



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE

GUWAHATI

26 JANUARY 2025

Dense fog at Kolkata airport delays 53 flights

KOLKATA, Jan 25: Dense fog disrupted operations at the Kolkata airport on Saturday, delaying at least 53 flights, an official said.

It was the third consecutive day of flight operations being disrupted at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International (NSCBI) Airport due to fog.

Flight movement was affected from 6:26 am to 12:10 pm at the airport, an Airports Authority of India (AAI) official said.

A total of 23 flights scheduled to arrive in Kolkata were delayed due to poor visibility at the airport. Similarly, the departure of at least 30 flights was delayed, he said.

"There were, however, no diversions of flights," the official said.

The Air Traffic Control (ATC) implements low visibility procedures (LVP) when visibility drops below 800 metres, guiding aircraft to their stands using 'Follow-Me' vehicles. LVP is also triggered when the cloud ceiling is below 200 feet.

On Friday, dense fog disrupted the movement of 34 flights, while the movement of 72 flights was disrupted on Thursday. — PTI



Corporate Communications Directorate

MILLENNIUM POST

KOLKATA

26 JANUARY 2025

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It was the third consecutive day of flight operations being disrupted at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International (NSCBI) Airport due to fog.

The Regional Meteorological Centre in Alipore has predicted that weather will improve from Sunday as a breeze is expected to drive away the fog patch over Kolkata. Flight movement was affected from 6.26 am to 12.10 pm at the airport, an Airports Authority of India (AAI) official



said. A total of 23 flights scheduled to arrive in Kolkata were delayed due to poor visibility at the airport. Similarly, the departure of at least 30 flights was delayed, he said.

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MPOST



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE STATESMAN

KOLKATA

26 JANUARY 2025

Flight disruptions as airport fortifies ahead of Republic Day

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 25 JANUARY

Flight operations at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International (NSCBI) Airport, Kolkata, experienced significant disruptions today owing to the implementation of safeguards ahead of Republic Day. On the third consecutive day, Saturday, passengers faced flight delays.

It is worth noting that several central agencies had issued warnings about potential subversive activities following a recent incident in Bangladesh and the arrest

of members of Bangladeshi terrorist outfits in West Bengal.

The operational impact was observed between 6.26 a.m. and 12.10 p.m, causing delays and affecting passenger schedules. Regarding key operational impacts, Airport Authorities of India (AAI) spokesman said that a total of 23 arriving flights faced delays during this period. Passengers were inconvenienced as they had to wait longer for their flights to land due to operational constraints. A total of 30 departing flights were delayed. Passengers

scheduled to leave during this window experienced extended waiting times at the terminal. There were no ramp returns reported, indicating that no aircraft had to return to the terminal after commencing taxiing. Airport sources said that there were no diversions reported, suggesting that flights en route to Kolkata were not rerouted to alternative airports during the disruption. The safeguarding procedures, while essential for operational safety and security, created a ripple effect on the flight schedule.

Air India Express will operate from all three Delhi-NCR airports this summer

Saurabh.Sinha@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Tata Group's low cost Air India Express will operate from all the three Delhi NCR airports this summer. While it had last week announced direct services between Hindon (Ghaziabad) and Bengaluru, Goa & Kolkata from March 1, sources say the LCC will have flights from Greater Noida Airport when it opens about two months later. Commercial services at Noida International Airport are likely to start by or from April 30.

"We want to be present at the upcoming Noida International airport from Day One. The airline as of now has about 100 aircraft and will get the remaining 15 white tail (made for some other airlines) Boeing 737 MAX and some of those made for us this year. IGIA, Hindon and Greater Noida are all different catchment areas. So AI Express will be all the three NCR airports," said people in the know. So far AI Express is the only big airline that has announced flights from Hindon. A decision for Navi Mumbai Air-



File Photo

Noida International Airport

port, that is also expected to open around the same time, will soon be taken at the group level (collectively for AI and the LCC), they add. However with Mumbai's CSMIA already operating at peak capacity, adding flights will mean going there for airlines.

So far, IndiGo is the only big desi carrier that has announced plans to be at both the upcoming airports in NCR and Mumbai MMR. The airline had operated validation flights at both these places.

Asked about the opening date, a NIA spokesperson said: "(We are) stea-

dily advancing toward operational readiness. The successful validation flight marked a key milestone, and we are now working closely with the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) and Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on the necessary licensing processes. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) is advancing its work in the air traffic control tower, and construction of the passenger terminal and associated infrastructure is progressing steadily."

The Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) is examining the capex submitted by NIA for approval and then will determine tariffs for the airport. Airline ticket sales are expected to start from Feb-March. If the tariff order - which stipulates, among other things, landing, parking charges for airlines and user fees for flyers - takes time, the regulator issues an ad hoc order that allows airlines to accordingly determine airfares and charge the UDF that goes to the airport operator. This arrangement continues till the final order is issued.

MAHA KUMBH SEES MEGA RUSH

Prayagraj to & fro airfares on key snan dates hit ₹50k

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Airfares to Prayagraj have skyrocketed ahead of the Jan 29 Mauni Amavasya snan. Travel portals show Chennai-Prayagraj return tickets for Jan 28 and back two days later are costing above Rs 53,000. A return trip from Kolkata on these dates is costing over Rs 35,500; from Hyderabad/Mumbai/Delhi it's over Rs 47,500 and from Bengaluru it's Rs 51,000 plus.

There's a similar rise around the three remaining important snan dates — Feb 3 (Basant Panchmi), Feb 12 (Maghi Purnima), and Feb 26 (Maha Shivratri and the concluding day of Maha Kumbh). Return fares to Prayagraj for Feb 14 and return two days later is costing upwards of Rs 33,000 from Delhi; Rs 40,000 from Hyderabad/Chennai/Kolkata and over Rs 45,000 from Mumbai/Bengaluru.

Anil Kalsi, vice president, Travel Agents Federation of India, said: "We are seeing tremendous enthusiasm from not just India but among the diaspora and foreigners too for the Maha Kumbh. Airfares have gone up as demand is far greater than supply. Accommodation is also hard to get."

"Prayagraj airport has achieved new milestones during Maha Kumbh 2025. With 17 additional flights on an average, a maximum of 46 daily flight movements, expanded



A foreign devotee in Prayagraj on Sunday. With 17 extra flights on an average, a maximum of 46 daily flight movements, expanded connectivity to 15 destinations, and 24x7 operations, Prayagraj airport has achieved new milestones

connectivity to 15 destinations, and 24x7 operations, the airport ensures seamless travel. The terminal area has been upgraded to handle 1,650 passengers per hour," the aviation ministry said on X for the Airports Authority of India-run airport on Sunday.

"Prayagraj airport achieved a record-breaking feat during Maha Kumbh 2025, witnessing 30,172 passengers in just one week, operating 226 flights in seven days, and crossing a historic milestone of over 5,000 passengers in a single day for the first time," it said.

Visa processing platform Atlys has reported a 21.4% increase in inbound spiritual travel to India, driven mainly by Maha Kumbh and other major festivals.



Corporate Communications Directorate

DECCAN HERALD

BANGALORE

26 JANUARY 2025

Tejasvi Surya for reopening HAL airport

BENGALURU, DHNS: Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya has appealed to the Public Accounts Committee, New Delhi, to take steps to open the HAL airport for commercial air traffic. Taking to X, he tweeted that the HAL airport would serve people while citizens wait for the city's second airport to be



**Tejasvi
Surya**

built. It would also save time for people who commute to the Kempegowda International Airport in the north, he added.

“Bengaluru needs HAL airport reopened at the earliest. While we wait for a new second airport, there is no logic in wasting the already existing public infrastructure at HAL. Thousands of passengers will benefit, saving the long commute to BIAL. Have pushed for this at PAC,” he wrote.



Corporate Communications Directorate

HINDUSTAN

DELHI

27 JANUARY 2025

राहत : हवाई अड्डों पर खुलेंगे किफायती कैफे

नई दिल्ली, विशेष संवाददाता। हवाई यात्रा करने वाले यात्रियों को किफायती दरों पर सूक्ष्म जलपान मुहैया कराने की दिशा में एयरपोर्ट अथॉरिटी ऑफ इंडिया (एएआई) काम कर रही है। कोलकाता स्थित नेताजी सुभाषचंद्र बोस अंतरराष्ट्रीय हवाई अड्डे पर सस्ते उड़ान यात्री कैफे का प्रयोग सफल रहने के बाद अब देश के अन्य हवाई अड्डों पर जल्द ही ऐसे कैफे (कैटीन) शुरू किए जाएंगे।

अगले छह महीनों में देश के सभी प्रमुख हवाई अड्डों पर किफायती दर वाले कैफे खोलने की योजना है। उड़ान यात्री कैफे में 10 रुपये में पानी और चाय, 20 रुपये में कॉफी एवं समोसा दिया जाता है। कैफे में नारते का अन्य सामान, शहर की

- कोलकाता एयरपोर्ट पर प्रयोग सफल रहा
- सस्ती दर पर मिलेंगे चाय, कॉफी व समोसा

मशहूर मिठाइयां, खाद्य व पेय पदार्थ भी मिलते हैं। एएआई से जुड़े अधिकारी कहते हैं कि कोलकाता एयरपोर्ट का प्रयोग पहले एक महीने में काफी सफल रहा। औसतन प्रतिदिन 900 से अधिक यात्री कैफे में आए। अब मार्च-अप्रैल तक देश के 20 से 30 एयरपोर्ट पर कैफे खोले जाएंगे। उसके बाद जून जुलाई तक इनकी संख्या बढ़ाकर दोगुनी की जाएगी। बता दें कि बीते वर्ष लोकसभा में हवाई अड्डों पर महंगे खाद्य पदार्थों का मुद्दा उठा था।



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE TIMES OF INDIA

CHENNAI

26 JANUARY 2025

R-day drill held at the airport

Chennai: Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) conducted a counter-terrorist mock drill at Chennai Airport's T-4 terminal on Friday night, simulating an armed attack to test preparedness ahead of Republic Day.

The drill involved more than 500 personnel from multiple agencies, including state police commando unit, national security guard, and representatives from airports authority of India, intelligence bureau, bureau of immigration, bureau of civil aviation security and airlines. TNN



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE

GUWAHATI

26 JANUARY 2025

SpiceJet flights from Guwahati to Prayagraj

GUWAHATI, Jan 25: SpiceJet has announced the addition of special flights to Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh by introducing new direct flights from Chennai, Hyderabad and Guwahati. Additionally, the airline will enhance its existing daily services to Prayagraj from Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, and Bengaluru by adding more flights from these key cities, stated a press release.

The special flights from Guwahati will run from February 11 to February 28, said Debojo Maharshi, Chief Business Officer, SpiceJet. "With direct flights from Guwahati, Chennai, and Hyderabad, and enhanced frequencies from Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, and Bengaluru, we aim to make travel convenient and accessible for devotees across the country. We are delighted to play a role in supporting the logistical needs of this once-in-a-lifetime event," he said. Bookings for these special flights are open on www.spicejet.com, the SpiceJet mobile app, and through online travel portals and agents.

● **ADVANCED URBAN MOBILITY**

DGCA move likely to spark interest in air taxi pilot training



SKYWARD COMMUTE. An electric vertical take-off and landing plane REUTERS

Rohit Vaid

Aspiring air taxi pilots in India may soon begin their training as the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is set to unveil licensing guidelines for electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, a senior official told *businessline*.

In aviation parlance, advanced air mobility vehicles, or air taxis, refer to a wide variety of eVTOL aircraft.

Senior officials pointed out that the guidelines can accelerate the rollout of air taxi services, bringing India closer to its vision of urban air mobility.

The guidelines, sources said, will define the qualifications, medical fitness, and training requirements for eVTOL flight crew.

According to one official, drawing from international best practices, the guidelines are set to include provisions for converting existing licences, recognising military pilot experience, and accepting licences issued by third countries.

The exercise to frame the guidelines, the official said, is part of a broader regulatory framework being developed by the DGCA to integrate eVTOLs into Indian airspace.

While the initial guidelines have addressed issues surrounding operational safety and airworthiness, upcoming regulations will focus on maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) certification, as well as naviga-

tion and airspace management.

The official said that since eVTOLs promise faster, eco-friendly commutes, the DGCA's proactive measures aim to create a safe and efficient ecosystem for this futuristic mode of transport.

GLOBAL RACE

"As training programmes take off, India is poised to become a key player in the global race for urban air mobility," the official said.

Besides, in another boost to the nascent sector, the Centre is expected to soon designate a few locations as 'regulatory sandbox' sites for testing and evaluating eVTOL prototypes.

A 'regulatory sandbox' site is a controlled environment used to test new products without the administration of regulatory requirements.

Potential sites are being scouted in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

"One such location was recently surveyed in Gujarat, close to Mandvi, which is a beach town in the Kutch district of Gujarat," the official said.

In Andhra Pradesh, a site near Vijayawada is reportedly under consideration as a 'regulatory sandbox' for eVTOLs and drones.

The official said a 'regulatory sandbox' will speed up the testing and standardisation of eVTOLs.

Several companies have come out with prototypes for eVTOL vehicles, even as the civil aviation regulator works on framing the guidelines for operations, licences, and safety standards of such aircraft.



Corporate Communications Directorate

BUSINESS LINE

DELHI

27 JANUARY 2025

India, Indonesia boost air connectivity with revised air service agreement

Aneesh Phadnis
Mumbai

Indian travellers will have more flight options for Bali as India and Indonesia have revised their air service agreement.

While Indonesian carriers will get access to Bengaluru and Hyderabad, Indian airlines will be able to increase flights to Denpasar (Bali), Jakarta or launch new destinations in the country, it is learnt.

An MOU to increase flights was signed on Thursday ahead of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's Delhi visit. This is crucial as 2025 has been designated as the India-ASEAN year of tourism.

CONNECTING PEOPLE

India and Indonesia discussed connectivity in the delegation level talks in Delhi on Saturday. "Both



Jaideep Mazumdar, MEA Secretary (East)

sides emphasised the importance of people to people connect," Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Jaideep Mazumdar said in a press briefing. While there are 21 weekly flights between the two countries, a Delhi-Jakarta service will start soon, he said.

India is the second largest source market for tourism in Bali behind Australia. In 2024 the island received over 5.5 lakh Indian tourists. On

an overall basis India stood sixth in tourist arrivals in Indonesia in the first six months of 2024.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Lukman F Laisa, acting Director General of Civil Aviation of Indonesia said the MOU will open up greater opportunities for airlines from both the countries. "We are optimistic that this development can provide positive contributions to other sectors such as economy, tourism, trade and business between the two countries," he said.

Currently, IndiGo operates daily flights between Mumbai-Jakarta. Air India and IndiGo operate to Bali from Delhi and Bengaluru respectively.

Air India is considering increasing frequencies to Bali or introducing a new service to Jakarta. IndiGo too is exploring additional flights and aims to connect passengers

from South East Asia to West Asia via its hubs. One such new destination under consideration is Medan where the GMR group runs an airport.

AirAsia Indonesia too is planning to launch flights to India in the summer schedule. At present Indonesian airlines do not operate to India.

Hotel Ritz-Carlton in Bali is seeing strong interest from the Indian market for leisure travel and destination weddings. Increased air connectivity will make Indonesia even more attractive to Indian visitors, an executive said.

According to MakeMyTrip's travel trends report of August 2024, Indonesia was the fifth most searched international destination by Indian travellers. Bali, Dubai and Singapore also had the highest share of searches for homestays and villas, it said.

Corporate Communications Directorate

BUSINESS STANDARD

DELHI

27 JANUARY 2025



IndiGo cleared for takeoff on strong demand winds

ON GROWTH RUNWAY: Airline stays airborne with consumer spending lift-off, lower fuel and rental costs

RAM PRASAD SAHU
Mumbai, 26 January

Propelled by strong demand and lower costs, the country's largest airline, InterGlobe Aviation (IndiGo), reported solid operational performance in the 2024-25 (FY25) October-December quarter (Q3). While demand was driven by the festival season, year-end increase, and higher consumer spending, lower fuel and rental costs helped deliver a beat at the operating profit level.

Riding on record passenger volumes in a seasonally favourable quarter and higher unit revenues, the company recorded revenues of ₹22,110 crore, reflecting a 13.7 per cent increase compared to the previous year and a 30 per cent rise sequentially. Passenger growth rose by 13 per cent year-on-year (Y-o-Y) and 12 per cent from the previous quarter, reaching 31 million — its highest ever for a quarter.

The revenue also included compensation from International Aero Engines due to the aircraft-on-ground situation. On a sequential basis, the primary driver of top-line growth was a 15 per cent increase in ancillary revenue.

Load factors rose by 120 basis points to

86.9 per cent for Q3FY25. According to the company, the demand increase caused industry load factors in domestic markets to remain above 90 per cent for most of November and December.

Although the reported operating profit of ₹5,160 crore fell short of expectations, the company exceeded estimates when excluding the negative foreign exchange (forex) impact. It incurred a forex loss of ₹1,399 crore. Operating profit, excluding forex losses, stood at ₹6,618 crore, above Street projections.

Analysts at Emkay Research emphasised that the airline achieved strong results in Q3FY25, with a standalone operating profit of ₹6,618 crore. This was driven by a 3 per cent increase in revenue per available seat kilometre and yields, while fuel costs and rentals were lower.

The international segment now contributes 10 per cent of revenue, with 28 per cent of overall capacity. The company is focused on increasing its share of the international market, which would act as a hedge against a weakening rupee. The company added four new international destinations in Q3FY25 and plans to add a cou-

ple more in 2025, bringing the total to 40.

IndiGo also expanded its domestic network, adding two new destinations and a total of 50 routes in Q3FY25. While the company remains optimistic about its growth potential, the movement of airfares in the short term will be a key trigger.

According to Motilal Oswal Research's airfare tracker, 30-day domestic forward prices for IndiGo have dropped 18 per cent quarter-on-quarter (Q-o-Q) to ₹5,576, while 15-day prices are down 2 per cent Q-o-Q to ₹6,531 in the fourth quarter (Q4) of FY25 to date. For Q4FY25, capacity in terms of available seat kilometre is expected to rise by 20 per cent Y-o-Y. While over 60 aircraft are grounded due to Pratt & Whitney engines, management expects this number to decrease to the 40s by 2025-26 (FY26).

Emkay Research has reiterated a 'buy' rating on the stock. While FY25/26 earnings per share have been reduced by 25 per cent/11 per cent due to forex losses and higher depreciation/amortisation, these adjustments are largely non-cash, and core earnings and valuation remain unchanged. The brokerage has a target price of ₹5,300.

Analysts of Motilal Oswal Research have revised their earnings estimates downward by 14 per cent/6 per cent for FY25/FY26. The stock is trading at 17x FY26 earnings and 8x FY26 enterprise value to operating profit before rentals. They maintain their 'neutral' rating with a target price of ₹4,535.

Performance metric	2023-24	2024-25E	2025-26E
Net sales (₹ crore)	68,904	80,093	91,492
Growth (% year-on-year)	26.6	16.2	14.2
Operating profit (₹ crore)	16,860	18,833	23,647
Growth (% year-on-year)	78.5	11.7	25.6
Margin (%)	24.5	23.5	25.8
Net profit (₹ crore)	8,017	5,612	8,907
Growth (% year-on-year)	LTP	-30.0	58.7

E: Estimates; LTP: Loss-to-profit

Source: Emkay Research



Corporate Communications Directorate

DECCAN CHRONICLE

HYDERABAD

26 JANUARY 2025

AIR INDIA EXP TO UP FREE BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JAN. 25

Air India Express has announced an increase in its free baggage allowance in international flights to the Middle East and Singapore. Passengers now can check in up to 30 kg of luggage, along with 7 kg of cabin baggage.

Families travelling with infants can carry up to 47 kg, including the 7 kg cabin baggage and an additional 10 kg for their infant's luggage. The airline also offers a 40 kg baggage allowance for those flying in its Xpress Biz class, which is equivalent to business class.

Air India Express, in a statement, said it was offering Xpress Lite fares for those who don't need check-in baggage. This option provides a lower ticket price and includes an additional 3 kg of cabin baggage.

If passengers need more luggage later, they can pre-book additional check-in baggage at discounted rates.

Passengers can also carry an extra 3-5 kg of cabin baggage with the new Extra Carry-On service. Additionally, musical instruments can be carried as cabin baggage at no extra cost if they meet size requirements.

For larger instruments, passengers can purchase an additional seat or check them in with special charges.

Southeast Asia Woos Indian Travellers with More Flights, Easier Visa Norms

Indonesia liberalises air transport agreement after Thailand, Vietnam

Arindam Majumder

New Delhi: Southeast Asian countries are doubling down on efforts to attract Indian tourists by increasing flights and easing visa regulations, buoyed by double-digit growth in Indian arrivals to Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia in 2024.

Last week, Indonesia finalised a new agreement with India which will allow airlines of both countries to operate 9,000 seats weekly between the two countries, up from 27 flights at present.

Indonesia is the third country in the region, after Thailand and Vietnam, to liberalise aviation ties with India in recent times.

The agreement, signed on the eve of Indonesian president Subianto's visit to India for the Republic Day parade, has given Indonesian carriers access to Hyderabad and Bengaluru besides Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai. Indian airlines have also been allowed to launch flights from the five metros to Yogyakarta, Labuan Bajo, Manado, and Lombok besides Ja-



karta and Denpasar (Bali).

Flying rights are allocated on a bilateral reciprocal basis by the governments, and airlines cannot operate more flights than they are allotted.

In November, India and Vietnam signed a similar pact, allowing airlines to increase the number of flights to 42 per week from 28. In March, India and Thailand agreed to hike capacity by 14,000 seats per week for both sides, an increase of 43%.

The pact with Thailand also allowed Indian airlines to operate flights to four additional airports—Udon Thani, Surat Thani, Hat Yai and Chiang Rai.

Southeast Asia has emerged as the top choice for Indian travel-

lers after multiple countries in the region eased visa regulations for Indians. While Thailand and Malaysia allow visa-free entry for Indians, Indonesia offers visa on arrival. For Vietnam, it's an online process and the visa arrives within 20 days.

"There is a surge in short trips to these countries as people can plan easily while they face uncertainty while travelling to the US and Europe," said an airline executive who requested not to be identified. "Due to affordable fares and budget friendly stays, Southeast Asia offers Indian travellers the chance to enjoy an international destination with a far better environment than even some domestic places."

India's largest airline IndiGo has launched flights to Bali, Langkawi and Penang in the last one year and is planning to increase frequency to Jakarta. Air India has added Kuala Lumpur and is planning flights to Jakarta and Manila, while Air India Express has started flights to Phuket and will add Vietnam.

"Indian businesses are expanding internationally, our citizens are exploring more destinations than ever before, and our diaspora continues to grow," IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said in a post results call on Friday. "Given these factors, air travel demand is poised to continue to grow, and we are privileged to be able to contribute to this growth."

SpiceJet's turnaround script could face fresh plot twists

The airline's revival efforts, after raising ₹3,000 crore via a Qualified Institutional Placement in September, come at a time when the aviation sector is grappling with global supply-chain issues

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

In its bid to revive the ailing airline and its grounded fleet, SpiceJet will spend 50% of the ₹3,000 crore raised last September in settling dues to lessors and vendors, and ₹800 crore for making its planes airworthy.

But the efforts come at a time when the industry is facing headwinds as new aircraft production stays slow and leased planes have become scarce, forcing airlines to maintain older fleets. This has brought the maintenance and repair markets under pressure as well, which have also been already strained by parts shortages caused by COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war, which disrupted the supply of materials like titanium for parts.

In September 2024, the airline raised ₹3,000 crore via Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP), which attracted top-tier institutional investors and mutual funds including Goldman Sachs (Singapore) and Morgan Stanley Asia. This has allowed SpiceJet to settle about \$308.4 million in claims at a negotiated \$76.1 million, the firm's chief business officer Debojo Mahrshi told *The Hindu*.

The terms of settlement also allow it to continue to operate the planes leased from the same lessors, barring where they were already returned to the lessors,



The fundraise has allowed SpiceJet to settle about \$308.4 million in claims at a negotiated value of \$76.1 million

DEBOJO MAHRSHI
Chief Business Officer
Spicejet

he said. At the time of the fundraise, SpiceJet's 36 of the total 58 aircraft were grounded and many were repossessed by lessors.

SpiceJet's fleet comprises Boeing 737 aircraft, including MAX 8s, and Bombardier Q-400s.

For example, the settlement with aircraft lessor Carlyle involved a write-off of \$40.17 million on arrears and conversion of \$30 million in arrears into equity while allowing the airline to continue to operate an unspecified number of air-

craft on a long-term basis.

Another settlement with Export Development Canada allows the airline full ownership of 13 Bombardier Q400 aircraft used for regional flying.

Clearing dues

Of the ₹3,000 crore raised, the airline allocated ₹1,400 crore for clearing dues. It has earmarked ₹800 crore for un-grounding its aircraft, ₹800 crore for working capital requirements.

A separate sum of ₹736 crore in a previous funding round was also utilised to address liabilities, clear a portion of dues and support working capital need.

The airline's attempt at revival come at a time when the global aviation industry is grappling with supply-chain issues, exerting pressure on availability of engines and parts in the hydraulic, and pneumatic systems. These will push

up the cost of maintenance contracts as well.

Further, with most of Boeing's suppliers based in the U.S., the rupee depreciation will also escalate expenses. Turnaround time for engines sent for shop visits for scheduled maintenance have also risen by 30% to 150% for various reasons, including due to more frequent maintenance as new engine technologies such as those in the Leap 1B engines used for Boeing 737 MAX aircraft takes time to mature.

It has tied up with U.S.-based engine maintenance, repair and overhaul organisation (MRO) StandardAero Inc., for restoring SpiceJet's grounded Boeing 737-8 Max fleet.

Leasing not easy

Repairing SpiceJet's existing planes also comes amid concerns that leasing additional planes may not be as easy for the airline due to its credit history.

"Lessors will prefer well-funded airlines and assess SpiceJet's risk exposure with greater scrutiny and demand 12-24 months of advance lease rental payments, letters of credit from the bank, among others. Moreover, the cost of leasing has gone up by 30% because leased planes are in great demand and almost drying up because of slow production of new planes," said Alok Anand, chairman and CEO, Acumen Aviation.

NO REGULAR PASSENGER FLIGHTS SINCE EARLY 2020

No India-China direct flights: Singapore, Vietnam, Dhaka gain as connecting hubs

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 26

THE EVIDENT signs of a thaw in India-China relations has built hopes of normalisation of air connectivity between the world's two most populous nations, which haven't had regular passenger flights between them since early 2020. Resumption of direct flights and normalisation of visa issuances—demands China has been making over the past couple of years—are expected to come up in Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's discussions with Beijing during his visit, which began Sunday. Chinese and Indian airlines would be watching keenly.

In September 2024, resumption of direct passenger flights between India and China was discussed in a meeting between India's Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu and Song Zhiyong, the Administrator of the Civil Aviation Administration of China. Earlier in June, Reuters had reported that China was pressing India to resume direct air connectivity between the two countries, while India was resisting it.

In November, resumption of direct flights featured in the discussions between Foreign Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at their meeting in Rio de Janeiro during the G20 Summit. That meeting took place less than a month after India and China announced a border patrolling arrangement on October 21, a clear sign of de-escalation. Two days later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met at the BRICS Summit in Russia.

Lack of direct air connectivity between India and mainland China, along with stringent visa restrictions, have led to airlines from both countries losing out on potential passenger loads. No wonder passenger traffic between the two countries—now solely



through connecting hubs in South and Southeast Asia—is less than half of what it was in 2019. Nevertheless, it is still not insignificant, and a few airlines from other countries have spotted and capitalised on the opportunity.

In January-October of 2024, the total number of flyers (in both directions) between India and China was over 4.60 lakh, sharply down from close to a million in the corresponding 10 months of 2019, shows an analysis of passenger data provided by global aviation analytics company Cirium. In January-October of 2019, direct flight passengers accounted for almost 46 per cent of the total passenger flows between the two countries.

Despite the slump in the overall numbers, airports in Singapore, Vietnam, and even Bangladesh have managed to clock higher India-China passenger traffic than they did in 2019, largely thanks to their respective home airlines' strategy to focus on connecting such flyers. Other hubs, however,

are either yet to catch up, or are struggling.

Singapore, Bangladesh, Vietnam gain

In the first 10 months of 2024, over 98,000 passengers travelling between India and China connected in Singapore, up 16.6 per cent from the corresponding period of 2019. This can be attributed to the Singapore Airlines group offering connections to various points in China from a number of Indian airports via the city-state. Singapore is now the second-largest connecting hub—after Hong Kong—for India-China passengers, up from the third spot in 2019.

Bangladesh's capital Dhaka, which connected just over 4,500 India-China passengers in the first 10 months of 2019, saw the numbers surge to over 30,000 in the corresponding period of 2024, with Bangladeshi carriers US-Bangla Airlines and Biman Bangladesh capitalising on the opportunity.

Notably, Vietnam's two major airports—Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh—that had hardly any India-China connecting passengers in 2019, together served as the connecting hubs for nearly 20,000 such flyers in January-October 2024, thanks to Vietnamese carriers VietJet Air and Vietnam Airlines having densified their networks to facilitate transfer traffic via Vietnam.

Where other connecting hubs stand

The Hong Kong airport, which is not exactly considered a Chinese airport due to Hong Kong's special autonomous status and a different visa regime than mainland China, continues to be the leading connecting hub between India and mainland China. The number of passengers connecting at Hong Kong—almost 1.73 lakh in January-October 2024—was 12.5 per cent lower than the corresponding period of 2019.

Thailand's capital Bangkok—with its two airports—was the sec-

ond-largest connecting hub for flyers between India and China in 2019. In January-October 2024, it was at the third spot, connecting nearly 93,000 passengers via the two airports, down around 31 per cent from five years ago. Thai carriers, primarily the Thai AirAsia group, are making efforts to increase their share of this market by adding more capacity on flights to Bangkok from Indian airports.

Kuala Lumpur, too, saw a notable decline in India-China connecting passenger numbers vis-à-vis 2019. Malaysian carriers' capacities deployed on routes between Kuala Lumpur and both India and China were lower than the pre-pandemic levels. In January-October of 2024, Kuala Lumpur's India-China connecting traffic was just over 32,000 passengers, down over 44 per cent from the first 10 months of 2019.

Colombo, where over 43,000 passengers travelling between India and China connected in January-October 2019, saw a steep drop of over 82 per cent in the comparable period of 2024. This primarily was on account of aircraft capacity constraints affecting the Sri Lankan Airlines network. Cirium data shows that Sri Lankan operated just 290 flights between Colombo and Chinese airports in January-October of last year, sharply down from over 1,200 flights in the same period of 2019.

Opportunity for Chinese, Indian airlines

Although normalisation of air connectivity would likely benefit airlines from both India and China, Beijing likely believes that Chinese carriers have more to gain as they enjoyed the dominant share of the direct flight market between the two countries before the pandemic. It is not surprising then that China has been nudging India to allow reestablishment of direct air connectivity and normalise visa issuances to Chinese nationals.

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THE PIONEER

DELHI

27 JANUARY 2025

DGCA urges airlines to cut Kumbh fares

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has urged airlines to rationalise airfares to Prayagraj, citing concerns over skyrocketing ticket prices as demand surges during the ongoing Maha Kumbh.

Airlines such as SpiceJet have ramped up operations, with the DGCA approving 81 additional flights in January, bringing the total number of flights to Prayagraj to 132. Despite the increase, airfares have soared, with some passengers reporting ticket prices nearly tripling.

"I usually pay around ₹4,000 for a round trip from Delhi to Prayagraj, but this time, it's over ₹12,000," said Rajeev



An aerial view of devotees at Sangam during the Mahakumbh festival, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh
PTI

Mishra, a businessman travelling for the Maha Kumbh. "It feels like airlines are taking advantage of the situation."

Travel agents echo this sentiment, pointing to the unprecedented demand. "Fares have gone through the roof. Even with extra flights,

availability is limited, and airlines are charging a premium," said Praveen Singh, a travel consultant in Lucknow.

The DGCA, in a post on X on Saturday, emphasised the need for airlines to address this issue. "Airlines have been urged to increase capacity

further and rationalise fares to make travel more accessible," the regulator said. A meeting with airline representatives was held on January 23 to discuss fare control measures.

According to travel portal Ixigo, fares for Delhi-Prayagraj flights alone have increased by up to 21%. "The hike is disheartening, especially for devotees who have been planning this pilgrimage for years," said Sneha Gupta, a homemaker who had to alter her travel plans due to high costs.

The Maha Kumbh, which began on January 13 and will conclude on February 26, continues to attract millions of devotees, pushing airlines and regulators to strike a balance between capacity and affordability.



Corporate Communications Directorate

PUNJAB KESARI

DELHI

27 JANUARY 2025

एयर इंडिया में यात्रा करने वाले यात्री सावधान

नई दिल्ली, (पंजाब केसरी) : अगर आप एयर इंडिया की फ्लाइट में सफर कर रहे हैं, तो अपने सामान की सुरक्षा का ध्यान खुद रखें। फ्लाइट में सामान गुम होने की स्थिति में उसे ढूँढ पाना या वापस पाना बेहद मुश्किल हो सकता है। कई बार ऐसा भी हो सकता है कि आपका सामान वापस मिले ही न। हाल ही में प्रतीक राय नामक एक यात्री ने अपने अनुभव साझा करते हुए एयर इंडिया की व्यवस्थाओं पर सबल उठाए हैं। प्रतीक राय ने सोशल मीडिया प्लेटफॉर्म 'एक्स' पर पोस्ट्स के जरिए एयर इंडिया की खामियों को उजागर किया। किस तरह सामान खोने के बाद उन्हें एयरलाइंस ने गुमराह किया। दावा किया कि एयरलाइंस की वेबसाइट पर भी गलत जानकारी दी गई और कॉल या मैसेज के जरिए उन्हें कोई स्पष्ट सूचना नहीं मिली।



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE TELEGRAPH

KOLKATA

26 JANUARY 2025



Fog over EM Bypass on Saturday morning. Picture by Pradi̇p Sanyal

Fog disrupts flights; chill set to make comeback

DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: Another spell of chill is on its way to the city, the Met office said on Saturday.

The conditions had been unusually warm for the past few days but the comeback of northerly and northwesterly winds will bring back the chill, according to the Met forecast.

A hint of the chill was felt late on Saturday evening.

Saturday morning was foggy but the fog was not as dense as it had been for the past two days.

It was the third consecutive day of disruption in flights to and from Calcutta.

"The operations were affected from 6.26am to 12.10pm. Twenty-three Calcutta-bound flights and 30 departing the

city were delayed," said an airport official.

As a safety precaution, there were curbs on the movement of people in the airport's apron area. Taxing aircraft and vehicles moved slowly.

"The fog was not as dense as it was on Thursday and Friday. The scale of disruptions was lower than the past two days," the official said.

On Thursday, more than 60 flights were delayed and a dozen diverted as the airport was enveloped in dense fog.

At 18.5 degrees Celsius, the minimum temperature was still four notches above normal. The sky was consistently cloudy. A Met official linked it to the high moisture content during the day. The minimum relative humidity was 61 per cent.

A Met official said the anti-cyclone that had been feeding moisture into south Bengal had changed its position, paving the way for the comeback of northerly and northwesterly winds.

"The Celsius will slide to 15 degrees on Sunday and lower in the coming days. The chill is expected to last till Wednesday, after which another western disturbance is expected to stall the flow of the cold winds," said a Met official.

Winter chill in Calcutta is usually interrupted by western disturbances. This year, the city has had three spells of chill.

The minimum temperature had dropped to 12.3 degrees on January 11, the lowest in Calcutta this season.

IRREGULATORS

Trai or Irdai or DGCA, Indian regulators tasked with protecting consumers aren't doing a good job

There are about 250mn feature phone users in India. Together they could be the fifth or sixth most populous country, depending on whether they outnumber 252mn Pakistanis. Late last month telecom regulator Trai ordered telcos to provide them voice-and-SMS-only tariff plans. There's no reason feature phone users should pay for bundled data and OTT services they can't use, Trai said. Even smartphone users with wired broadband at home and office might not want these extra services. It seemed like a consumer-friendly order that would reduce rates for a large section of people.

The opposite happened. Telcos obliged Trai by removing data allowances from existing packs without reducing prices. Simultaneously, they relaunched the old with-data packs at significantly higher rates. Classic case of cocking a snook. What makes it worse is that the leading telcos had revised their pack rates in tandem on



July 3 last year. A ₹1,799 pack, for instance, had become 11% dearer at ₹1,999, and now it's gone up another 12.5% to ₹2,249. Altogether a 25% increase in seven months. Telcos had welcomed the July hike for a "financially healthy business model". Did they really need another booster shot so soon? Trai must answer, especially because telephony is an essential service now like water and electricity. Arbitrary tariff hikes will deter many from buying their first feature phone, and others from transitioning to smartphones.

Following backlash on social media, telcos have reduced the rates of their new no-frills packs, but public pressure can't be a proxy for effective regulation. Yet, that seems to be the case in sector after sector. Insurance comes to mind immediately. Insurance regulator Irdai seems unable to speed up hospital bill settlements. Reports say the rate of rejection for health insurance claims increased by 19.1% in FY 2023-24 – altogether ₹26,000cr worth of claims denied. Aviation regulator DGCA also looks feckless at times. Whether it is overbooked flights – 2,719 passengers were denied boarding last May, the same month when a plane had to return because one man was travelling standing – or seemingly random cancellations and delays, DGCA ends up looking like Dhritrashtra. As do the other authorities who may be tasked with protecting homebuyers, or ensuring schools don't fleece parents, or hospitals don't inflate bills. The little guy is increasingly left to fend for himself.



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE TIMES OF INDIA

DELHI

27 JANUARY 2025

Wet seats, misbehaviour: Lufthansa fined ₹55k for elderly couple's trauma

Chennai: An elderly couple's traumatic experience aboard a 10-hour Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt, where they endured wet seats and dripping water for a large part of the journey, has led to a Chennai court penalising the airline for deficient service, reports **Ram Sundaram**. The ordeal extended beyond the flight, with delays and mishandling disrupting their journey and causing financial and emotional distress.

Joju Dominic, 69, and his wife Jasmine, 65, had booked round-trip tickets from Chennai to Vancouver via Frankfurt for Rs 3.5 lakh. Their trouble began on June 12, 2023, when their Chennai-Frankfurt flight was delayed by 90 minutes for cleaning, leaving them waiting in the aerobridge.

Upon boarding, they discovered their seats were soaked, with water dripping from the overhead compartment. Joju claimed they received no help, and a cabin crew even threatened to deplane him when he complained. "The staff blamed the issue on Chennai's climate and suggested we use a blanket to deal with the dripping water," he said. After prolonged inconvenience, they were offered alternative seats.

At Frankfurt airport, delays and lack of priority assistance caused them to miss their connecting Air Canada flight to Vancouver. Following arguments with airline staff, they were eventually accommodated on a later flight, but the delay caused them to miss their scheduled ferry in Canada.

The return journey was equally harrowing. Shortly after take-off, the aircraft reported a fuel leakage and returned to Frankfurt. At Frankfurt airport on Oct 3, 2023, the couple was directed to a service centre, where Joju alleged they were treated harshly. Despite their age, their request for accommodation till the rescheduled flight was initially denied. Later, they had to walk nearly 2km to reach the lodging as they were also denied pre-booked wheelchair assistance.

Joju alleged inadequate meal provisions during the delay and said they ran out of essential medicines.

The couple sought Rs 3.5 lakh in compensation, equivalent to the cost of their tickets. The airline was ordered to pay Rs 55,000 for mental agony and legal costs. The commission said alternative arrangements were provided to the couple, which justified the limited compensation. Dissatisfied with the ruling, Joju has appealed to the state consumer commission, seeking higher compensation for their ordeal.



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE TIMES OF INDIA

BANGALORE

26 JANUARY 2025

Vizag flight returns to Bengaluru

Bengaluru: An Air India Express flight bound for Visakhapatnam Saturday returned to Bengaluru due to a technical issue, KIA officials said.

The flight, which departed at 10am, circled over Bengaluru before making its way back to the airport. Officials said the situation did not involve an emergency landing.

"There was a technical issue with the aircraft, but it was not an emergency. The flight returned as a precautionary measure," said an airport spokesperson. Air India Express authorities were not available for comments. TNN



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THE TIMES OF INDIA

BANGALORE

26 JANUARY 2025

Flight prices soar as Maha Kumbh pilgrims flock to Prayagraj

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Bengaluru: Prayagraj, which is hosting Maha Kumbh, has become a costly destination with flight fares skyrocketing.

According to MakeMyTrip, fares from Bengaluru to Prayagraj on Jan 25 were between Rs 36,218 and Rs 37,058 for flights with layovers in Mumbai or New Delhi. Return tickets on the next day are priced at Rs 16,000, making the total cost of a round trip to about Rs 51,000. Airlines like IndiGo have one-way tickets priced at Rs 29,000, while SpiceJet tickets with a single stop in Delhi cost Rs 40,000. Additionally, connecting flights via Raipur and Bhopal cost Rs 27,000 for one-way journey.



Priya Darshini, sales manager at Flotus World Travel Pvt Ltd said, "Under normal circumstances, a round-trip flight from Bengaluru to Prayagraj costs just Rs 17,000. However, thanks to the demand due to Maha Kumbh, prices have soared," she said.

IndiGo sources confirmed there is dynamic pricing because of high demand and supply due to Maha Kumbh.

Rajesh Kumar, a businessman travelling with his family of four, said they hadn't anticipated that prices would surge by so much. "Spending over Rs 1.5 lakh on flights alone is beyond what we'd planned, but Maha Kumbh makes it worthwhile," he said.

Others have turned to alternate routes and modes of transport. Alka Sharma, a homemaker, opted to take flights to Lucknow and then hire a cab to Prayagraj. "It's a longer journey, but more affordable," she said.



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THE TIMES OF INDIA

MUMBAI

26 JANUARY 2025

Airfares see big surge amid rush for Maha Kumbh Mela

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Feb is typically considered a lean period for air travel, but this year is different for the four domestic carriers that have launched special flights to transport pilgrims for the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

The ongoing mela, which attracts millions from around the world, has changed the demand-supply dynamics to such an extent that the cheapest fare for a to-and-fro weekend visit on a Feb 15-16 non-stop flight from Bengaluru and Kolkata to Prayagraj was priced at Rs 58,000 Saturday. From Mumbai, return fares began at Rs 42,000; the geographically closer Delhi was the best bet with return fares starting at Rs 31,000. However, if you book for travel during a weekend in March—Maha Kum-

bh Mela ends on Feb 26—you will find the fares have dropped to Rs 14,000 for a return ticket from Mumbai and Rs 18,000 from Bengaluru.

Weekday travel for Feb is cheaper: For instance, a return from Bengaluru for Feb 18-20 is priced at Rs 38,000. But not when the dates with religious significance fall on weekdays such as Feb 3, 12, and 26. Four airlines, Air India, IndiGo, SpiceJet and Akasa Air, are operating the special flights for the mela.

Travel portal Skyscanner said its data showed peak travel demand for Jan 28, indicating a higher travel interest due to the second Shahi Snan. "Jan 28 recorded a staggering 675% increase in booking volume compared to a typical day. Compared to the same time last year when no event was held in Prayagraj,

the volume of bookings surged by 1,776%," it said.

The top five international cities that searched for travel to Prayagraj around the dates were Dubai, London, Abu Dhabi, Singapore and Doha, it added. The data also revealed major week-on-week growth (Jan 20 week compared to Jan 13 week) in searches for travel in Feb for routes such as Hyderabad-Prayagraj (2815%), Pune-Prayagraj (1345%), and Prayagraj-Mumbai (870%).

Later in the night, the DGCA posted on X that it had approved 81 additional flights in Jan to meet increased demand for travel to Prayagraj. That raised Prayagraj connectivity to 132 flights from across India, it said. The move comes after DGCA held meetings with airlines on Jan 23 and urged them to increase capacity and rationise fares.