

# 'NSG must have its own air wing'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

A Parliamentary panel has recommended that the Centre urgently take steps to ensure that the National Security Guard (NSG) – the country's premier counter-terrorist and contingency force – is equipped with its own dedicated air wing.

The committee headed by Congress leader P. Chidambaram observed with anguish that the two Mi-17 helicopters procured by the NSG in 1988-99, were grounded and unavailable. While one of the helicopters met with an accident on February 22, 2002, and got damaged extensively; the second one was unserviceable due to want of spare parts.



A file picture of NSG Commandos simulating a hijack drill on a model aircraft. ■ S. SUBRAMANIAM

The 215th Parliamentary Standing Committee Report on Home Affairs tabled in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday recommended that the “Ministry of Home Affairs should make urgent and sincere efforts to commission a dedicated Air Wing of NSG and provide requisite types and number of air assets to

strengthen the aviation capability of the force.” The NSG’s delay in reaching Mumbai during the November 2008 terrorist attacks on the city had come under severe criticism, with the non-availability of dedicated aircraft hampering the force’s rapid reaction capabilities.

“The Committee observes

that NSG has yet not tested its power to commandeer any aircraft in real-time circumstances and feels that, unless this power is used, the force would remain unaware of the response time and logistical challenges that it may face in operational situations,” the panel noted.

The NSG was raised in 1986 following the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Operation Blue Star. The force, which is trained to operate as an elite urban anti-terrorist and anti-hijack force, doesn’t have a cadre of its own or direct recruitment and is instead dependent on personnel sent on deputation from the army and the central armed police forces.