New Delhi: Asadha 24, 1891(Saka)
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Air Marshal P.C. Lal will tomorrow assume the office of the Chief of the Air Staff in the rank of Air Chief Marshal. He was till recently on loan to the Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. as their Managing Director and Chief Executive. He has been in Delhi for the past two months or so as Air Officer on Special Duty.

Air Marshal Pratap Chandra Lal was born at Ludhiana (Punjab) on December 6, 1916. He was educated in Delhi and London, where he graduated from King's College. He was preparing for the bar when studies were interrupted by World War II.

Air Marshal Lal learnt to fly as a hobby in 1933. On the outbreak of war he volunteered for Air Force service and was commissioned in the I.A.F. in November 1939. He was a navigation and flying instructor at No. 1 Service Flying Training School and No.152 Operational Training Unit, before being posted to No.7 Squadron in October 1943.

The squadron, equipped with dive-bomber aircraft, was part of the force which, in 1944, supported General Wingate's long-range penetration brigades in Burma and helped in relieving the siege of Imphal. Air Marshal (then Squadron Leader) Lal assumed command
of the squadron in June 1944 and, having been re-equipped with fighters, took it into Burma for a second tour early in 1945. 

Serving in the tactical reconnaissance role, the squadron operated in close support of the Army all the way from north Burma to Rangoon. For his part in the operations of 1944 and 1945 Air Marshal Lal was mentioned in despatches and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

At the end of the war Air Marshal Lal was absorbed into the permanent cadre of the I.A.F. After Independence he did a course at the RAF Staff College, Andover, and held several senior appointments including those of Director of Plans at Air Headquarters, Deputy Secretary (Military) to the Cabinet and Air Officer Commanding, Training Command. He was also a member of several Government Missions abroad. While leading a team to evaluate new aircraft in 1954 he became one of the first pilots of the IAF to fly faster than the speed of sound.

In November 1957 his services were loaned to the Indian Airlines Corporation, of which he was General Manager for five years. He was concurrently a Member of the Board of Directors of IAC and Air India. It was during this period that the IAC showed its first profits and began the modernization of its fleet, leading up to the present-day Caravelle.

Since returning to the Air Force in 1963, Air Marshal Lal has held the posts of Air Officer incharge of Maintenance at Air Headquarters, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Western Air Command and Vice Chief of the Air Staff. He continues to be an active pilot on all types of service aircraft.
Air Marshal Lal was awarded Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of a high order during the recent Indo-Pakistan conflict. On September 26, 1966 he relinquished the charge as Vice Chief of the Air Staff and his services were loaned to the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. He was the Managing Director of this undertaking.