



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

DELHI

26 FEBRUARY 2025

Navi Mumbai airport likely to open in May

Neha LM Tripathi

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NEW DELHI: The much-talked-about Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) may be inaugurated on May 15, three officials familiar with the development said on Tuesday.

This comes as the aviation regulator, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), conducted an assessment on Tuesday. The on-ground assessment also included Vipin Kumar, chairman of the Airports Authority of India (AAI), Prakash Nikam, regional director of the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), officials from Adani Airport Holdings (AAHL) and City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra

(CIDCO).

“The DGCA team conducted the assessment the whole day on Monday. The two department heads joined on Tuesday and carried out the assessment, which lasted for four hours,” one of the officials mentioned above said.

A DGCA official said, “We observed the preparedness of NMIA. We have been informed that they will apply for all permits by March 5, and we will process them.”

As per regulations, the airport operator will now apply for the aerodrome license. “NMIA will apply for the aerodrome license to begin operations from May 15,” an official said.

(With inputs from Yogesh Naik)

DGCA suspects tech error behind false hijack alarm

Neha LM Tripathi

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NEW DELHI: India's aviation regulator suspects a technical fault caused a false hijack alarm on an Air India flight last month, triggering an emergency response at two of the country's busiest airports, two officials have said.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) believes the incident was likely caused by a transponder malfunction on the Mumbai-bound flight from New Delhi, according to officials who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Indian Air Force, which first detected the alarm, has submitted its report indicating technical error, one of the officials said. "As of now it's appearing to be an error in codes," a ministry official confirmed.

The incident occurred at 8.40pm on January 27 when Air India flight AI 2957, carrying 126 passengers, transmitted a "squawk 7500" code shortly after take-off from New Delhi's Indira Gandhi Airport. The emergency signal remained active for three minutes.

In aviation, transponders use four-digit codes ranging from 0000 to 7777 to identify aircraft to air traffic control. The code 7500 specifically indicates a hijacking attempt, while 7600 signals radio failure and 7700 denotes a general emergency.

Despite the pilot's immediate notification that it was a false alarm, authorities were compelled to follow full emergency protocols. "How can air traffic control assume that the pilot is not being pressured? What if he is at gunpoint?" explained a former air traffic control official, speaking on background.

The procedures included the formation of a central committee in Delhi comprising police, the Central Industrial Security Force,



January 29: HT reported how a mid-air 'hijack' alert activated security protocol

the Airports Authority of India, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, and the Air Force. In Mumbai, where the flight landed at 9.47pm, authorities declared a full emergency around 9.30pm, deploying the National Security Guard, local police, and other stakeholders.

An Air India official familiar with the incident said at the time there was "no indication of any crew involvement," suggesting a technical malfunction. Air India did not respond to requests for a comment. "Overlapping of codes is a rare phenomenon," a former Airports Authority of India official said. "However, the reason for the code sent to air traffic control needs to be thoroughly investigated." The DGCA has requested a detailed report from the AAI about the incident. The aviation regulator declined to comment when contacted by HT.

Aviation experts said more scrutiny may be needed. "The incident can be possible either when someone accidentally entered the code wrong or if there is a technical issue with the transponder of the aircraft," said aviation expert Mohan Ranganathan.

"The pilots seem void of folly as the airline would have evaluated the FDR (flight data recorder — a device that records various flight details like speed, altitude, engine performance, pilot's actions). However, a technical glitch or a malfunction seems like a remote possibility," a former AAI official said.



Corporate Communications Directorate

BUSINESS STANDARD

DELHI

26 FEBRUARY 2025

GMR Airports raises ₹1,100 crore through non-convertible bonds

GMR Airports has raised ₹1,100 crore through the issuance of non-convertible bonds on a private placement basis. The management committee of the firm's board on Tuesday allotted ₹1,10,000 denominated listed, unsecured, rated, redeemable non-convertible bonds on the private placement basis on receipt of ₹1,100 crore, according to a regulatory filing. The bonds have a coupon rate of 5 per cent and a tenure of 36 months.

PTI



भारतीय विमानपत्तन प्राधिकरण
AIRPORTS AUTHORITY OF INDIA

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DAINIK JAGRAN

DELHI

26 FEBRUARY 2025

जयपुर हवाई अड्डे पर यात्रियों का हंगामा

जयपुर : जयपुर अंतरराष्ट्रीय हवाई अड्डे पर यात्रियों ने हंगामा किया। यह हंगामा एअर इंडिया एयरलाइंस के यात्रियों को पांच घंटे तक विमान में बिटाए रखने से नाराजगी बढ़ने पर हुआ। यात्रियों को पांच घंटे तक विमान में बिटाए रखने के बाद अंतिम समय में तकनीकी कारणों का हवाला देते हुए फ्लाइट को रद्द कर दिया गया। मंगलवार सुबह 9:25 बजे एअर इंडिया एयरलाइंस की फ्लाइट को मुंबई के लिए उड़ान भरनी थी। विमान को पांच घंटे तक खड़ा रखने के बाद दोपहर 2:30 बजे तकनीकी कारणों का हवाला देते हुए एयरलाइंस के कर्मचारियों ने फ्लाइट को रद्द करने की बात कही। इससे नाराज यात्रियों ने हंगामा किया। (जास)

TO FUND DIAL STAKE BUY

**GMR Airports
Raises ₹1,100 cr
Via NCDs from
Deutsche Bank**

Shilpy Sinha

Mumbai: GMR Airports has raised ₹1,100 crore from Deutsche Bank through a private placement of non-convertible bonds. The bonds, carrying a 10.75% yield, will mature on February 25, 2028.

The company will use the proceeds to fund its acquisition of Fraport's stake in Delhi International Airport (DIAL). GMR Airports said in September last year that it was buying the German airport operator's 10% stake in DIAL for \$126 million.

The transaction comes at a time when GMR Airports is transitioning from mainly a holding company to an operating entity, following the transfer of Delhi Duty Free operations to the company from August 2025.



Currently rated BBB+ with a stable outlook, the bonds have staggered coupon payments, with the first due on March 31, 2025.

"It is a strategic transaction for GMR Airports for consolidating their shareholding in the Delhi airport. For Deutsche Bank, this underscores our commitment to invest in the infrastructure growth story of India," said Apoorv Madhup, head of India financing at Deutsche Bank.

GMR has been actively restructuring its debt to cut borrowing costs. In June, DIAL refinanced \$450 million of high-cost foreign debt into domestic bonds. Its consolidated net debt, excluding foreign currency convertible notes, stands at ₹29,700 crore, driven by borrowings for the Bhogapuram Airport project, forex impacts on dollar bonds and the Delhi airport's capital expenditures.

The group recently raised ₹6,300 crore from Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth fund ADIA, which will help pare debt at its promoter entity, GMR Enterprises.

Air India mulls installing modified seats to offer better experience

Rohit Vaid

New Delhi

To offer a better in-flight passenger experience, the Tata Group-promoted Air India is mulling installing modified seats, replacing an earlier lot that had design flaws, sources said.

Accordingly, the airline has been working with seat manufacturer Geven on the new design.

As per sources, the seat that was flagged by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan as broken and sunken-in on the Air India flight from Bhopal to Delhi was brand new and sourced from Geven.

“The issue of cushioning has been noticed on some seats that were provided by Geven. Following our observation, they had given a ship set of modified seats,” sources said, adding that the exercise was ongoing even before Minister Chauhan’s complaint of a broken seat offered to him on an Air India flight last week.

“We have installed these modified seats on one aircraft and are assessing whether the issue has been addressed.”



Noting that the problem was only confined to a few seats, sources said that the earlier lot provided by Geven was only installed on two aircraft.

On Saturday, an exclusively-sourced video of the seat in question by *businessline* showed that the seat reclined and wasn’t broken; however, industry insiders, pointed out that the cushioning might have been a problem. *businessline* was not able to verify this claim.

CENTRE’S REPORT

Following Chauhan’s post on social media outlet X (formerly Twitter), the Centre sought a report from Air India on the issue.

“It was uncomfortable to sit. When I asked the airline

staff why the seat was allotted to me if it was bad, they told me that the management had been informed earlier that this seat was not good and its ticket should not be sold. It is not just one such seat but many more,” Chauhan wrote.

He further said that it is “unethical to make passengers sit in bad and uncomfortable seats after charging them the full amount. Isn’t this cheating the passengers?”

According to a senior Civil Aviation Ministry official, Air India has submitted its report on the issue, and the same is being studied by the regulator. As per a 2022 directive, DGCA has barred airlines from selling broken seats.

Air India’s spokesperson, in an official statement on Saturday, said, “Air India deeply regrets the inconvenience caused to Hon’ble Union Minister, Shri Shivraj Singh Chauhan ji, on his flight from Bhopal to Delhi. This does not reflect the standard of service we strive to provide to our guests, and we are conducting a thorough investigation into the matter to ensure that such incidents are not repeated.”



Corporate Communications Directorate

BUSINESS LINE

DELHI

26 FEBRUARY 2025

IndiGo to deploy widebody Boeing 787 on Delhi-Bangkok route

Aneesh Phadnis

Mumbai

IndiGo will deploy widebody Boeing 787 aircraft on the Delhi-Bangkok route from March 1, ahead of its planned expansion into Europe in summer.

The airline has wet-leased a Boeing 787 from Norwegian airline Norse Atlantic, which seats 338 passengers in the premium and economy class.

Apart from commercial factors like high demand, route selection seems to be guided by operational reasons too.

Norse Atlantic flies between Oslo and Bangkok. In winter, it will also operate flights from London's Gatwick airport and Stockholm to the Thai capital.

"The early induction of our wide body aircraft marks a significant milestone in our journey. Starting between Delhi and Bangkok, we intend to shift to Europe from mid-summer," IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said in a statement.

ON WET LEASE

Under a wet lease, the lessor provides pilots and crew along with the aircraft and is responsible for its upkeep.

The Norse Atlantic aircraft has 56 premium seats, which IndiGo will market as its business class, Stretch product, and 282 economy class seats.

Passengers in the premium cabin will enjoy specially-curated meals by Oberoi Catering Services, paired with beverages designed by Sula Vineyards.

Corporate Communications Directorate

DAINIK BHASKAR

DELHI

26 FEBRUARY 2025

दुनिया का बेस्ट केबिन चुना गया सिंगापुर एयरलाइंस का स्काईरूम सुइट; एयरलाइन में अब ऑनबोर्ड शेफ की सुविधा



लंदन | अब एयरलाइंस के बिजनेस क्लास केबिन लम्जरी सुइट में बदल रहे हैं। सिंगापुर एयरलाइंस के 'स्काईरूम सुइट' को इस साल दुनिया का बेस्ट केबिन चुना गया है। इसकी सबसे बड़ी खूबी फोल्डआउट फ्लैटबेड है, जो प्रीमियम बिस्तर, एक डुवेट और आलीशान तकिए के साथ आता है। अर्बोर्ड देने वाली संस्था एयरलाइनेरेंटिंग्स डॉक कॉम के मुताबिक, एतिहाद एयरलाइंस का फर्स्ट-क्लास सुइट दूसरे नंबर पर रहा। इसमें बंद होने वाले दरवाजे और मूड लाइटिंग जैसी सुविधाएं हैं। चुनिंदा मार्गों पर ऑनबोर्ड शेफ यात्री की पसंद के हिसाब से खाना भी तैयार करते हैं।

एक मार्च से प्रयागराज की दोनों उड़ान बंद होंगी, सुबह 7:10 बजे मुंबई जाने वाली फ्लाइट भी बंद

वाराणसी और प्रयागराज
फ्लाइट्स रहीं घंटों लेट

एविएशन रिपोर्टर | जयपुर

जयपुर एयरपोर्ट पर 1 मार्च से प्रयागराज की दोनों फ्लाइट बंद होंगी। एयरपोर्ट से मिली जानकारी के अनुसार जयपुर से प्रयागराज के लिए स्पाइसजेट एयरलाइंस की दो 2 फ्लाइट संचालित हो रही हैं। इसमें सुबह 7:30 बजे की फ्लाइट एसजी-2963 और शाम 5:05 बजे की फ्लाइट एसजी-2965 शामिल हैं। करीब सवा महीने पहले संचालित हुई इन दोनों फ्लाइट के लिए एयरलाइन ने यात्रियों से जमकर किराया वसूला है। महाकुंभ के दौरान यात्रियों से सामान्य से 5 गुना तक अधिक किराया लिया



है। स्पाइसजेट ने एक-एक टिकट 37 हजार रुपए तक में बेचा है।

इसी तरह जयपुर-मुंबई फ्लाइट एक महीने भी नहीं चल सकी। मामला एयर इंडिया की फ्लाइट एआई-501/502 का है। फ्लाइट मुंबई से सुबह 7:10 बजे जयपुर आती थी, जो वापसी में जयपुर से 7:55 बजे मुंबई जाती थी। ये फ्लाइट 1 फरवरी से शुरू की गई थी, लेकिन अब एयरलाइन ने मुंबई की इस फ्लाइट को पूरी तरह से बंद कर दिया है। वैसे 21 फरवरी से ही फ्लाइट

लगातार रद्द चल रही थी। इसके बाद अब मुंबई के लिए रोजाना 9 फ्लाइट ही उपलब्ध होंगी, जबकि अभी तक अभी तक इंडिगो की 4, एयर इंडिया की 4 और एयर इंडिया एक्सप्रेस की 2 फ्लाइट संचालित हो रही थीं।

उधर, सोमवार को स्पाइसजेट की वाराणसी की फ्लाइट एसजी-2958 जयपुर से सुबह 11:45 बजे रवाना होनी थी, लेकिन संचालन कारणों की वजह से फ्लाइट दोपहर 2:25 बजे तक रवाना हुई। प्रयागराज जाने वाले फ्लाइट के ज्यादा लेट होने से यात्री परेशान हुए। मामला स्पाइसजेट की फ्लाइट संख्या एसजी-2963 का है। ये जयपुर से सुबह 7:30 बजे प्रयागराज जाती है, जो विमान नहीं होने के चलते 10:40 बजे रवाना हो सकी।



भारतीय विमानपत्तन प्राधिकरण
AIRPORTS AUTHORITY OF INDIA

Corporate Communications Directorate

DAINIK NAVJYOTI

JAIPUR

25 FEBRUARY 2025

जयपुर से प्रयागराज और मुंबई की फ्लाइट्स बंद



नवज्योति, जयपुर। जयपुर से प्रयागराज की दोनों फ्लाइट्स एक मार्च से बंद हो जाएंगी। स्पाइस जेट एयरलाइन ने महाकुंभ यात्रियों की सुविधा के लिए फ्लाइट का संचालन शुरू किया था। एयरलाइन ने जयपुर से प्रयागराज के लिए प्रति यात्री 37 हजार रुपए तक का किराया वसूला था। इसी प्रकार एयर इंडिया एयरलाइन ने मुंबई के लिए एक फरवरी से शुरू हुई फ्लाइट को भी बंद कर दिया है। 21 फरवरी से लगातार रद्द रहने के बाद इसे अब पूरी तरह बंद कर दिया गया। अब मुंबई के लिए अब केवल 9 फ्लाइट ही उपलब्ध रहेंगी।

Aviation compliance: Global watchdog rates India below Pakistan

SWARAJ BAGGONKAR
Mumbai, February 25

AVIATION WORKING GROUP (AWG), which monitors leasing and financial laws for aircraft manufacturers and lessors, has welcomed India's new Bill to safeguard lessors but kept the country on watchlist, keeping its overall score even below that of Pakistan's.

The Union Cabinet approved the 'Protection and Enforcement of Interests in Aircraft Objects Bill, 2024' (Cape Town Convention Bill) in January to make it easier for lessors to repossess their aircraft and engines in case their Indian clients flout norms or go belly up.

While the overall CTC compliance outlook of India has been kept 'positive' by AWG, the country stays in the medium category (higher compliance is favoured) with a lower index score of 61. This score is lower than 63.5 awarded in May 2023 when India was downgraded to a 'negative' outlook. At 71, Pakistan scores higher in the AWG analysis. Pakistan's aviation passenger market at 7.6 million, as of the end of 2023, is minuscule compared to 327 million clocked by India in the same year.

"The introduction of the CTC Bill is a material development affecting CTC compliance in India and, if enacted, would be a positive development," AWG

FLYING LOW



■ Aviation Working Group monitors leasing and financial laws for aircraft manufacturers and lessors

■ AWG has praised the new Bill to protect lessors, but kept India on watchlist

■ Outlook of India has been kept 'positive' with a score of 61 vs 71 to Pakistan

■ AWG cited outcomes in SpiceJet, Jet and Go First cases for the analysis; says Bill may raise India's score

said. AWG cited outcomes in cases of SpiceJet, Supertech, Jet Airways insolvency and Go First insolvency for the analysis. The watchdog has said that enacting legislation giving CTC primacy over conflicting national law would increase India's score.

AWG, co-chaired by Airbus and Boeing, is a not-for-profit legal entity comprising aircraft lessors, including AerCap, the world's biggest, and financial institutions like Deutsche Bank and Standard Chartered.



| Airfare Turbulence

Kashmir airfares hit record highs, wallets crash

Mukeet Akmal
Srinagar, Feb 23

Kashmir's air connectivity crisis has deepened as airfares to the Valley have skyrocketed to unprecedented levels, surpassing international travel costs and drawing sharp criticism from parliamentary committees, business leaders, and affected travellers.

A comprehensive analysis of current airfares reveals astronomical prices across major routes.

For Delhi-Srinagar flights, travellers pay Rs 12,000 to Rs 14,000, while those from Bangalore must pay approximately Rs 17,000.

Mumbai residents are confronted with even steeper fares of Rs 27,000, and Kolkata passengers face rates around Rs 18,000 for February 24 departures.

The human cost of these exorbitant fares was poignantly illustrated by Srinagar resident Javid Ahmad, who recently



Airfares on Feb 24

Delhi to Srinagar
Rs 12,000 to Rs 14,000

Bangalore-Srinagar
Rs 17,000

Mumbai-Srinagar
Rs 27,000

Kolkata-Srinagar
Rs 18,000

endured a significant financial burden during a medical emergency.

"I paid Rs 16,500 per passenger airfare from Delhi to Srinagar. We were four family members, and my total cost of air tickets was Rs 66,000 because we travelled

to Delhi for my father's critical surgery and had our children with us as there was nobody here to look after them," Ahmad said, highlighting the devastating impact on families facing medical necessities.

The issue has captured the attention of national policymakers.

In a strongly worded report last year, the Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism, and Culture emphasised the detrimental effect on tourism stressing, "Exorbitant price of air tickets is a major dampener. Escalating airfares of 'low cost' carriers during the peak season is a major deterrent to increasing footfall in the region. The airfares are equivalent to that of nearby foreign destinations and given the sensitivity of the region, tourists would prefer to visit nearby foreign destinations at the same airfare rather than visit J&K."

» See **Kashmir**..on Pg-08

Kashmir airfares hit...

The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) has been particularly vocal about the economic implications.

"This issue not only poses a significant concern for Kashmir's economy and tourism but also places an undue burden on the local populace, who are forced to pay exorbitant air travel prices compared to other regions," KCCI President Javid Tenga said.

The trade body further emphasised the paradox in tourism promotion efforts saying, "Despite government efforts to promote Kashmir as a premier tourist destination, the current airfares make the region a costlier option for potential travellers."

The KCCI challenges the traditional supply-demand explanation offered by carriers saying, "If the demand for travel to Kashmir is genuinely high, airlines should increase the number of available flights rather than hiking prices."

This statement directly confronts the industry's typical justification for fare increases.

The situation has historical precedent concerning practices.

In 2021, the Crime Branch Kashmir launched an investigation into alleged price manipulation, conducting searches across Srinagar city.

The probe was initiated following complaints from Travel Associations and Trade bodies through the Director Tourism, Kashmir, regarding questionable ticketing practices.

Specifically, allegations emerged about "dry selling and offline selling of bulk tickets by airline staff to the ticketing agents in advance in violation of the standing norms and procedure."

Current market conditions are reportedly exacerbated by multiple factors, including increased tourist flow during New Year celebrations.

However, regulatory solutions remain elusive.

While the Ministry of Tourism has engaged with the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), the government's current hands-off approach to airfare regulation has left the issue unresolved.

JKHARA demands action on rising airfares to Kashmir

GK News service
Srinagar, Feb 24

A delegation from the Jammu and Kashmir Hotels and Restaurants Association (JKHARA), headed by President Babar Chowdhary, engaged in an important meeting with Javed Anjum, the Director of Srinagar Airport. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss various pressing issues affecting the aviation sector, which are vital to both the local community and the tourism industry.

JKHARA delegation comprised office bearers and core committee members. President JKHARA Babar Chowdhary opened the discussion by raising the critical issue of exorbitant airfares from major cities to Srinagar, which he noted were not only deterring potential tourists but also imposing a considerable burden on local residents. Many locals rely on air travel for education, medical treatment, and personal reasons, and the high costs associated with airfares make it challenging for them to access these essential services. Chowdhary advocated for the establishment of an upper ceiling on airfares, drawing a parallel to similar measures in place for flights to Leh during the winter months, which aim to make travel more affordable and accessible.

The JKHARA delegation also addressed the topic of parking fees at Srinagar Airport. Chowdhary articulated the concerns of locals, stating, "What we are experiencing is akin to a toll. Once a vehicle enters the airport premises, it is subjected to parking fees regardless of whether it is simply picking up or dropping off passengers." This practice has added an additional financial strain on those needing to access the airport for brief



→ **High Airfares:** Babar Chowdhary raised concerns about soaring airfares to Kashmir, affecting tourism and local residents.

→ **Fare Regulation Needed:** Chowdhary advocated for an upper ceiling on airfares, similar to measures for flights to Leh.

→ **Parking Fee Issues:** The delegation discussed high parking fees at Srinagar Airport, calling for a designated free area for pick-ups and drop-offs.

→ **Airport Improvements:** Director Javed Anjum assured ongoing upgrades to airport facilities and discussions with airlines to resolve these issues.

visits. In response to these concerns, Director Anjum promised that plans are in place to create a designated area specifically for passengers being picked up or dropped off, free from parking charges, which would alleviate some of the strain caused by the current parking policy.

Furthermore, the Director provided updates regarding ongoing efforts to enhance the airport facilities, assuring the JKHARA delegation that work on the airport's upgradation is progressing rapidly. He emphasized that improving infrastructure is a priority and that discussions with various stakeholders, including airlines, are ongoing to address the issues raised in the meeting.

The JKHARA expressed its commitment to collaborating with the airport authorities and offered its full support in facilitating further improvements to the aviation sector. The President urged Director Anjum to advocate for more reasonable airfares at appropriate forums, recognizing the need for a balanced approach that serves both the local populace and the tourism sector.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both parties agreeing on the necessity for ongoing dialogue to address these concerns effectively and foster a better travel experience for everyone in Jammu and Kashmir.



भारतीय विमानपत्तन प्राधिकरण
AIRPORTS AUTHORITY OF INDIA

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HINDUSTAN

DELHI

26 FEBRUARY 2025

अब शाम में भी देवघर से दिल्ली की उड़ान

देवघर, कासं। अगले महीने के अंत से देवघर एयरपोर्ट से देर शाम में भी हवाई सेवा की शुरुआत होने जा रही है। इस कड़ी में देवघर से दिल्ली और दिल्ली से देवघर के लिए एक और फ्लाइट सेवा शुरू हो रही है। 220 सीटर इंडिगो की फ्लाइट रात के अंधेरे में उड़ान भरेगी। नई उड़ान की शुरुआत मार्च माह के अंत में 30 तारीख से होने जा रही है। इस बात की जानकारी भाजपा सांसद डॉ. निशिकांत दुबे ने दी है।

दुबे ने बताया कि 30 मार्च से देवघर से दिल्ली के लिए शाम में भी हवाई जहाज की सुविधा मिलेगी। दिल्ली से विमान शाम 5:30 बजे उड़ान भरकर 7 बजे शाम देवघर पहुंचेगा। वहीं विमान देवघर से शाम 7:40 बजे उड़ान भरकर रात 9:30 बजे दिल्ली पहुंचेगा।

INDIGO PLANS TO FLY WIDEBODY AIRCRAFT BETWEEN DELHI, BANGKOK FROM MARCH 1

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NEW DELHI: IndiGo airlines on Tuesday announced plans to fly its first leased widebody Dreamliner aircraft between Delhi and Bangkok from March 1. "In view of the growing demand for air travel, the induction of a temporarily leased Boeing B787-9 widebody aircraft from Norse Atlantic comes ahead of IndiGo's delivery of XLRs in FY2026 and A350s in 2027," the airline spokesperson said.

The airline will operate daily nonstop flights between the two destinations. The flight 6E 1053 from Delhi to Bangkok will take off at 10am IST to land in Bangkok at 15.45 (local time) and the return flight 6E 1054 will depart at 17.45 (local time) to land in Delhi at 20.55 IST.

The airline said flights on the route will also offer business class seats.

Announcing the development, chief executive officer Pieter Elbers said, "As India's aviation sector undergoes rapid transformation to keep pace with unprecedented growth in demand for travel, IndiGo is well positioned to lead this expansion. The early induction of our widebody aircraft marks a significant milestone in our journey."

He said the airline also aims to commence flights to Europe.

Elbers said, "We intend to shift to Europe in mid-Summer. We are thrilled to introduce the comfort of IndiGoStretch on our regional international route after the positive and encouraging feedback domestically. Our roots and fundamentals are Indian but increasingly, the world is where we operate."

Earlier this year, IndiGo entered into a damp lease agreement with Norse Atlantic Airways for a Boeing 787-9 aircraft.

Starting Tuesday, these flights will be available for bookings on IndiGo's direct channels as well as aggregator websites, the airline spokesperson added.

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AFTER INDUCTING IT ON DELHI-BANGKOK ROUTE

IndiGo to fly leased Boeing 787 aircraft to Europe in mid-summer

SUKALP SHARMA

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

INDIA'S LARGEST airline IndiGo has announced Thailand's capital Bangkok as its first international route to be operated by the wide-body Boeing 787-9 aircraft that the carrier recently inducted on damp lease from Norse Atlantic Airways. While the aircraft is being first deployed on this highly popular route to operate a daily return service from March 1, IndiGo intends to use it on a European route from "mid-summer". The airline currently has no direct flight to any destination in the European Union, but has had the continent on its mind for some time now.

"As India's aviation sector undergoes rapid transformation to keep pace with unprecedented growth in demand for travel, IndiGo is well-positioned to lead this expansion. The early induction of our wide body aircraft



The airline currently has no direct flight to any destination in the European Union. *Express file*

marks a significant milestone in our journey. Starting between Delhi and Bangkok, we intend to shift to Europe from mid-Summer," the airline's chief executive officer Pieter Elbers said, but did not divulge the airline's first European destination.

IndiGo's business class product — IndiGoStretch — which is currently available only on select domestic flights will also be avail-

able on the damp-leased Boeing 787-9 as the plane already has a premium class cabin in addition to economy class seating.

Notably, while the Boeing 787-9 can operate long-haul intercontinental flights, IndiGo has chosen Bangkok — a destination that can easily be served using narrow-body planes — for the initial run of the damp-leased jet. According to industry watchers, as a high-demand, busy, and familiar route, Delhi-Bangkok may be a good choice as an initial wide-body route for the airline as it plans, builds, and stabilises its medium- and long-haul network to Europe and other geographies using wide-body aircraft in the coming months and years.

After dominating the Indian skies with a market share of over 60 per cent, IndiGo has been making concerted efforts as part of its strategy of "internationalisation", which entails a rapid expansion of its international network given the robust overseas

travel demand from India. Over the past two to three years, IndiGo has expanded its international network by adding destinations in regions including Central Asia and the Caucasus, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Europe, where Air India is the only Indian carrier that operates, was expected to be the next frontier for IndiGo.

As part of its internationalisation strategy, IndiGo also plans to induct extra-long-range narrow-body Airbus A321 XLR aircraft and even wide-body Airbus A350 planes to operate medium- and long-range international flights. While IndiGo will start receiving the A321 XLRs from 2025-26 and the A350s from 2027, the airline evidently does not want to wait for them to fuel its international expansion. Therefore, it took a Boeing 787-9 on a damp lease from Norse Atlantic, and is in the market for more wide-body aircraft under such arrangements.

FULL REPORT ON

www.indianexpress.com

Electric air taxi maker ePlane plans largest fundraise ever

Chennai-based startup, preparing to manufacture three prototypes by 2026, eyes \$30-50 mn

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NEW DELHI

Chennai-based electric air taxi startup The ePlane Co is looking to raise another \$30-50 million as it prepares to manufacture three prototypes by 2026 and set the stage for its first launch.

The startup has been conservative in tapping investors so far, securing \$20 million since it was founded in 2019. That includes the \$14 million it raised in November from venture capital firm Speciale Invest and others.

ePlane's proposed series C funding round will likely be followed by another one next year, founder and chief executive Satyanarayan Chakravarthy said, without disclosing a potential valuation. "We are open to receiving up to \$100



The startup was the first to propose a domestically built air taxi.

million in our next funding round if investors align with our vision and targets," Chakravarthy told *Mint*.

"This is a capital-intensive field since it involves the manufacturing of the air taxis themselves, and the next two funding rounds will be key as we commence commercial, revenue-generating operations by end-2026 or early 2027."

The startup, incubated at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, was the first to propose a domestically built air taxi. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued three sets of rules on aircraft standards, landing ports and pilot training for air taxis—with maintenance and air traffic regulations still pending.

Last month, DGCA also identified five sites for 'sandboxes', or on-ground areas for controlled testing, of air taxis in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. Trial flights of air taxis, in which The ePlane Co aims to participate, will begin by the end of this

year, Chakravarthy said, followed by more elaborate trials next year.

'Satya', as Chakravarthy is popularly called by his peers, has a PhD in aerospace engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology in the US. Following a postdoctoral stint there, he joined IIT-Madras as a professor in 1997.

supply 788 air ambulances in a deal valued tentatively at \$1 billion. On Tuesday, the startup announced an expansion into three global markets—the UAE, Indonesia and Thailand.

Chakravarthy said the company was also speaking with the civil aviation authorities of Malaysia and Singapore

our business. But our first launch will be from India itself," Chakravarthy said.

Air taxis have been floated as an idea for some time now. Eight years ago, Dutch company Pal-V International BV showcased the world's first commercial 'flying car' that was ready for production. The same year, Uber Inc. and the US' National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) signed a 'Space Act' to develop an unmanned aerial traffic management system for air taxis.

Multilateral think tank World Economic Forum's 'Aviate' programme published a report on 13 November stating that in 2023 Bengaluru alone lost \$2.3 billion in economic value due to metropolitan congestion—something autonomous air mobility could mitigate.

India's DGCA has moved to enable a legal framework for air taxis, including certifying approved air taxi operators.

"The DGCA is exploring a certifica-

tion basis with us at the moment. Once we establish this certification basis, we'll take the same information to other aviation bodies across the world to show them our standards, and there is a significant amount of government-to-government understanding in this field," Chakravarthy said. "Given these complications, by the end of 2027, we can expect operations to commence commercially in other parts of the world too."

While the domestic air taxi market doesn't have many players yet, Bengaluru-based Sarla Aviation is a key competitor for The ePlane Co. In November, Sarla raised \$10 million in series-A funding from venture capital firm Accel. Earlier, in April last year, UK-based Archer Aviation signed a deal with airline IndiGo's promoter, Interglobe Aviation, to supply 300 air taxis for city-to-airport commute.

For an extended version, visit live-mint.com

TAKEOFF PLANS

THE startup has been conservative in tapping investors so far, securing \$20 mn since its founding

EPLANE raised \$14 million in November from venture capital firm Speciale Invest and others

THE firm's proposed series C funding round will likely be followed by another fundraise next year

ON Tuesday, the startup announced its expansion into the UAE, Indonesia and Thailand

Towards the end of 2020, Chakravarthy moved away from teaching to focus on the startup—but resumed teaching at a limited scale in August last year.

The ePlane Co is now looking to scale up. Last week, the startup signed a non-binding agreement with the International Critical-care Air Transfer Team to

for regulatory clarity.

"The Directorate General of Civil Aviation in Indonesia is looking at us acquiring a certification of operation from India's DGCA and replicate similar rules to operate there. We're now in conversation with Malaysia for the same, which will increase the scope of

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MINT

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Musk begins testing his Starlink terminals in US airspace system

Bloomberg

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Elon Musk's SpaceX is seeking to deploy Starlink satellite internet terminals to help accelerate an upgrade of the information technology networks that support the US Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) national airspace system, according to people familiar with the matter.

The effort raises questions about conflicts of interest for Musk's business empire and the future of a \$2 billion contract awarded in 2023 to Verizon Communications Inc. to upgrade the critical infrastructure, according to the people, who weren't autho-

rized to speak publicly.

Musk approved a shipment of 4,000 Starlink terminals to the FAA last week for the initiative, said one of the people. One terminal has already been installed at the FAA's air traffic control technology lab in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for testing, the person said.

The person familiar with the matter said the programme will be called TDMX. The goal is to have the entire programme fully functional within 12 to 18 months.

An FAA spokesperson confirmed Bloomberg's report, saying the agency is testing one terminal in Atlantic City and two terminals at non-safety critical sites in Alaska. The FAA has been considering the

use of Starlink to fix telecommunication connections and provide more reliable weather information at remote sites, including in Alaska, the spokesperson said by email.

Verizon's contract supports the FAA in maintaining and upgrading its critical infrastructure, company spokesman Rich Young said by email. "Protecting Americans who rely on a safe and functioning air traffic control system is more important than ever," Young added. "Our enhancements will help make that happen."

A SpaceX representative didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

"The Verizon system is not



Improving the FAA's ageing airspace network has drawn fresh attention after a deadly midair collision in January. BLOOMBERG

working and so is putting air travelers at serious risk," Musk posted on his X social media platform.

The people said it was

unclear how the use of Starlink terminals might impact the existing Verizon contract.

The push would extend Musk's reach into the FAA,

the aviation safety watchdog that regulates SpaceX rocket launches. Musk is overseeing a broad effort to reshape the US government under President Donald Trump, and has significant contracts with federal agencies. The FAA's air traffic control system manages 45,000 flights carrying almost 3 million people in the US each day.

Improving the FAA's ageing airspace network has drawn fresh attention after a deadly midair collision in January between a regional jet and a

military helicopter near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. After the crash, Trump called current air traffic control technology "obsolete."

Transportation secretary Sean Duffy said earlier this month that Musk's Department of Government Efficiency would work with aviation authorities to "rethink" the nation's air-space.

An FAA effort to modernize its air-traffic controller network has dragged on for years. The US Government

SYSTEMS UPGRADE

MUSK approved a shipment of 4,000 Starlink terminals to the FAA last week for the initiative

ONE terminal has already been installed at the FAA's air traffic control technology lab in Atlantic City

Accountability Office warned in December that the agency needed to take urgent action to update its systems, noting that a 2023 risk assessment found 76% were either unsustainable or potentially unsustainable.

The FAA's Starlink tests mark the latest inroads SpaceX is making with governments and businesses globally—an expansion that has been further accelerated by Musk's greater political influence and reach.

Bloomberg reported in December that SpaceX received a Pentagon contract to expand Ukraine's access to a more secure, militarized version of its Starlink satellite network.

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THE MORNING STANDARD

DELHI

26 FEBRUARY 2025

A fresh search for doomed Malaysia airlines flight

KUALA LUMPUR

A fresh search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 has been launched more than a decade after the plane went missing in one of aviation's greatest enduring mysteries.

Maritime exploration firm Ocean Infinity has resumed the hunt for the missing plane, Malaysian Transport Minister Anthony Loke said on Tuesday.

Loke said contract details between Malaysia and the firm were still being finalised but welcomed "the proactiveness of Ocean Infinity to deploy their ships" to begin the search for the plane, which went missing in March 2014.

Loke said details about how long the search would last had not been negotiated yet. He also did not provide details about when exactly the British firm restarted its hunt.

The Malaysian government said in December last year it had agreed to launch a new



In this file photo, a woman pushes her baby cart in front of a message board for passengers aboard the missing Malaysia Airlines plane in Kuala Lumpur | AP

search for MH370. The Boeing 777 carrying 239 people disappeared from radar screens on March 8, 2014, while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

Two-thirds of the passengers were Chinese, while the others

included Malaysians, Indonesians and Australians, as well as Indian, American, Dutch and French nationals.

The plane has never been found despite the largest search in aviation history. "We're very relieved and pleased that the

search is resuming once again after such a long hiatus," Malaysian Grace Nathan, 36, who lost her mother on the doomed jet, told AFP.

Jaquita Gonzales, 62, wife of MH370 flight supervisor Patrick Gomes, said she hoped the resumption of the search would bring her family much-needed closure. "We just want to know where it is and what happened," she said. "Memories come back like yesterday, it's fresh in our heads."

Loke said in December the new search would be on the same "no find, no fee" principle as Ocean Infinity's previous search, with the government only paying out if the firm finds the aircraft. The contract was for 18 months and Malaysia would pay \$70 million to the company if the plane was found, Loke had previously said. Ocean Infinity, based in UK and the US, last carried out an unsuccessful search in 2018.

AP



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THE TIMES OF INDIA

CHENNAI

25 FEBRUARY 2025

DGCA issues summons to AI over Chouhan's complaint of broken seat

New Delhi: Civil aviation regulator DGCA has called a meeting with Air India (AI) on next Monday following a complaint by Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan about an uncomfortable seat on his flight from Bhopal to Delhi.

Chouhan had raised concerns after being allotted what he described as a "broken and sunken" seat on Air India flight AI 436 last Saturday. His experience reignited concerns about Air India's service standards, while the airline attempts to improve its operations under Tata Group's ownership.

Following the regulator's directive, Air India submitted a report on Monday. It said the seat was not broken and was functioning properly. However, the airline acknowledged that the seat, like others on Airbus A321, was designed to be lightweight with lean cushioning to reduce aircraft weight and fuel consumption.

DGCA is expected to remind the airline about ensuring passenger comfort. In the past, the regulator has instructed airlines not to sell unserviceable seats. TNN