

Sanjay Gandhi's Handling Of Flight Being Probed

From Our Special Representative

NEW DELHI, May 9.—The inquiry into the controversial handling of an Indian Airlines passenger flight by Mr Sanjay Gandhi has been entrusted to the Director of Air Safety, Mr V. Chellappa. The Director-General of Civil Aviation, who had earlier deputed the Controller of Aeronautical Inspection, Hyderabad, to conduct the inquiry, today modified his order.

Mr Chellappa will, if the incident of the unauthorized handling of aircraft is proved, also inquire into the reasons for the failure of the pilots, operator, aerodrome personnel, the Indian Commercial Pilots' Association and other concerned to report the matter to the Director-General of Civil Aviation.

The earlier order of inquiry followed reports that Mr Sanjay Gandhi had been allowed by a pilot to handle an Indian Airlines flight from Hyderabad to Tirupati on December 25, 1976. Since then, representations had been made to the Director-General of Civil Aviation that the inquiry should be conducted at a senior level.

Mr Chellappa is expected to submit his report within ten days.

Our Special Representative in Hyderabad adds: It was dawn on Christmas Day, 1976. There was an unusually large crowd at Begumpet airport. Youth Congress members were shouting "Sanjay Gandhi zindabad".

A procession of cars, mostly imported, drew up bringing a number of VIPs. An Indian Airlines Avro was ready to take off.

Mr Gandhi made straight for the cockpit and sat in the commander's seat on the left. The co-pilot's seat was occupied by Captain H. R. Singh. Originally, the flight was to have been under the command of Captain Davar.

On board the chartered flight was the Union Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Mr Raghuramaiah, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr Vengal Rao, the Revenue Minister, Mr Narsa Reddy, the Transport Minister, Mr Chebrolu Hanumaiah, Mr K. L. N. Prasad, former MP, two journalists and a Press photographer, among others.

Mr Gandhi, who did not have an endorsement to fly an Avro, or authorized to handle an I.A. flight, was in command. The VIPs had a few anxious moments during the flight from Hyderabad to Tirupati

but it landed safely a little before 8 a.m.

The fact that Mr Gandhi was in command was announced through the public address system. When the photographer went to the cockpit to photograph Mr Gandhi, Captain Singh objected. He, however, said that if the photographer obtained the Civil Aviation Minister's permission, he could take pictures inside the cockpit. Mr Raghuramaiah obliged.

On reaching Tirupati, Mr Raghuramaiah congratulated Mr Gandhi. The aerodrome officer at Tirupati was not amused. He is said to have reported the matter to the Director-General of Civil Aviation. Obviously, the matter was suppressed. So was the complaint lodged by the Indian Commercial Pilots' Association.

Records relating to the flight are said to be missing. The radio-telephone tapes, which records the conversation between the commander and the control tower, which are preserved for at least six months, have disappeared from Hyderabad airport. But the camera does not lie.