First river landing of amphibian aircraft in Northeast India

Seaplane lands on Brahmaputra at Guwahati's Pandu Ghat in demo flight

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Nov 15: A seaplane successfully landed at the Pandu Ghat on the banks of the Brahmaputra here on Friday, marking the first river landing of an amphibian aircraft in Northeast India.

The seaplane took off from the LGBI Airport and landed at the Pandu Ghat in around 7 minutes, a day after a similar feat in Umiam lake at Barapani.

The flight was part of an exhibition organized by the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation and De Havilland Canada, one of the world's biggest seaplane makers.

On board the plane were State Tourism Minister Jayanta Mallabaruah and officials of the Transport department and AAI. "It is a new hope for the tourism sector of Assam," he said.

First river landing ...

(Contd from page 1)

"This exhibition certainly brightened the potential of seaplane for the prosperity of Assam's tourism segment. We look forward to promoting tourism in Assam with their cooperation in the near future," the minister said.

He said that discussions were on at various stages and it might take some time for the introduction of seaplanes in Assam.

"We are looking at connecting places like Kaziranga, Majuli, Umrangso, etc., with seaplane service and then move on to high-end tourism. Seaplanes will reduce the travel time and bridge communication bottlenecks, transforming the tourism sector," Mallabaruah said.

Ahmedabad had seen the country's first seaplane service four years ago but the service did not last long.

The Union Government wants to relaunch seaplanes on regional routes under the UDAN scheme and demonstration flights are being conducted throughout the country.

De Havilland Canada had earlier said that interest has come in from private players, including Spicejet and a public sector entity to induct the DHC-6 Twing Otter aircraft, and the company forecasts a requirement of at least 30-40 seaplanes in India over the next five years. In fact, SpiceJet has announced plans to launch seaplane operations in 2025.

The Canadian company had launched a demo tour in India on November 9 that will conclude on November 19. The plane costs around Rs 60 crore per unit.

Union Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu had launched the Guidelines for Seaplane Operations in August.

Tractor stuck on runway delays IndiGo flight landing in Patna

Ruchir Kumar

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PATNA: A tractor stranded on the flanks of the runway of the Jayaprakash Narayan International Airport led to a 40-minute delay in the landing of IndiGo's morning flight (6E 7085) from Kolkata to Patna on Friday, said officials familiar with the matter.

"A tractor, engaged in grass cutting, got stuck alongside the runway within the safety margin of wing clearance of an aircraft from air traffic controller's point of view, leading to around 15-20 minutes delay in flight operation on Thursday morning," said an official of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) requesting ano-

THE AAI SAID THE FLIGHT WAS DELAYED BY 20 MINUTES AS THE TRACTOR WAS PULLED OUT AND REMOVED

nymity. "The tractor collapsed in the wet, muddy area of land and it took around 15-20 minutes to remove it. Initially, we tried to move it with a normal vehicle but then had to use a heavy excavator to pull it out, which took some time," said the official.

"Flying from Kolkata to Patna by IndiGo 6E 7085, having taken off from Kolkata at

5:40am, we landed at Patna around 7:50am, late by 40 minutes due to breakdown of a tractor along the runway," said Dr Satyajit Sinha, a passenger.

"The pilot made in-flight announcement four times that a tractor has broken down along the runway of Patna Airport, as we circled over Patna airport. It will be a while before we are able to land, until then we will be flying over Patna till we are cleared to land," said Dr Sinha, quoting the pilot.

The AAI, however, said the flight was delayed by 20 minutes as the tractor was pulled out and removed.

All other flight operations were normal during the day.

2D barcode scanners installed at entrance of terminals in airport

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

A few years ago, a man managed to enter a terminal at the Chennai International Airport with a fake ticket to see off his wife and spend some more time with her.

However, he was caught by the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel on his way out.

In the past, quite a few people have attempted to enter the terminals with fake tickets. To prevent such incidents, and enhance security at the airport, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) has introduced 2D barcode scanners.

Scanning tickets
Officials of the AAI said that with the new system in place, when a passenger enters a terminal, the barcode on his or her ticket would be scanned by the CISF personnel instead of just being examined.

"Thus far, the CISF personnel used to just see the ticket and ID proof, and allow passengers entry. But this 2D barcode scanner is linked with the airline database, and the CISF personnel can see the flight time and status. This system will ensure that those with fake tickets do not

Entry of persons with fake tickets will be averted. Quite a few airports, including those at Mumbai, Thiruvananthapuram, and Delhi are using this technology

gain access to terminals," an official said.

As of now, four out of 16 entry gates are equipped with these scanners. They are currently installed only at the entry gates, officials said, adding that they would consider installing them at the security hold area as well. The facility could also help ease congestion at the airport, they added.

The 2D barcode scanners are not new. Quite a few airports, including those at Mumbai, New Delhi, and Thiruvananthapuram, already use this technology. It has been implemented as per the mandate of the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). Though there have been discussions to introduce this facility at the Chennai airport for a long time, it is only being put in place now, sources said.

Meanwhile, eight additional self-baggage drop kiosks have been installed at the domestic terminal of the Chennai airport.

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LOVE IS IN THE AIR(PORT)

Can unconditional love be subject to timelines?

FE FEATURES

AN AIRPORT SENDOFF IS quite an emotional experience with a range of emotions: excitement, anxiety, and sadness. But sometimes administrative rules can overpower the emotional sendoffs. One such being when airports apply time limits on hugs just to ensure the smooth traffic and flow of passengers. All said and done, picking up and dropping off people at the airport can be a hassle-but worth it too.

Public display of affection or PDA is now timed. Recently, the New Zealand airport has reduced the time limit of farewells in the drop-off area, especially those engaging in long PDA for more than three minutes and will be asked to move to the parking lot. This was evident on a signage installed at the Dunedin airport, located in Momona in New Zealand, to direct visitors to limit their goodbyes to just three minutes.

However, the 'three-minute hug' has drawn flak on social media with people criticising on how limiting hug-time can be 'inhumane'. One user wrote: "Isn't this inhumane? Hugging is a human right and this New Zealand's Dunedin airport is taking a piss."

Some praised the move as many airports don't allow passengers to hug or kiss before saying goodbye to their loved ones. "You get 3 minutes to hug?? In America, they don't even want you to stop. Just come to a slow roll and push your passenger out," a user wrote.

Dunedin Airport's CEO, Daniel De Bono, addressed the issue in an interview with New Zealand's RNZ radio, explaining airports as "emotional hotspots" and cited a study indicating that a 20-second hug is sufficient to trigger a release of the "love hormone" oxytocin. Dunedin Airport car park provides 15 minutes of free parking, thus, Bono has relocated the drop-off zone to improve traffic flow and safety around the terminal.

This airport rule to streamline congestion is a reminder of the situation back home when Indians gather in full force to bid farewell to their friends, families and loved ones at airports.

The Airports Authority of India (AAI) does not charge from entry to exit for vehicles going to pick/drop lanes at arrival/ departure. However, there is no 'free time concept' from entry to exit for vehicles going to pick/drop lanes at arrival/ departure, says the AAI website.

Blaming the lack of a proper system to regulate vehicle movement in peak travel season, airports in India face this challenge. The Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi is known to handle up to 80 million passengers each year with over 1500 + flights daily. For parking though, Terminal 3 offers only eight minutes of free pick-up time for private vehicles. If one extends this time, money will be automatically deducted via FASTag. The Guwahati International Airport too is a busy airport often resulting in traffic pileup during peak hours. Reportedly, passengers have been charged a hefty fine of over ₹100 for spending more than three minutes, dropping off travellers, while the parking fee for a private car for up to 30 minutes is ₹90, says the airport website. The airport has a 10-minute free buffer period for parking for private/ non-commercial vehicles which is too short a time to reach the exit point during peak hours. Similarly, Bagdogra airport, operated as a civil enclave airport at the Indian Air Force's Bagdogra Air Force Station, has a car wait time at the pick-up point for three minutes, beyond which one needs to pay a hefty fine. Passengers at the Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport in Lucknow have complained of being charged over and above the nominal fee and wait time of three-minutes and beyond.

However, airports like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) in Mumbai are making travel more stress-free, comforting and fun-loving for passengers. Recently, it announced a 'pawfect' initiative, turning the airport experience into a fun-filled adventure with nine adorable dogs at Terminal 2 as furry ambassadors of happiness for some emotional bonding with passengers. A Golden Retriever, a Maltese, a rescued Husky, a Shih Tzu, a Lhasa apso, a Labrador and more-all chosen and trained to spread joy and soothe travellers. The dog squad is available every Friday to Sunday, from 1500 to 2300 hours, to greet travellers at Terminal 2 Departures, including Domestic Level 3 and post-departure immigration.

The trained canine companions are experts in sensing and responding to moods, offering unconditional love and comfort, allowing passengers to find their travel anxiety melting away.

Landing trials at upcoming Noida airport postponed

Press Trust of India
NOIDA

The landing trials at the upcoming Noida International Airport, scheduled to begin from Friday, have been postponed after the airport failed to get the required permissions from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), an official said, adding that the trials are likely to begin from November 30.

Dr. Arunvir Singh, Chief Executive Officer of the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority, which is helming the airport's construction, confirmed the change of dates. According to the earlier plan, after the calibration test was approved, six aircraft – three each of Indigo and Akasa – would land and take off from the airport daily.

After the successful completion of the tests, the DGCA will issue an aerodrome licence to the airport to begin commercial operations.

PM Modi's aircraft develops tech snag at Deoghar airport

MPOST BUREAU

RANCHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi was left stranded at Deoghar airport in Jharkhand for more than an hour on Friday due to a technical issue with his special aircraft, officials reported. He eventually returned to Delhi on a different plane.

Modi was supposed to fly back to New Delhi on the Indian Air Force plane after addressing a rally in Bihar's Jamui, which is around 80 km from Deoghar, they said.

He was visiting Jamui to attend a function organised on the 150th birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, which is celebrated as 'Janjatiya Gaurav Divas'. "The PM has been at the Deoghar airport for more than an

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's special IAF aircraft that developed a snag   PTI

hour now. What would be the alternative arrangement for his return to Delhi is being discussed," an official said. 'No flying zone' was declared in the region's air space, officials said. Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi was stuck in Godda, where he addressed an election rally, as his helicopter could not take off following this, they said.

नोएडा इंटरनेशनल एयरपोर्ट पर अब हर रोज 3 विमान भरेंगे उड़ान

15 दिसम्बर तक 90 विमानों की लैंडिंग का टेस्ट एयरपोर्ट के रनवे पर किया जाएगा

शुरुआती ट्रायल के बाद क्रू मेंबर के साथ भी होगा विमानों का ट्रायल

■ टेस्टिंग में इंडिगो व अकासा कंपनी के विमान शामिल

नोएडा, 16 नवम्बर (नवोदय टाइम्स): ग्रेटर नोएडा के जेवर में तैयार हो रहे नोएडा इंटरनेशनल एयरपोर्ट पर शुक्रवार से पहली बार दूसरे अन्य एयरपोर्ट से अधिक 3950 मीटर लंबे रनवे पर विमानों की लैंडिंग की टेस्टिंग शुरू हो गया। अगले एक माह तक हर रोज तीन विमान रनवे पर उतरेंगे और वहां से उड़ान भरेंगे।

इस लैंडिंग का टेस्ट कराने का चार्ट तैयार किया गया है, जिसमें 15 दिसम्बर तक 90 विमानों की लैंडिंग का टेस्ट इस एयरपोर्ट के रनवे पर किया जाएगा।

शुक्रवार को होने वाले रनवे टेस्टिंग की तैयारियों को वीरवार को अंतिम रूप दिया गया था। अधिकारियों ने इस रनवे टेस्टिंग को लेकर वीरवार को एक बैठक भी की थी और जरूरी निर्देश भी दिए। इस रनवे पर लैंडिंग टेस्टिंग के लिए इंडिगो और अकासा एयरलाइंस कंफनी के विमान शामिल होंगे। हर

विमानों की लैंडिंग के लिए तैयार नोएडा अंतरराष्ट्रीय एयरपोर्ट।

रोज इनके डेटा की रिपोर्ट डायरेक्टरेट जनरल सिविल एविएशन (डीजीसीए) को भेजी जाएगी। इस रिपोर्ट के आधार पर ही 30 नवम्बर

से फुल मोड में ट्रायल शुरू करने के लिए डीजीसीए को एनओसी जारी करनी है जोकि 25 नवम्बर कर जारी करने का लक्ष्य रखा गया है।

रनवे टेस्टिंग के दौरान एयरपोर्ट का संचालन उसी तरह होगा, जैसे कामर्शियल सेवा के दौरान होता है। रनवे पर उतरने और उड़ान भरने वाले विमान का वजन भी यात्री समेत विमान के बराबर होगा। लेकिन ट्रायल के दौरान विमान में यात्री नहीं होंगे। दिन और रात दोनों में ट्रायल कर एयरपोर्ट के उपकरणों की कार्यप्रणाली को परखा जाएगा। मालूम

नोएडा इंटरनेशनल एयरपोर्ट लि. के मुख्य कार्यपालक अधिकारी डा. अरुणवीर सिंह का कहना है कि एयरोड्रोम लाइसेंस के लिए कम से कम 70 फ्लाइट का रनवे पर उतरने और उड़ान भरने का अभ्यास होना जरूरी है। इससे यह सुनिश्चित किया जाता है कि यात्री विमान के लिए एयरपोर्ट का रनवे, वहां लगाए गए उपकरण पूरी तरह दुरुस्त, क्रियाशील और सुरक्षित हैं। शुरुआती ट्रायल के बाद क्रू मेंबर के साथ भी ट्रायल होगा। ट्रायल के दौरान एयरबस और बोइंग को एयरपोर्ट के रनवे पर उतारा जाएगा। कैट तीन के तहत दृश्यता बेहद कम होने के बावजूद रनवे पर विमान को उतारने के लिए इसे तैयार व उपकरणों से लैस किया गया है। भारत में अभी छह एयरपोर्ट कैट तीन हैं। इसमें लखनऊ, कोलकाता, अमृतसर, जयपुर, बैंगलूरू और दिल्ली शामिल हैं।

हो कि 17 अप्रैल 2025 नियत की गई है। इसके लिए 30 नवम्बर को

तीन प्रकार के एयरक्राफ्ट और विमान उतारकर रनवे की टेस्टिंग होगी।

IAF aircraft develops snag, PM stranded at Deoghar airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was stranded in Jharkhand's Deoghar airport for nearly two hours on Friday after his special Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft developed a snag, flew back to Delhi in another plane. PM Modi was supposed to return to New Delhi on the IAF plane after addressing a rally in Bihar's Jamui, around 80 km from Deoghar. Senior Congress leader and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi too faced a two hour delay in the schedule due to a grounded helicopter close to the place where PM's craft was held.

The PM visited Jamui to attend a function marking the 150th birth anniversary of tribal leader Birsa Munda, celebrated as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas.

"PM Modi left for Delhi from Deoghar in another special aircraft after his IAF plane developed a technical snag. The aircraft could not be rectified on time. The PM had to wait for more than two hours," Deoghar Deputy Commissioner Vishal Sagar said. While Modi waited for the issue to be resolved, the region's airspace was declared a "no-flying zone".

Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was also caught in a similar situation in Godda, Jharkhand. Rahul's helicopter, which was supposed to take him back after addressing an election rally, was grounded for about two hours, prompting allegations from the Congress that the delay was politically motivated.

"Our leader Rahul Gandhi's helicopter was not allowed to take off for about two hours, posing a grave threat to his life. This was a security lapse at the behest of the Centre," state minister Deepika Pandey Singh alleged.

Congress also Friday complained to the Election Commission against the alleged grounding of Rahul Gandhi's helicopter in poll-bound Jharkhand and sought its urgent intervention in ensuring a level-playing field in poll campaigning.

Tech issues, operational snag ground dozen flights at airport

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Chennai: An Air India Express flight bound for Singapore was cancelled after the pilot detected a technical issue shortly before takeoff. The 250 passengers were accommodated in hotels, and the airline rescheduled the flight for Thursday evening.

Originally scheduled to depart from Chennai International Airport at 2:50am on Friday, the flight was delayed when the pilot identified a mechanical fault before the

File photo

250 PASSENGERS SHIFTED TO HOTELS

plane began taxiing.

The pilot immediately informed the control room, prompting a team of aircraft engineers to assess the issue. However, their efforts were unsuccessful, leading to the

rescheduling of the flight to 8pm on Friday.

In a separate incident, a Malaysia-bound flight was delayed due to a technical glitch. Additionally, 10 domestic flights, five arriving in Chennai and five departing, were cancelled due to technical issues. Air India Express flights to and from Kolkata, Bhubaneshwar, Bengaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, and Siliguri were also canceled for administrative reasons. The cancellations caused significant disruptions at the airport.

Live cartridge in hand baggage, flyer stopped at RGIA

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Hyderabad: Security personnel at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) intercepted a passenger carrying live ammunition during the screening process.

Akram Sarfaraz of East Champaran in Bihar was travelling from Hyderabad to Patna on an Indigo Airlines flight on Nov 12 when he was found with a 7.65 calibre live cartridge in his hand baggage. According to a complaint filed by CISF sub-inspector Lalit Singh, who was in charge of the X-ray machine at the screening area, a suspicious image was detected in Akram's bag. The bag was referred for physical examination, during which the live ammunition was discovered.

In compliance with the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security rules, CISF personnel handed over Akram and the ammunition to RGIA police for further investigation.

> Akram Sarfaraz of East Champaran in Bihar was travelling from Hyderabad to Patna on on Nov 12 when he was found with a 7.65 calibre live cartridge in his hand baggage

BCAS regulations mandate that passengers carrying arms or ammunition without a valid licence must be referred to local law enforcement for legal action.

RGIA police registered a case under section 25(1B)(a) of the Arms Act. SI D Appa Rao, who is investigating the case, said: "Akram claimed that he was carrying the bag of his brother-in-law and was unaware of the ammunition inside. He has not been arrested but was served a notice. He produced the arms licence of his brother-in-law."

Appa Rao said: "We are examining his statement to verify the facts and will take action as per the law."

हैदराबाद से बैंकॉक की उड़ान में बम की धमकी

रंगारेड्डी (तेलंगाना)। हैदराबाद से बैंकॉक जा रही नोक एयर की उड़ान में बम की धमकी के बाद आपात स्थिति घोषित कर दी गई। विमान शनिवार सुबह उड़ान भरने वाला था। धमकी के बाद सभी यात्रियों को विमान से उतारा गया और पूरे विमान की तलाशी ली गई। यात्रियों के सामान को भी विमान से निकाला गया व सघन जांच की गई। पिछले दिनों धमकियों के बाद पुलिस कई आरोपियों को गिरफ्तार कर चुकी है। एजेंसी

Threat is in the Air

Hoax messages have delayed about 1,000 flights in the past two months and exposed the cracks in the system. Can India adopt global best practices, starting with a more efficient filtering of fakes from specific threats?

TIME	DESTINATION	FLIGHT	GATE	REMARKS
12:39	BERLIN	BA 903	31	CANCELLED
12:57	SYDNEY	QF5723	27	CANCELLED
13:08	TORONTO	AC5984	22	CANCELLED
13:21	TOKYO	JL 608	41	CANCELLED
13:37	HONG KONG	CX5471	29	CANCELLED
13:48	MADRID	IB3941	30	CANCELLED
14:19	LONDON	LH5021	28	CANCELLED
14:35	NEW YORK	AA 997	11	CANCELLED
14:54	PARIS	AF5870	23	CANCELLED
15:10	ROME	AZ5324	43	CANCELLED

Anirban Chowdhury & Rashmi Rajput

One morning in January this year, Jagdish Uikey, a 35-year-old construction worker, sat down at his home in Gondia, Maharashtra, and started sending emails—to airlines, security agencies, the chief minister's office and the prime minister's office. The messages, written in Marathi, were vicious. They warned about bombs planted in aircraft and flights that would be hijacked by terrorists. He didn't stop there. Between January and October, when he was arrested in Nagpur, he had sent 35 threatening emails. They all turned out to be fake.

It was not just Uikey, though. Between May and November so far, India received about 900 threatening messages, including 600 posted on X, according to the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), which is in charge of security at commercial airports. These threats were all directed at airlines. Sources in the industry say in the past two months alone, over 1,000 flights—domestic and foreign—were delayed due to threatening calls, texts and social media posts that turned out to be fake. The losses that the airlines ran up due to this during the period could amount to about ₹500 crore.

The disruption has been on an alarming scale as flights were moved to isolation bays where bomb squads were pressed into service, travellers and crew were deboarded and checked, and the aircraft combed from nose to tail, with security amped up at airports.

As threats delayed flights by six-seven hours, the on-time performance of airlines in the four major airports plummeted to 60% in August-September this year from 80% in the same period last year. It could be even more dismal in October when hoax messages surged, but the numbers have yet to be released by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

Yet, apart from Uikey, only one other person who sent fake threat messages this year has been caught: a 17-year-old from Chhattisgarh, whose whereabouts have been kept under wraps as he is a minor. According to police sources, they say hacked into the social media account of a man who had allegedly cheated him of money and posted scores of threat messages about flights, including an Air India flight from Mumbai to New York.

"We have almost had no success," admits a senior police official, who is investigating 20 cases of hoax threats to airlines.

Hoax bomb threats, which have also targeted trains, hotels and schools, have exposed the cracks in India's security system. While the offenders hide behind a maze of virtual private networks (VPNs) that stonewall security agencies, inadequate rules, a lack of coordination between investigative agencies and weak multilateral agreements that don't help in tracking down perpetrators in foreign locations have hampered investigations.

India needs to make a beginning with a better threat assessment protocol.

Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu said recently that the government is looking at changing regulations and amending laws to filter threatening calls and messages more efficiently and to make punishment more stringent, including longer sentences and putting the offenders on no-fly lists.

An official says the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) may rework its standard operating procedures to raise alerts after making a distinction between credible threats and hoaxes. Earlier this month, it upgraded its Bomb Threat Contingency Plan to analyse digital threats adeptly and to ensure advanced layers of protocol at airports.

Source of Hoax Bomb Threats
(May-Nov 2024*)

Total Threats **900**

✕	**600**	Posts on X
✉	**210**	Emails
✎	**30**	Writing (notes or stickers)
🗣	**25**	Verbal (words like *Bomb rakha hai* by passengers)
📞	**20**	Phone calls
📱	**15**	Text messages

Note: Numbers are approximate
*Till Date
Source: CISF

1,000
No. of flights delayed in the past two months

₹500 cr
Losses incurred by airlines due to delayed flights
Note: Figures are approximate
Source: Industry

FAKING IT

While the spate of threatening calls is unprecedented, there is nothing new about hoax calls. The reasons range from the ludicrous—to stop someone from boarding a particular flight—to the desperate—to draw attention to oneself. Uikey, for instance, has written a book called *Aatankwad: Ek Toofani Rakshas*, reportedly a compilation of conspiracy theories regarding terrorism, and believed himself to be an expert in the field. The fake calls, he reportedly confessed, were designed to get him and his "views on terrorism" some attention. "It was a stunt," says Ravindra Singal, police commissioner, Nagpur.

For the ludicrous, look no further than the first man who was put on the no-fly list after the Anti-Hijacking Act 2016 came into force. Rajesh Chandra, former director-general of BCAS, recalls the case that involved a Mumbai businessman, Birju Salla. He was on a Jet Airways flight from Mumbai to Delhi on October 30, 2017. "A paper, recovered from the toilet of the flight, said hijackers were on board and the flight had to be taken to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir," says Chandra. It was a midair scare and the flight made an emergency landing in Ahmedabad.

The prosecution said Salla was in love with a Jet Airways employee and that he assumed his note would force the airline to shut down its Delhi office and his girlfriend to return to Mumbai. While Jet Airways did wind up, years later, in 2019, for reasons that had nothing to do with these alleged imaginings, Salla's conviction was overturned by the Gujarat High Court in 2023 for lack of evidence.

Damages
■ A threat can delay flights by 6-7 hours

Loss Per Delayed Flight
■ Up to ₹45 lakh for low-cost airline
■ Over ₹50 lakh for full-service carrier

Plummeting OTP in Four Major Airports*
■ Aug-Sept 2024: **60%**
■ Aug-Sept 2023: **80%**

*On-Time Performance
Note: Oct-Nov '24 figures yet to be released
Source: Industry, DGCA

What Happens When A Threat is Posted on X

■ The message is intercepted by operational risk management teams at airports, airlines and security agencies
■ If the airline is on ground, ground staff springs into action
■ The Bomb Threat Assessment Committee is called
■ Aircraft is taken to an isolation bay, passengers and crew deboarded and a physical check is done
■ If the aircraft is mid-air, the pilot communicates with air traffic control and decides whether to invoke the Squawk 7700 protocol and make an emergency landing at the nearest airport
■ Sometimes an air force jet guards the airliner to land safely

Since that incident in 2017, the miscreants' modus operandi has considerably evolved while the procedures to tackle them have not so much. Neither the airlines nor the civil aviation security agencies have a policy to discern a prank call from a serious threat (or, in security parlance, specific and non-specific calls). "So a standard protocol is set in motion. The aircraft is brought to isolation bay and is subjected to checks. If more than one aircraft is threatened, all of them would queue up at the bay which has space for just one aircraft. This will lead to further chaos," says Chandra.

"I have got calls from pilot friends who are clueless when such hoax messages come," says Amit Singh, a veteran pilot who has held senior positions in IndiGo, Scoot and AirAsia and now runs the non-profit Safety Matters Foundation. "Neither the pilot's operations manual nor an airline's operations control centre has a single document that says what is a specific threat and a non-specific threat."

The emails ET sent to airlines have not got a response at the time of going to press.

VPN BLOCK

The biggest impediment to the investigation into hoax calls is VPN. Most hoax messages and posts are sent via VPNs that mask miscreants' internet protocol (IP) addresses and leave false trails to destinations outside India. The crack team trailing them is faced with IP addresses that are "bounced off" to various countries, especially in Europe, making the chase of locating the source next to impossible.

Says the police officer quoted earlier: "It's impossible for state police to access VPN data. Central agencies like CBI can extract the data but they work in silos and rarely assist us. We have made requests to social media platforms like X to share data, but they have been reluctant."

Many recent cases of hoax emails had one thing in common: Proton, the Switzerland-based VPN provider that does not keep any record of one's online activity. While there were reports earlier this year that the Indian government was considering banning ProtonMail, especially after a hoax bomb threat was emailed to schools in Chennai using the service, it is available in India. Proton's website says Swiss federal authorities "have been in contact with the relevant Indian authorities to prevent the blocking of Proton Mail in India".

Says Kanishk Gaur, cyber security expert and CEO of Athenian Tech, a digital risk management company: "Many criminals use encrypted communication channels or dark web resources to mask their identities, creating layers of obfuscation that are challenging to penetrate

How the Investigation unfolds
■ Concerned airline informs the local police; a case is registered
■ City police contacts the social media platform to help trace the handler
■ Cyber cell springs into action to locate IP address, VPN
■ If message is sent through an offshore server, Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty is invoked

without specialised technology and skills." He adds, "Our current law enforcement structure is not yet fully equipped with the real-time tracking tools and data analytics required to keep up with these fast-evolving tactics."

Now, new patterns have emerged where in VPNs are traced not just to Europe, but also Southeast Asia. There has been a spurt in organised cybercrimes emanating from Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos. "They are seen as the main players behind the recent 'digital arrest' fraud cases," says a government official.

Rajesh Kumar, CEO of Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), said in May that the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has set up an interministerial committee headed by a top security officer to give focussed attention to and check organised cybercrime gangs originating from Southeast Asian countries.

ADOPT BEST PRACTICES

India needs to adopt global best practices in cybersecurity and aviation safety. However, even something as essential as full-body scanners for major airports have been stuck for almost a year. An airport official says an order could be placed in the next four-five months, but he is not sure.

Says Gaur: "The US, EU, Australia and the UK have implemented advanced cybersecurity frameworks and regulations." These include US' Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act, which encourages sharing of info between companies and government, and the UK's Investigatory Powers Act that grants law enforcement significant powers to monitor and intercept digital communications.

The US was the first to wise up to the threats, after the 9/11 attacks. "Prior to 9/11, everyone worked in silos. But post that, interagency cooperation was mandated by law," says Jeffrey Price, an expert in global aviation security and professor, department of aviation and aerospace science, Metropolitan State University of Denver, US. "So the Federal Bureau of Administration, the Transport Security Administration, the Federal Aviation Administration, airlines and airports work very closely and regularly share data," he adds.

Price points out that American airlines and agencies have a positive threat identification protocol. "It's a standardised process to vet calls when they come in. A lot of the stuff gets filtered out. There's a specific set of questions and a lot of observations. It's an unnerving experience for a call taker: They have to be well-trained to take those calls," says Price.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation, the UN nodal agency for air navigation, came out with a rule last September that mandates airports to screen all its workers, says Price, adding, "A lot of threats come from within. This law has wide ramifications on security. It entails time, cost and training."

India also needs to sharpen its tech edge. Going forward, artificial intelligence (AI) will be a double-edged sword. "The evolution of AI and its usage will be a critical part of threats on one side and of security protocol to tackle them on the other," says John Cox, president and CEO of Safety Operating Systems, which provides aviation consulting and safety management systems, in Washington, DC.

For now, India's security personnel are keeping their fingers crossed. The number of threatening calls and messages have declined in the past two weeks.

"We pray they don't start again. Because we are as helpless as we were when they surged," says the senior police officer.

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AI Express to offer 230 weekly flights from Kolkata, Bagdogra

PTI
KOLKATA

Air India Express on Friday announced expansion of its services from West Bengal's Kolkata and Bagdogra, increasing the number of weekly flights to over 230 this winter, from 168 in the same season last year.

The growth includes new direct routes connecting Kolkata with Sri Vijaya Puram (Port Blair) and Indore, and Bagdogra with Chennai. "Our new winter schedule, featuring over 230 weekly flights from Kolkata and Bagdogra, underscores our dedication to fostering trade and tourism in the region," Dr Ankur Garg, Chief Commercial Officer of Air India Express, said in a statement.

"We are thrilled to introduce a new Kolkata-Port Blair flight next month, just in time for holiday season," he said.

Air traffic rises due to festive rush

Agencies

MUMBAI

Mumbai airport's total passenger traffic increased 4% year-on-year to over 4.42 million in October, thanks to festive travel demand, Mumbai International Airport Ltd (MIAL) said on Friday.

The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA), the country's second busiest airport, handled 4.25 million passengers in October 2023. Significantly, this year, three major festivals –

4.25 million
Oct 2023 count

4.42 million
Oct 2024

Dussehra, Dhanteras and Diwali – fell in October. "The CSMIA facilitated travel for over 4.42 million passengers (3.16 million domestic and over 1.25 million international) in October. This festive season saw a marked surge in both domestic and interna-

tional traffic as travellers flocked to celebrate the festival of lights," MIAL said.

October 26, which fell on Saturday before the commencement of the Diwali festivities, recorded the highest number of air traffic movements (ATM), including arrivals and departures, with 939 flights on a single day, marking it the busiest day in the month, MIAL said. The facility saw a remarkable rise in ATM in October, with 19,848 domestic and 7,222 international.

फ्लाइट में दूसरा बैग ले जाना अब महंगा

■ **एनबीटी न्यूजडेस्कः** यूरोप और यूके की एयर इंडिया फ्लाइट्स में अब दूसरा बैग ले जाना ज्यादा महंगा हो गया है। टाइम्स ऑफ इंडिया की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, 17 अक्टूबर से, एयर इंडिया ने नए फेयर फैमिली नियम लागू किए हैं, जिसके तहत सबसे सस्ती इकॉनमी टिकट पर केवल एक बैग (23 किलोग्राम तक) ले जाने की अनुमति होगी। अगर यात्री दूसरा बैग ले जाना चाहते हैं, तो उन्हें महंगे इकॉनमी किराये का विकल्प चुनना होगा, जिसकी कीमत एकतरफा यात्रा के लिए करीब 4,000 से शुरू होती है।

Air India announces 230 weekly flights from Kolkata

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Air India Express on Friday announced expansion of its services from West Bengal's Kolkata and Bagdogra, increasing the number of weekly flights to over 230 this winter, from 168 in the same season last year.

The growth includes new direct routes connecting Kolkata with Sri Vijaya Puram (Port Blair) and Indore, and Bagdogra with Chennai, the airline said.

"Our new winter schedule, featuring over 230 weekly flights from Kolkata and Bagdogra, underscores our dedication to fostering trade and tourism in the region," Dr Ankur Garg, Chief Commercial Officer of Air India Express, said in a statement.

"We are thrilled to introduce a new Kolkata-Port Blair flight next month, just in time for the holiday season, offering our guests more travel options," he said.

Additionally, two brand new aircraft, with liveries inspired by "Jamdani" and "Kantha" designs, invite guests to experience the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal, the statement said.

Jamdani is a renowned pattern from Bengal, known for its delicate handloom creations, typically featuring intricate floral, vine, leaf, and geometric motifs.

Kantha, also from Bengal, originated as a method of repurposing old saris and clothes into quilts and blankets.

"As we expand our services with a 37 per cent increase in flights from West Bengal, Air India Express reaffirms its commitment to connecting this vibrant state with the rest of India," Garg said.

According to the statement, Air India Express' winter schedule across its expanding network has grown by 30 per cent from last year, supported by the airline's growing fleet, which now includes over 90 aircraft.

This winter, the airline will operate more than 400 daily flights compared to over 325 daily flights during the same period last year.

The enhanced schedule includes new routes such as Chennai-Goa, Chennai-Jaipur, Chennai-Pune, Delhi-Indore, Hyderabad-Gwalior, Kochi-Pune, and Visakhapatnam-Vijayawada. Additionally, the airline will commence operations to two new destinations, Jammu and Sri Vijaya Puram (Port Blair), starting December 1, 2024.

The airline has also increased the frequency of flights on the Bengaluru-Hyderabad and Kochi-Hyderabad routes, along with international routes connecting Abu Dhabi, Ras al-Khaimah, and Muscat.

AI hikes rates for 2nd bag on flights to UK, Europe

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Europe and UK-bound Air India (AI) passengers will now have to pay more to check-in a second bag. As per AI's new rate structure, introduced on Oct 17, the lowest economy fare to the two places allows one check-in of 23kg. Those who wish to check-in two bags will have to opt for higher economy fare, the difference starting at about Rs 4,000 (one way).

Most big western airlines, like Lufthansa, allow a single check-in bag to economy flyers, & extra charges have to be paid for second bag. British Airways starts with a hand-bag-only economy fare and then has higher economy fare levels that allow two bags of up to 23kg each.

Earlier this year, AI did the same for domestic flights. Its base category of economy fare allows baggage allowance of up to 15kg, down from earlier 25kg but in line with all other Indian carriers. Before 2022, state-owned AI used to offer higher baggage allowance to woo passengers and make up for its dilapidated cabin product and poor punctuality. Now, with Tatas investing billions of dollars in improving AI, the baggage allowance is in sync with big global airlines.

"AI offers travellers a more affordable 'value' fare option that provides one checked baggage weighing 23kg with limited travel flexibility. Travellers who seek more baggage allowance & higher travel flexibility can opt for the 'classic' and 'flex' fares that continue to offer two pieces of checked baggage weighing 23kg each in economy. 'Value' fares are available only for economy class bookings," a recent AI statement announced. AI has 264 weekly flights to and from Europe and UK.

An AI official said, "The difference is not much. The idea was, why should a person travelling with one check-in pay same as someone doing so with two check-in bags."