flow at airports which a critical requirement for the efficient functioning of the airline industry.

Then came the era of screening baggage using technology. The first generation technology that used basic metal detection and primitive x-ray imaging nevertheless provided a major breakthrough where airport operators were able to maintain a reasonable passenger flow rate and limit manual inspection only to handle exceptions.

The industry has come a long way since then. Advancements in biometrics as well as information and communication technology has provided a tremendous boost to effective and efficient passenger and baggage screening. The advent of machine readable travel documents and the ability for states to promptly share information about potential offenders have made passenger impersonation virtually impossible, delivering a major blow to skyjackers.

Screening technology has also developed immensely with the advent of sophisticated image processing software. Modern baggage screening systems can detect prohibited items with a very low rate of false detections. Only the baggage detected as enclosing prohibited items are diverted for manual inspection. In addition, artificial intelligence can be employed which can screen baggage several times faster than humans. These developments have created a situation where the genuine passenger is almost unaffected by the stringent airport security screening processes while it is near impossible for prohibited items to be concealed and taken aboard flights. In 2017 not a single incident of skyjacking was reported. Unfortunately, the record could not be maintained, with a single skyjacking incident been reported in 2018 and in 2019. However, the threat has been drastically reduced but it remains.



This is why the aviation security experts prefer to be proactive. They are researching further to counter any methods that offenders are likely to deploy in the future. One example of such research is 'on-board assembled devices'. Aviation security experts envisage the possibility for offenders to carry prohibited items in the form of disassembled parts in the carry in baggage and then re-assemble them once they are inside the aircraft. The disassembled parts do not appear as offensive nor fall under the prohibited category and may pass through screening systems undetected. The parts may even be carried in the luggage of several offenders. Aboard the flight, the parts may be put together to form the offensive item and this may be carried out in areas in the aircraft such as the washrooms where no surveillance is possible. Sophisticated image processing software is being developed which can extrapolate images of suspicious items to ascertain whether it could be a part of a prohibited item.

Today, the availability of effective and efficient baggage screening systems that are commensurate with the passenger movements is an essential prerequisite for the certification of airports by civil aviation regulatory authorities. Threats to the civil aviation industry should never be undermined. Airport operators, airline operators, immigration authorities, and law enforcement authorities should work hand in hand to counter them. The threat is global so every state has a responsibility towards it. Offenders need to be intercepted at the point of boarding and it may often be in a state not at all connected with issues the offenders are involved in. This is why international standards have been set which all airport service providers are bound to comply with.

Deploying effective and efficient security screening systems at airports is costly in terms of human resources, equipment, and the space occupied. Therefore it could be tempting for countries without

a high level of security threats internally to be slack in the provision of security at its airports. This should be avoided at all costs because only a globally distributed uniform system can effectively prevent threats to civil aviation.

Ladies and gentlemen

What I have highlighted is just one of the many challenges faced by the aviation industry. It is essential for all personnel deployed in aviation in whatever capacity to be aware of this challenge and develop a culture of security consciousness. There have been instances where the alertness of a single airport worker has helped in the prevention of major security catastrophes and the apprehension of offenders. You may get the next opportunity.

I hope that all these young ladies and gentlemen who are receiving their diploma today would treat security as a matter of utmost importance and do your part in ensuring it even if it may not be directly related to your job or career. I wish to congratulate you all on your achievement. You have earned your diploma through your own hard work. You have learnt:

- The fundamentals of the aviation industry
- Basics of operations management
- Accounting and Basic Economic Concepts
- Mathematics & Computational Methods
- Airport & Airline Operations
- Analytical Techniques
- Supervisory Management
- Airport Revenue Management
- Workspace Organization and Productivity

You have also been given a thorough insight into Professional Development which will enable each of you to project yourself professionally.

You have also received a thorough understanding of the operation of the allied services such as Cargo, and Tourism.

I hope that you would embark on your careers in a manner that your parents, all your instructors at the CATC and we, as the institution that educated you can be proud of you.

I would also like to congratulate our Civil Aviation Training Centre for the valued services it renders to the aviation industry. I congratulate the CATC team headed by our Head of Civil Aviation Training on a job well done. I together with the board of directors would like to see you continuing the good work.

I wish all of you gathered here a pleasant afternoon.

Thank you!

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