FEDERATION OF INDIAN PILOTS

FIP/AAIB/26- 25 **02 November 2026**

To,
The Hon'ble Prime Minister
Seva Teerath, South Block,
New Delhi – 110003

URGENT REPRESENTATION REGARDING THE ALARMING ACCIDENT OF HELICOPTERS IN INDIA – NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF HELICOPTER OPERATIONS, ENHANCED SAFETY OVERSIGHT AND A NATIONAL HELICOPTER SAFETY FRAMEWORK

Respected Hon'ble Prime Minister Sir,

1. The Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP) wishes to draw your urgent attention to the **increasingly disturbing pattern of Helicopter Accidents in India**, particularly those involving operations in the Himalayan region, High-altitude Terrain, Offshore installations and other challenging operating environments.

2. The recent tragic Helicopter Accident in Uttarakhand on 30 October 2026, involving a helicopter operated by M/s Trans Bharat Aviation, near Hathi Parvat in the Joshimath area of Chamoli district, has once again brought into sharp focus the vulnerabilities associated with helicopter operations in difficult terrain and adverse weather conditions. The accident resulted in the loss of all six occupants on board, including **Captain Himanshu Sabharwal and Five passengers**. The loss of an experienced pilot and five innocent passengers is deeply distressing. FIP conveys its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and expresses its solidarity with the Aviation Fraternity during this difficult time.

3. This tragedy is particularly disturbing when viewed against the backdrop of several Helicopter accidents in Uttarakhand and other parts of the country in recent years. The recurrence of such Accidents, some involving multiple fatalities, raises serious questions regarding the adequacy of existing operational procedures, pilot training, weather assessment, terrain clearance, helipad infrastructure, operator oversight and the effectiveness of the safety management systems governing helicopter operations. FIP firmly believes that the time has come for the **Ministry of Civil Aviation and DGCA to undertake a comprehensive examination of Helicopter Operations in India** and especially in Hills which has also been flagged in the 380th Report of August 2025 by the Department-**Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture** with background of a series of Accidents during high-risk Char Dham Yatra operations which states:

"3.4.1.1 The unique operational challenges of helicopter flights in India's mountainous regions were starkly highlighted by a series of four accidents involving helicopters during the most recent Char Dham Yatra in 2025. These incidents occurred in a high-risk operational environment characterized by challenging topography, rapidly

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changing and often severe climatic conditions, and high-density traffic. The Ministry acknowledged that these operations carry inherent risks that warrant immediate and serious intervention."

"3.4.2.1 A critical factor in this safety equation is the governance structure for these operations. The Committee was informed that helicopter services for the Char Dham Yatra are managed and operated not directly under the aegis of a national body, but by the Uttarakhand Civil Aviation Development Authority (UCADA), a State-level agency. The DGCA clarified its role as being primarily that of a licensing authority, which has issued safety guidelines to UCADA but does not exercise direct, proactive, and continuous supervision over the day-to-day operations. This arrangement raises fundamental questions about regulatory uniformity, the consistent application of national safety protocols, and ultimate systemic Accountability when Incidents occur."

"3.4.3.1 In the aftermath of the accidents, the DGCA instituted a series of measures. These included issuing an enhanced safety checklist to UCADA, conducting special Audits of all Char Dham operators, suspending the operations of two service providers with poor safety records, and placing restrictions on flight density at the Kedarnath helipad. However, the Committee observed that these measures, while timely, were largely reactive, emerging only as a response to the accidents that had already occurred. Such an approach does not reflect the proactive and anticipatory safety culture that ought to characterize aviation oversight in a known high-risk environment."

"3.4.3.2 Furthermore, the Committee noted a glaring Regulatory gap of significant concern: the absence of any **Mandatory, Terrain-specific Mountain-flying Training and Certification for Pilots** who operate in the treacherous Himalayan terrain. The DGCA itself expressed concern that UCADA lacked adequately trained and competent manpower for such high-density operations, yet a specific training mandate for these unique conditions was not in place."

"3.4.4.2 Aviation Safety, by its very nature, demands uniform, high standards that are applied consistently, **regardless of the Operator, the region, or the nature of the operation.** Allowing state-level agencies to manage complex Commercial Air services creates a patchwork of regulatory oversight, where national standards may be diluted or inconsistently enforced. The DGCA's position of being a passive licensing authority in this context represents an abdication of its ultimate responsibility for ensuring the safety of all civil aviation activities within the country. This ambiguity creates a "responsibility vacuum," making it unclear who is ultimately accountable for Safety—the state agency for the conduct of operations, or the DGCA for the quality of oversight. This two-tiered safety system, with differing levels of scrutiny, is inherently unsafe and unsustainable."

3.1. The approach must go beyond issuing advisories or imposing restrictions following every accident. What is required is a sustainable, practical and professionally driven safety framework that addresses the underlying operational risks and prevents recurrence.

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4. HELICOPTER ACCIDENT RECORD IN INDIA – A MATTER OF SERIOUS CONCERN

A review of publicly available Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) reports and parliamentary records reveals a number of significant helicopter accidents and serious occurrences during the **last five years**. The detailed Table regarding Helicopter Accidents in Hills in India is placed at Appendix "A"

4.1 The **DGCA conducted special audits of UCADA and Helicopter Operators between 12 and 22 June 2025**. It further reported the **suspension of Aryan Aviation's approval for Helicopter Operations in Uttarakhand following the 15 June accident**. These developments demonstrate the need to examine whether the corrective measures introduced after earlier accidents have been sufficiently implemented and whether their effectiveness has been independently verified.

5. THE NEED FOR A FUNDAMENTAL REVIEW OF HELICOPTER OPERATIONS IN INDIA, ESPECIALLY IN HILLS OF UTTARAKHAND.

5.1 Helicopter Operations are inherently different from fixed-wing Airline Operations. They involve low-level flying, operations at confined and elevated **landing sites, rapidly changing weather, proximity to terrain and obstacles, demanding take-offs and landings, and frequent exposure to environmental conditions** that may change significantly within a short period. The risk becomes even greater in the Himalayan region, where cloud formations, mountain waves, downdrafts, turbulence, wind shear, restricted visibility and rapidly changing weather can create extremely challenging conditions. The following areas require immediate attention.

5.2 **AREA OF OPERATIONS (KEDARNATH SECTOR). TERRAIN** - Fully mountainous with narrow and steep valleys with operating altitude between 8000-12000 feet and can be classified as **Hostile Environment** according to DGCA CAR Sec 8 Ser O Part IV (Definitions) due to:

(a) A **safe forced landing** cannot be accomplished because the surface and surrounding environment are inadequate;

(b) The **Helicopter occupants** cannot be adequately protected from the elements;

(c) **Search and rescue** response/capability is not provided consistent with anticipated exposure;

5.3 HELIPADS

(a) Most of the helipads have UNIDIRECTIONAL Approach/Take off funnel. Minimum 150° separation between Landing & Take off funnel is not available and not followed.

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(b) Due to unidirectional funnel, most of the time either Take off is carried out in **TAIL WIND** or Landing is carried in TAIL WIND which is very dangerous given the thin engine power margin and sluggish controllability of helicopter at those high altitudes.

5.4 HELICOPTERS.

(a) The Helicopters being used in Char Dham are:

(i) All **Single Engine** - Performance **Class 3** Helicopters.
(ii) Only **VFR capable**.
(iii) Have **no Auto-Pilot**.
(iv) Have **no Weather** Radar.
(v) **Flown Single Pilot**.

(b) Since for VFR, **Auto-Pilot** and **Weather Radar** not required no machine is equipped with it.

(c) For Operations in Performance Class 3, in the event of an engine failure at any time during the flight, a **forced landing will be required.** (Vide DGCA **CAR Sec 8 Ser O Part IV Appendix 'B', Para 1.5.**)

(d) Since the Operating Area is a Hostile Environment and **forced landing field is not available for all phases of flight**, operation of Performance Class 3 Helicopter is Unsafe and Unsuitable for Operations in this region.

5.5 FLIGHT CREW

(a) **Qualifications.** Hill flying qualifications are adequately covered in CAR Sec 8 Ser H Part II.

(b) **Recurrent Training.** Though the basic qualifications are adequately enumerated by DGCA however by virtue of being only VFR operations (though most of the times in IMC), the Recurrent Training required leaves much to be desired to fly a Performance Class 3 Helicopter in such a treacherous and weather unpredictable environment which would be amply clear from succeeding paragraphs. Recurrent Training requirement for **Non-IR** & **Non-Current-IR** pilots and flying only VFR stands diluted by DGCA to the extent:

(i) Only one **PC (Proficiency Check)** is required in a year against two required by current IR Pilot

(ii) **Current IR** is not required for flying SVFR.

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(iii) **SVFR qualification** requires just one initial Flying Test valid for life time with no renewal tests required to fly VFR in IMC conditions unlike IR where annual renewal is required.

(iv) Most of the **Helicopter flying in India is VFR by day**. However, due to persistent poor visibility for majority part of the year in India ***most of the time VFR is flown in IMC Conditions.***

(v) **Instrument Flying SIMULATOR Training** is only required to be done by Current IR Pilots and not for **Non-IR** Pilots or **Non-Current-IR** Pilots. This has encouraged the operators to avoid getting non-IR Pilots instrument rated and also stop doing IR renewals for even IR Pilots on the grounds that they only fly VFR by day and don't fly IF Flying. They do it to avoid IF SIM trainings to cut the cost on recurrent training.

5.6 **Type of Operations**

(a) Only **VFR Operations** without any concessions in visibility is possible in **Kedarnath Sector** and no IFR or SVFR is permitted. Apart from distance from clouds & ceilings Minimum Visibility required for flying in this sector are: *(As per ENR 1.2, AIP and **DGCA CAR Sec 9 Ser C Part I, Para 3.9**)*

(i) **5 km** - Below 10000 feet.

(ii) **8 km** - Above 10000 feet.

(b) In **Kedarnath IMC Conditions exist** for most of the time therefore the VFR Helicopter Operations in IMC is irregular and unsafe in this region. However, Helicopters are forced to fly VFR with below Minimum visibility required for VFR in IMC.

(c) ROTOR RUNNING change around. Since all the passengers are first time traveller's the change around should be with rotors stopped. The period is too short for safe change of passengers not allowing enough time for Post Landing and pre take off checks and briefing of passenger in aircraft. There needs to be proper common SOP for all Aircrafts and minimum Safe time on ground for passenger change.

5.7 **Search & Rescue** The Search and Rescue response/capability is not available in consistent with anticipated exposure to the dangers of flying in this sector. It is pertinent to mention that at two occasions the Single Engine, Single Pilot Civil Helicopters were wrongly used for SAR missions. In present accident near Badrinath after the fatal crash where one aircraft had already crashed due to bad weather the civil helicopters were launched in same weather for SAR. The other time civil Helicopters were launched to recover stranded trekkers from altitudes of 15000 feet and above where VFR flights by Civil aircrafts are not permitted. Only Military Helicopters can fly such missions.

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5.8 **Recommendations:** The Flying conditions in the sector following is recommended for Safe Operations.

(a) **VFR operations** should be carried out following strict VFR conditions requirements as per altitude.

(b) **Performance Class 1 Helicopters** with Auto Pilot and Weather Radar should be used.

(c) It should be **two Pilot operation** and of both Pilots should hold current IR to handle any inadvertent bad weather which is common in Hills.

(d) **Recurrent Training** requirements should be same as that of a current IR Pilot.

(e) The **Helipads should have two separate funnels** for Take Off & Landing funnel adequately separated as required by DGCA. At such high altitude with available margins of error being very less, the Tail Wind approach & take off is highly improper and unsafe.

(f) The **Helicopter Services in Char Dham** should be used in limited manner, at best for Senior Citizens and persons restricted in mobility. It shouldn't be used as joy rides and tourism.

(g) Fitment of Enhanced Vision systems **(EVS) on Helicopters.**

6. STRENGTHENING THE SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF HELICOPTER OPERATORS

Every **Helicopter Operator must have an effective and functioning Safety Management System (SMS)**, rather than an SMS existing merely as a regulatory compliance document. DGCA should ensure that operators have:

a) A competent and independent **Safety Management** function.

b) Effective Hazard Identification and **Risk Assessment.**

c) Mandatory reporting of **Safety Occurrences.**

d) Confidential and Non-punitive **Safety Reporting Mechanisms.**

e) Regular internal Safety Reviews and **Management Oversight.**

f) Flight Data Monitoring and Analysis wherever **Technically feasible.**

g) Monitoring of **Pilot fatigue** and **Operational Duty limitations.**

h) Appropriate **Maintenance and Reliability Monitoring.**

i) **Corrective action Tracking and Verification.**

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j) **Periodic Safety Performance** reviews.

k) Pro-activeness as a part of SMS is diluted by **NIL HELICOPTER FOI at DGCA, Western Region** which is the hub of helicopters in India.

6.1 There should be particular emphasis on **ensuring that operational decisions are not driven by Commercial considerations, Passenger demand, seasonal revenue targets or pressure to complete a prescribed number of sorties.** A Pilot must always have the unquestioned authority to discontinue a flight or refuse a sortie when safety is in doubt.

7. CHECKLISTS, STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONAL DISCIPLINE – LESSONS FROM THE EVOLUTION OF AVIATION

During our helicopter training and subsequent professional experience, we were taught that in the early days of aviation, there were virtually no comprehensive checklists or standard operating procedures (SOPs). As Aviation evolved, **Incidents and Accidents** exposed Operational shortcomings. Manufacturers, in consultation with experienced aviation professionals, began introducing simple procedural guidelines with their Helicopters.

7.1 Over time, as incidents became more serious and accidents increasingly fatal, those few pages evolved into Instructional booklets, Comprehensive Rotorcraft Flight Manuals (**RFMs**), and eventually multiple volumes of detailed operating instructions.

7.2 **Why did this happen?**

Largely because of lessons learned, often at the cost of human lives, and the need to address shortcomings in our own Operational practices and decision-making. This evolution is particularly relevant to the present circumstances.

7.3 **Regulations, manuals and SOPs** are not intended to be mere administrative requirements. They are the collective wisdom of the aviation profession, accumulated through experience, investigation and lessons learned from previous accidents. If we do not demonstrate **discipline, sound judgement and accountability, regulations and restrictions** will inevitably become more stringent. Perhaps the time has come for the helicopter industry to pause and take a holistic, practical and collective approach towards aviation safety.

7.4 Instead of waiting for more restrictions to follow more accidents, the **industry must** take the initiative to reverse this trend through:

a) Better **Initial and Recurrent Training.**

b) Strict **adherence** to approved Rotorcraft **Flight Manuals and SOPs.**

c) Stronger **Operational Discipline.**

d) Responsible **decision-making by Pilots and Operators.**

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e) Effective **Supervision and Accountability.**

f) A genuine and **transparent Safety Culture**.

g) Active participation of **experienced Pilots in Safety reviews.**

h) **Sharing** of lessons learned from **Accidents and Serious** Incidents.

7.5 The objective should be simple:

Fewer restrictions through better self-regulation, fewer accidents through better judgement, and the highest possible assurance of safety for our aircraft, passengers and crew.

7.6 Safety must evolve through our wisdom and responsibility, not merely through regulations imposed after a tragedy. **FIP strongly advocates** that Operators, Pilots, Training Organisations, Manufacturers and Regulators (DGCA) work together to develop a safety culture in which compliance is complemented by professional judgement and individual responsibility.

8. NEED FOR A NATIONAL HELICOPTER SAFETY REVIEW COMMITTEE

In view of the Recurring Accidents, FIP recommends that the Ministry constitute a **National Helicopter Safety Review Committee** under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, with participation from:

a) **DGCA.**

b) Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (**AAIB**).

c) Federation of Indian Pilots (**FIP**).

d) **Helicopter Operators**, including Offshore operators.

e) **Experienced Helicopter Pilots** and Instructors.

f) **Helicopter manufacturers** and technical experts.

g) **UCADA** and other relevant state aviation authorities.

h) **ONGC** and other Offshore industry representatives.

i) **Aviation Safety and Human-factors specialists.**

8.1 The Committee should undertake a comprehensive review of **Helicopter Operations** in India and submit its recommendations within a defined period, preferably 90 days. Its terms of reference should include the following:

a) **Examination of Helicopter Accidents** and serious incidents during the last five years, with particular emphasis on fatal accidents and recurring Operational patterns.

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b) **Review** of Mountain, High-altitude, Offshore, Charter, Pilgrimage, Emergency Medical and other Helicopter Operations.

c) **Assessment** of Pilot Qualifications, Training, Recency and Operational experience.

d) **Review of Aircraft Maintenance, Component reliability, HUMS and Technical monitoring.**

e) **Examination** of Weather Reporting, Route Planning and Operational limitations.

f) **Review of Helipad infrastructure and Emergency Response arrangements**.

g) Assessment of the effectiveness of **Operator SMS** and **DGCA surveillance**.

h) Examination of **implementation of AAIB Safety** recommendations.

i) Development of standardised **Helicopter Operating Procedures** and safety benchmarks for different operational categories.

j) **Preparation of a time-bound national action plan** for reducing helicopter accidents and fatalities.

9. **Greater Transparency and Accountability in Accident Investigation**

The prevention of accidents must be the primary objective of every investigation. **Subject Matter Experts (SME's) on Helicopters** must be as investigators in AAIB as per ICAO Doc 9756. FIP believes that AAIB investigations should lead to timely identification of safety deficiencies and effective implementation of corrective measures. We recommend the following:

a) Timely completion and **publication of Helicopter Accident Investigation** reports.

b) Publication of **interim safety findings** wherever an immediate safety concern is identified.

c) **Prompt dissemination** of safety advisories to all operators.

d) A **centralised database of Helicopter accidents**, serious incidents and safety occurrences.

e) Tracking of each **Safety recommendation** until its implementation is verified.

f) **Periodic review** of repeat findings and common safety deficiencies across operators.

g) **Sharing of de-identified investigation lessons** with the entire Helicopter industry.

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9.1 The purpose of an Accident Investigation must be to establish what happened, why it happened and how recurrence can be prevented, rather than merely to assign responsibility after the event.

10. FIP'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

In view of the recent Uttarakhand tragedy, we respectfully request the Ministry to consider the following immediate measures:

10.1 UTTARAKHAND HELICOPTER OPERATIONS

a) **Commission an immediate safety review** of all Commercial Helicopter Operators in the state.

b) **Review the Operational status**, Aircraft serviceability and compliance records of Operators engaged in Pilgrimage services.

c) **Reassess Weather Minima**, operating windows and route restrictions.

d) **Review Pilot experience** and Mountain-flying Proficiency.

e) **Audit helipads and passenger movement arrangements**.

f) **Ensure that operational clearances** are supported by current weather information and an effective safety risk assessment.

g) **Review the adequacy of search-and-rescue** facilities in remote valleys.

10.2 National Helicopter Operations

National Safety Data

a) Publish a five-year Helicopter Accident and serious-incident report, including 2026 data.

b) Classify accidents by operation type, aircraft type, operator, phase of flight and location.

c) Publish helicopter flying-hour data to enable calculation of meaningful accident rates.

d) Identify recurring causal and contributing factors from AAIB investigations.

11. A Collaborative Approach towards Safer Helicopter Operations

India's Helicopter industry has immense potential. Helicopters play a vital role in connecting remote and inaccessible regions, providing emergency medical services, facilitating pilgrimage tourism, supporting offshore oil and gas-operations, undertaking disaster relief and strengthening national infrastructure.

11.1 In the Himalayan states, helicopter services are often the only practical means of accessing remote locations and providing urgent assistance. Similarly, offshore operations are essential to India's energy infrastructure. It would therefore be neither

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practical nor desirable to discourage helicopter operations. What is required is to ensure that these operations are conducted with the highest standards of safety, professionalism and operational discipline.

11.2 FIP believes that safety cannot be achieved merely through more regulations, additional paperwork or restrictions imposed after Accidents. It requires competent Pilots, responsible Operators, effective regulatory Oversight, appropriate infrastructure and a collective commitment to learning from past occurrences. The Aviation profession has evolved through the lessons of countless accidents and incidents. We must ensure that the lives lost in these tragedies are not reduced to statistics but become the foundation for meaningful improvements in Aviation Safety.

11.3 The latest loss of **Captain Himanshu Sabharwal** and five passengers should serve as a compelling reminder that every Helicopter flight carries a profound responsibility towards the lives entrusted to the crew. **The ultimate measure of an Aviation System is not the number of flights it operates, but its ability to ensure that every flight is completed safely.**

12. **REQUEST FOR A MEETING WITH THE HON'BLE MINISTER**

In view of the seriousness of the matter, the Federation of Indian Pilots respectfully seeks an **opportunity to meet the Hon'ble Minister** and present its recommendations for strengthening Helicopter safety in India. Till date in spite of our best efforts, we have **never been given a hearing with Minister Civil Aviation.**

12.1 FIP would be pleased to contribute its professional experience, technical expertise and the collective knowledge of experienced pilots towards developing a practical and effective national Helicopter Safety Framework.

12.2 We sincerely hope that the Ministry will treat the recent accident and the recurring pattern of Helicopter tragedies as an urgent national aviation safety concern and initiate appropriate action without further delay. We remain committed to working constructively with the Ministry, DGCA, AAIB and the Helicopter industry to ensure that India's **Helicopter Operations** achieve the highest standards of Safety and Operational excellence.

With profound regards,

Yours Sincerely,

Capt. CS Randhawa
President
Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP)

Copy to:

1. Minister of Civil Aviation, Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan, New Delhi.

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2. Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan, New Delhi.
3. Director General, Directorate General of Civil Aviation, New Delhi.
4. Director General, Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau, New Delhi.
5. Chairman, Airports Authority of India, Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan, New Delhi.
6. Secretary-General/Secretariat, Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, Parliament of India, New Delhi.
7. Chairman, Committee on Petitions, Rajya Sabha/Lok Sabha, New Delhi.
8. Principal Secretary, PMO Office, Seva Teerth, South Block, New Delhi-110011.
9. Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of Uttarakhand, 4 Subhash Road, Dehradun - 248001.
10. Chief Executive Officer, Uttarakhand Civil Aviation Development Authority (UCADA), 4 Subhash Road, Dehradun - 248001.

IMPORTANT SUPPORTING REFERENCES FOR THE REPRESENTATION

These Official and Published records should accompany the letter as supporting documents.

1. 380th Report of Parliamentary Standing Committee. 380_2025_8_12.pdf.

2. CAR Sec 8 Ser O Part IV - Commercial Helicopter Operations

https://www.dgca.gov.in/digigovportal/Upload?flag=iframeAttachView&attachId=MUPoLTdu5Zcbsz%2BumDeXcg%3D%3D.

4. CAR Sec 8 Ser H Part II - Flight Crew Training and Qualification requirements For Commercial Helicopter Operations

https://www.dgca.gov.in/digigovportal/Upload?flag=iframeAttachView&attachId=vEKAKv87ob4YKqT6%2F6Vgjw%3D%3D.

5. AAIB – Investigation reports and Helicopter Accident records.

6. DGCA – Investigation Reports

https://www.dgca.gov.in/digigovportal/?baseLocale=en_US?dynamicPage=AccidentReports/500005/0/viewApplicationDtlsReq.

7. Uttarakhand Helicopter Accident – 30 October 2026, details of the six fatalities.

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