

ISSUE 16

AVIATION SAFETY IS OUR BUSINESS

As the aviation industry continues to grow, maintaining safety standards to keep our skies safe remains important as always. Bridging Skies speaks with Tan Kah Han, Director, Airworthiness and Flight Operations, Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS), on his role in regulating and maintaining safety oversight of this dynamic and vast industry with its multi-faceted array of aviation-related activities.

Can you elaborate on your role and scope of work at CAAS?

I lead a team of 60 people in the Airworthiness and Flight Operations Division at CAAS. We are tasked with regulating and maintaining safety oversight on Singapore-registered aircraft and airlines, maintenance, repair and overhaul (MROs) organisations, as well as aerospace-related companies that manufacture and design aeronautical products. These cover best practices in the areas of flight operations, airworthiness, carriage of dangerous goods by air transport, general oversight of all foreign air operators at Changi and Seletar airports, as well as personnel licensing for pilots and aerospace engineers. At an international level, my team also participates in various forums as well as ICAO task forces to contribute to the development of aviation safety regulatory requirements.

You started out as an F-16 pilot with the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) before moving to CAAS. What prompted that move from military to civil aviation?

Aviation is my passion. After more than 20 years as a pilot with the RSAF, I chose to pursue my passion in aviation at CAAS. The role at CAAS provides many opportunities for me to proactively contribute to shaping the industry.

Has your experience in military aviation helped in the transition to your current position in CAAS?

While the military operates under separate sets of rules, the principle considerations of some of the rules and regulations are similar to civil aviation. As a senior commander in the RSAF, I was exposed to various aspects of aviation from pilot training, engineering, air traffic control to accident/incident investigation. This, together with the induction and functional training provided by CAAS, enabled me to transition smoothly to my current role at CAAS.

How are your current responsibilities different from being a military F-16 pilot?

As a military pilot and senior commander with the RSAF, my key focus was to safeguard Singapore's interests. I developed operational doctrines and capability, trained my men, made measured but decisive decisions to achieve the mission assigned to me.

While the scope of responsibilities of the two roles is naturally different, the current job is no less challenging. My focus now is supporting the growth of Singapore as a global aviation hub, while ensuring that aviation safety is maintained at the highest level.

What are the challenges that you face in your job?

The challenge is to set what is considered acceptable safety standards while balancing the business needs for the industry to grow. With the anticipated growth of airlines' fleet size in years to come, we will need to work cohesively with the aviation community to ensure that our approach to safety will keep pace with the developments and challenges faced by the industry. To foster closer collaboration on aviation safety matters, we conduct regular engagement sessions to update the aviation industry on developments in safety policies, regulations and address any impact of new programmes or changes on the industry. These sessions are vital to ensure that the industry continues to embrace a strong safety culture and maintain the highest international safety standards and best practices.

What do you find most satisfying about your current work?

Aviation is one of the key economic drivers of Singapore's economy. It facilitates our connectedness with the rest of the world, bringing about trade and business exchanges in and out of Singapore. Having a reliable and sound aviation safety system in place to safeguard our operations gives the business community the confidence to invest and grow our vast and vibrant industry.