

# Corporate Communications Directorate

DESHBANDHU

DELHI

27 DECEMBER 2024

## एयरपोर्ट मुआवजा वृद्धि से संतुष्ट नहीं दिख रहे किसान

रवृपुरा, 26 दिसम्बर (देशबन्धु)। प्रदेश की योगी सरकार ने हाल ही में जेवर स्थित निर्माणाधीन अंतरराष्ट्रीय एयरपोर्ट से प्रभावित किसानों को मुआवजा वृद्धि कर भले ही राहत देने की कोशिश की हो लेकिन किसान सरकार के इस कदम से संतुष्ट होते नजर नहीं आ रहे हैं। लखनऊ में मुख्यमंत्री संवाद कार्यक्रम के दौरान मुआवजा वृद्धि घोषणा उपरांत लौटते ही किसानों के विरोध के स्वर तेज हो गए हैं। जगह-जगह पंचायत का दौर व

■ सरकार की निर्धारित मुआवजा राशि पर जमीन देने से इनकार, पंचायत का दौर शुरू

सोशल मीडिया पर बढ़े हुए मुआवजे के प्रति विरोध का सिलसिला शुरू हो गया है। किसान शासनिक व प्रशासनिक नुमाइंदों पर गंभीर आरोप लगाते हुए अपनी जमीन देने से इंकार कर रहे हैं। स्थानीय लोगों के मुताबिक जेवर में बन रहे एयरपोर्ट से प्रभावित गांवों के किसान मुआवजा बढ़ाने की मांग को लेकर लंबे समय से धरना प्रदर्शन कर रहे थे। किसानों की समस्याओं को देखते हुए जेवर के विधायक के नेतृत्व में किसानों को लखनऊ ले जाकर मुख्यमंत्री के साथ वार्ता कराई। जिसके बाद मुख्यमंत्री ने तत्कालीन मुआवजा में वृद्धि करते हुए 4300 वर्ग मीटर मुआवजे की घोषणा कर दी। लेकिन किसानों का आरोप है कि मुख्यमंत्री द्वारा 4500 रुपए वर्ग मीटर मुआवजा की घोषणा की गई थी परन्तु चंद मिनट बाद ही मुआवजा राशि को 4300 रुपए वर्ग मीटर निर्धारित कर दिया गया। इसके बाद किसान अपने घर वापस लौट आए और सरकार के इस कदम से असंतुष्ट किसानों गांव थोरा समेत कई अन्य स्थानों पर भी पंचायत का आयोजन करते हुए उक्त निर्धारित राशि पर जमीन देने से इंकार कर रहे हैं। साथ ही जनप्रतिनिधि व प्राधिकरण के अधिकारियों पर विभिन्न प्रकार के आरोप लगा रहे हैं। वहीं भाकियू (लोकशक्ति) के राष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष शयौराज सिंह ने सोशल मीडिया पर वीडियो वायरल कर बड़े मुआवजा में 200 की कटौती, आवासीय प्लाट खत्म करने आदि का आरोप लगाते हुए कहा है कि सरकार का यह कदम किसानों के साथ छलावा है। किसानों के साथ लंबे समय से धोखा किया जाता रहा है और उन्हें गुमराह करते हुए किसानों की अन्य समस्याओं का भी समाधान नहीं किया जा रहा है।



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## नोएडा एयरपोर्ट को पानी देने के लिए लाइन बिछाई, अगले हफ्ते से होगी आपूर्ति

ग्रेटर नोएडा, 26 दिसम्बर (देशबन्धु)। नोएडा इंटरनेशनल एयरपोर्ट को पानी की आपूर्ति करने के लिए आठ किलोमीटर की लंबी लाइन बिछाई गई है। फलैदा बांगर के नलकूप से पानी एयरपोर्ट को पहुंचाया जाएगा। एयरपोर्ट परिसर में बने वॉटर ट्रीटमेंट प्लांट में शोधित करके पानी पहुंचाया जाएगा। पाइपलाइन की टेस्टिंग शुरू हो गई है। एक हफ्ते में पानी की आपूर्ति शुरू हो जाएगी।

नोएडा इंटरनेशनल एयरपोर्ट का संचालन अप्रैल से शुरू करने की तैयारी है। इससे पहले एयरपोर्ट में सभी जरूरी सुविधाओं को अंतिम रूप दिया जा रहा है। एयरपोर्ट को करीब आठ एमएलडी पानी की जरूरत होगी। शुरुआती चरण में एयरपोर्ट को रोजाना दो एमएलडी पानी की जरूरत होगी। इस पानी की आपूर्ति के लिए तैयारी पूरी हो गई है। फलैदा बांगर में तीन नलकूप लगाए गए हैं। इन नलकूपों के जरिए एयरपोर्ट को पानी दिया जाएगा। इसके लिए फलैदा बांगर से एक्सप्रेस वे के किनारे आठ किलोमीटर की लंबी लाइन बिछाई गई है। यह पाइपलाइन एयरपोर्ट परिसर में बनाए गए वॉटर ट्रीटमेंट प्लांट तक ले जाई गयी है। इस लाइन के जरिए पानी प्लांट में पहुंचेगा। प्लांट में पानी शोधित करके एयरपोर्ट को सप्लाई किया जाएगा। पाइपलाइन की टेस्टिंग का काम शुरू हो गया है। टेस्टिंग में कहीं-कहीं पर



- एयरपोर्ट को आठ एमएलडी पानी की जरूरत होगी, शुरुआती दौर में दो और एमएलडी पानी चाहिए
- पानी आपूर्ति के लिए फलैदा बांगर में तीन नलकूप लगाए गए, आठ किलोमीटर की लाइन बिछाई

लीकेज को समस्या आई है। इस समस्या को दूर किया जा रहा है। एक हफ्ते के भीतर पानी की आपूर्ति शुरू करने की योजना है। एयरपोर्ट के नोडल अधिकारी शैलेंद्र भाटिया ने बताया कि पानी आपूर्ति के लिए काम चल रहा है अगले एक हफ्ते के भीतर एयरपोर्ट को पानी की सप्लाई शुरू हो जाएगी।



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## Launch of Taj Cochin International Airport hotel on Dec 28



COCHIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT will inaugurate Taj Cochin International Airport, a five-star hotel on its premises, by Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan on December 28. — **AGENCIES**

# 2025 promises to be exciting for aviation

Construction is on at a frenetic pace to complete the Noida International Airport (NIA), a 100% subsidiary of Zurich Airport International. The first flight is scheduled to take off from the runway in April 2025. In the first phase, the ₹5,730-crore new airport with a single runway and the terminal building is expected to cater to 12 million passengers annually. Validation flights began at the facility earlier this month.

Trying to match the pace of NIA but still lagging is the most urgently needed airport in the country — the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) — something most Mumbai residents have long given up hope of ever seeing completed. Getting NMIA off the ground will be a big achievement and a feather in many caps including CIDCO (the agency that has been struggling with it for decades) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, who has taken a personal interest in the project. As things stand, the project is 83% complete and the target is to get the domestic terminal operational by April, and international by July, but most expect a delay of a few months to get all requisite clearances.

Viability remains a question mark for NIA while Navi Mumbai is likely to hit the ground running as Mumbai's current facilities are notoriously inadequate. Several smaller airports around the country are in need or likely to see upgrades, but it is these two new greenfield airports that will attract national attention.

With the total passenger numbers projected at between 160-174 million for the coming year (ICRA estimates), a growth of 7-10% over 2024, the lens of the industry will also be trained on the progress of Air India, which merged with Vistara in 2024. Many loyal passengers of Vistara have reluctantly moved to Air India and as is perhaps to be expected, notes of discontent and unhappiness with the erstwhile national carrier's service standards have begun to come in.

It is too early to pass a verdict since Air India is yet to get its own act together and deliver in any discernible manner, although it appears to have turned the corner from a business point of view under Tata group's watch and guidance. As per news reports, the airline's losses came down from over ₹11,000 crore in FY 2023 to close to ₹4,500 crore in FY 2024, a reduction of 60%, which is no mean achievement. Passengers and industry observers however remain severely disappointed at the pace of change set by the airline and the management team at the helm has been accused of "more talk, less action" by the industry and the travelling public. Its progress will be keenly watched

through 2025.

Similar scrutiny is on the cards for the market leader IndiGo, which is in the process of reinventing itself. In 2024, IndiGo announced its decision to introduce a second aircraft — a wide body — in its fleet, a momentous decision for any airline that has stuck so firmly to its core till now. With the order for 30 A350-900 (with options for another 70), the fundamental tenets on which this business stood for 18 years will be altered forever.

More recently, along with bumper profits, the carrier has also started offering business class on busy domestic routes, a logical corollary of the bigger decision of entering the wide body and thereby, long-haul space. In a nutshell, this means that after 18 years as a low-fare carrier, IndiGo will metamorphose

into a full-service one over time. It is fair to say this is a seminal moment for any airline in its journey and this transformation will be one of the most closely watched by airline industry professionals not just in India but globally too. Industry observers, however, greeted the news with a muted response as the decision amounts to rocking a pretty steady boat in choppy waters.

The industry will also be tracking the progress of the smaller players — which have now acquired a new significance to prevent the ill effects a duopoly (Air India and IndiGo) brings forth. What is now clear is Jet Airways and Go First are unlikely to see any kind of revival. Akasa, which has been growing quietly at a steady clip, has, reportedly, large losses on its books. This is likely to be a worry for a management that has no large corporate backing and lost its primary backer with the passing of Rakesh Jhunjhunwala in 2022.

The revival of SpiceJet, India's oldest low-fare airline, was a big surprise for the sector in 2024. Many had grounded the airline since Boeing's troubles began and the pandemic took a severe toll on the airline's finances and functioning. After struggling for almost four years, the airline managed to raise funds through a qualified institutional placement in September 2024. The continued survival of the carrier against all odds has been attributed to its chairman Ajay Singh's never say die attitude and his ability to influence developments affecting the business in his favour.

Let me end with an interesting aside. In 2019, India's largest private airline Jet Airways ceased flying and shut shop. 2020 was the pandemic year when all airlines globally halted operations for a short time as the world came to a standstill. In 2021, India's national carrier was sold to one of India's largest business conglomerates, the Tata Group. All three years were biggies for the aviation industry — more gloom than joy but dramatic, nonetheless. In comparison, 2022, 2023 and 2024 were relatively tame years for the sector even though one airline went down in 2023.

So, will the coming year break this jinx and offer more to chew on for India's airline sector? Watch this space through 2025 for the answer.



Anjali Bhargava

**THE REVIVAL OF SPICEJET WAS A BIG SURPRISE FOR THE SECTOR IN 2024. MANY HAD GROUNDED THE AIRLINE SINCE THE PANDEMIC TOOK A SEVERE TOLL ON THE AIRLINE'S FUNCTIONING.**

## Cost of airport amnesia: ₹100cr

IMRAN AHMED SIDDIQUI

**New Delhi:** High-end cell-phones, laptops, wallets, smart watches, gold and diamond jewellery, and believe it or not — a two-month-old infant whose parents were too busy on their mobiles to care.

When a stunned CISF surveillance team at Mumbai airport found an iPad, a Macbook, gold and diamond jewellery and \$6,000 in cash in two handbags inadvertently left behind by a Dubai-based businesswoman at Mumbai airport last year, it swivelled the spotlight on an unusual mound. The CISF is in charge of security at the airports.

Over the past two years, belongings worth over ₹100 crore have been left behind at the country's 68 airports and most remained unclaimed. CISF officials say they have no idea how to reunite the luggage with their owners.

In 2014, the CISF launched a lost-and-found facility on its official website where it uploads details of the contact persons the passengers can approach to claim their lost belongings. The CISF uploads a list of all



retrieved items along with the date and the name of the airport where they had been found.

"We have witnessed a steady rise in the number and value of belongings left behind by flyers over the past few years. Most of them don't approach us to claim their lost luggage. Maybe they assume that they will never get back their lost items," said a CISF official.

"Those who contact us get back their lost valuables," he said.

According to the data compiled by CISF, flyers left behind items worth ₹58 crore at airports across the country in 2023 compared with ₹55 crore in 2022.

An analysis of the data shows that people most commonly left behind high-end cellphones, laptops, tablets, wallets, smart watches, gold and diamond jewellery, cameras, Bluetooth headphones, earpods, sunglasses, reading glasses and jackets.

Sources said flyers left behind luggage worth ₹10 crore at Delhi airport, ₹9 crore at Mumbai airport, ₹5 crore at Hyderabad airport and ₹2.5 crore at Calcutta airport in 2022.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ►

## Cost of airport amnesia: ₹100cr

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A CISF official posted at Calcutta airport said around 800-900 items were recovered every month but very few people came back to claim their belongings.

All retrieved items are kept in the lost-and-found section of an airport for a month before being transferred to the central storage unit where they are kept for 90 days. The airport authorities auction the items if they remain unclaimed for over a year from the date of recovery.

A former CISF director-general blamed the forgetfulness of flyers on the stressful modern life.

"Flyers are always busy multi-tasking and at the same time worried about flights or hassled by security checks. The moment they enter the airport, some start working on laptops while others keep speaking on mobile phones. Perhaps there is a lack of focus that makes them forget things," he said.

He recounted an incident where a couple left behind their two-month-old daughter at a cafeteria at Indira Gandhi International Airport lounge in 2013. The parents had stopped for coffee after flying in from Mumbai and walked away without their daughter. The cafeteria's staff alerted the CISF when the infant began wailing.

"Both of them were busy talking on the phone and left the airport without their baby. They realised it only after reaching their home in Ghaziabad and rushed back. So far it has been the most bizarre incident of forgetfulness we have come across at the airports," the former CISF DG said.

# Beware, parts of city to see cold-day conditions, rain

Tarun Rawat

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Parts of Delhi could get rain and see cold day conditions on Friday and Saturday, India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said.

A cold day is declared when the minimum temperature is below 10 degrees Celsius and the maximum is lower than the normal by 4.5 degrees or more.

There was a possibility of very light rain on Thursday night and there could be light to moderate showers on Friday and Saturday.

Safdarjung, the city's base station, saw dense fog on Wednesday with the lowest visibility of 100 metres.

Palam saw moderate fog with visibility dipping to 300 metres. Over 20 trains were delayed due to fog. Some flights were delayed at Delhi airport that reported moderate fog. An airport official said the delays happened due to adverse weather conditions at the origin airports.

The maximum temperature on Thursday was 24.1 degrees Celsius, three degrees above normal. It was 1.7 degrees higher than Wednesday's maximum temperature. The minimum temperature was 8.2 degrees Celsius, one degree above normal.

The maximum temperature is predicted to dip to 20 degrees Celsius on Friday and Saturday. "A western disturbance and its interaction with easterly winds is likely to cau-



**COLD AND POLLUTED, A DOUBLE WHAMMY**

**Over 20 trains were delayed due to fog. Some flights were delayed at Delhi airport that reported moderate fog**

se light to moderate rainfall or thunderstorms over north-west and central India in the two days. Delhi is likely to record light to moderate rain, and isolated areas may witness cold day conditions," a Met official said on Thursday.

IMD has sounded a yellow alert for light to moderate rain and cold day conditions on Friday and Saturday.

"A western disturbance lies as a trough in middle tropospheric westerlies. It is very likely to interact with lo-

wer-level easterly winds over central parts of the country, leading to high moisture feeding from the Arabian Sea as well as the Bay of Bengal mainly during Dec 27 and 28. Under the influence of these systems, isolated to scattered rainfall, accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds (wind speed 30-50 kmph) is likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh, east Rajasthan, Madhya Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh on Dec 27 and 28," IMD said in its bulletin.

In this Dec so far, Safdarjung has logged 3.5 mm of rainfall as against the month's normal of 8.1 mm.

In Dec last year, the city recorded just 'trace' rainfall, and the month ended with a 100% rain deficit.

## Cops take action against 9 cabbies at airport in 2 days

V.Narayan@timesofindia.com

**Mumbai:** The arrest of a cabbie for duping an NRI by charging him Rs 2,800 for a 10-minute ride, comes around a week after an autorickshaw driver was held for robbing a 19-year-old US-based student from Sangli, Vishwajeet Patil, of Rs 3,500 on Dec 17.

D Vijay (49), the NRI who is visiting India after three years for a family reunion, was shocked when the cabbie, Vinod Goswami, displayed a fare of Rs 2,800 on a counterfeit app during their midnight journey. "The businessman was startled when the driver demanded Rs 2,800 for a mere 10-minute journey to a Vile Parle hotel. Goswami was arrested based on the mobile number and car details he gave Vijay, asking him to call him whenever he arrived next in Mumbai," said a Sahar police station officer.

After checking into his hotel, Vijay consulted the manager about the fare. "Upon reaching Nagpur, I mailed the complaint on Mumbai police's email ID after discovering from the hotel staff that their pickup service costs only Rs 700 and what I paid was four times more," Vijay told TOI.

Vijay said, "This seems to be a new way of cheating by showing a fake app that looks like Ola and Uber. People flying into Mumbai might be unaware about the fare. Before filing the complaint, I asked my friend in Mumbai to check the mobile number that the accused had given me asking to call him for his service whenever I land in Mum-

### OVERCHARGING AND THREATS

#### Past cases

**Dec 17** | Sahar police arrested autorickshaw driver Ritesh Kadam (26) for robbing a 19-year-old US-based chemical engineering student Vishwajeet Patil from Sangli of ₹3,500 on Dec 14 when the fare to Chembur showed ₹106 on his meter. The student was travelling from Mumbai airport. Kadam called someone in front of him and threatened him into paying up



**Sept 3** | Sachin Shukla filed a complaint with traffic police after autorickshaw driver Sanjay Pathak made him get down

midway when he asked to switch on the fare meter. He had hired the rickshaw from outside the domestic airport

**Nov 22, 2022** | A cab driver was arrested for molesting a 45-year-old woman at the airport after he allegedly tried to pull her hand when she refused to enter his cab

**Oct 2016** | Cab driver Manoj Gurnani (51) was arrested at the airport for asking a passenger to give him change for a ₹1,000 note; when the passenger handed him two ₹500 notes he replaced them with two ₹100 notes and asked for more



bai, and found it to be genuine. The details were then shared with cops who nabbed him."

The businessman recommended installing clear signage outside the airport to safeguard tourists. He said he noted the lack of an adequately staffed help desk at Mumbai airport.

Responding to the email complaint, Sahar police arrested Goswami within 12 hours and seized his vehicle.

They also deployed plainclothes officers to monitor the airport area for fraudulent drivers. "Over two days, we took action against nine such drivers and seized their vehicles for attempting to deceive airport passengers," said an officer. Fraudulent drivers usually operate between

late-night and early-morning hours, said the officer.

In the Dec 17 case of the student, Sahar police arrested Ritesh Kadam (26) using vehicle information from the RTO. The incident occurred when Patil, studying in the US, returned for holidays. Police confirmed Kadam's vehicle was seized and he admitted to targeting the student believing the newcomer wouldn't report the crime.

The officer said in both cases, the drivers assumed their victims wouldn't file police complaints. "Many such offences have occurred in the past but none of the victims like Patil or Vijay has approached the police, giving the confidence to such drivers to dupe or rob people who are new to the city," said an officer.

## Azerbaijani airliner crashes off Kazakh city, 38 killed



MOSCOW, Dec 25: An Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashed on Wednesday near the Kazakhstani city of Aktau, leaving 38 dead, according to officials.

The plane was en route from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry said in a Telegram statement that those on board included five crew. A total of 29 survivors, including two children, have been hospitalized, the ministry told Russia's state news agency, RIA Novosti.

Another Russian news agency, Interfax quoted medical workers as saying that four bodies have been recovered and emergency workers at the scene as saying that both pilots, according to a preliminary assessment, died in the crash.

## Azerbaijani jet ...

(Contd from page 1)

The Embraer 190 jet made an emergency landing 3 km from the city, Azerbaijan Airlines said earlier.

According to Kazakhstani officials, those onboard the plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhstani and three Kyrgyzstani citizens. – AP



# Corporate Communications Directorate

AMAR UJALA

DELHI

27 DECEMBER 2024

## देहरादून-दिल्ली के लिए एयर इंडिया जनवरी से शुरू करेगा नई उड़ान

जौलीग्रॉंट (देहरादून)। नए साल के पहले दिन से यात्रियों को देहरादून-दिल्ली के लिए एयर इंडिया एक और विकल्प देने जा रहा है। इस हवाई रूट पर एयर इंडिया 175 सीटर विमान से नई उड़ान शुरू करने जा रहा है। खास बात ये होगी कि यह विमान सप्ताह में सातों दिन उड़ान भरेगी। वर्तमान में एयर इंडिया का सिर्फ एक विमान शाम करीब 3:20 बजे यात्रियों को लेकर देहरादून एयरपोर्ट पर उतरता है, लेकिन एक जनवरी से कंपनी का विमान दिल्ली से यात्रियों को लेकर प्रतिदिन सुबह 8:35 बजे देहरादून एयरपोर्ट पहुंचेगा। यहां से यात्रियों को लेकर विमान सुबह 9:50 बजे वापस दिल्ली के लिए उड़ान भरेगा। देहरादून एयरपोर्ट पर दिल्ली के लिए इंडिगो, एलायंस एयर पहले से ही अपनी फ्लाइट संचालित कर रहे हैं, लेकिन दिल्ली के लिए अधिक पैसंजर होने के कारण एयर इंडिया नए साल से दिल्ली के लिए अपनी दूसरी उड़ान शुरू करने जा रहा है। संवाद

# रेटिंग अपग्रेड : 3 दिन में 9 फीसदी चढ़ा इंडिगो

बीएस संवाददाता  
मुंबई, 26 दिसंबर

इंडिगो का शेयर गुरुवार को फिर से चढ़ गया। दिन के कारोबार में यह 2.77 फीसदी चढ़कर 4,736.30 रुपये की ऊंचाई पर पहुंच गया। शेयर में लगातार तीसरे दिन तेजी दर्ज की गई। पिछले तीन कारोबारी सत्रों के दौरान यह शेयर 8.86 फीसदी चढ़ा है।

गुरुवार को इंडिगो का शेयर अंत में 2.35 फीसदी की तेजी के साथ 4,716.90 रुपये पर बंद हुआ। सेंसेक्स 78,472.48 के स्तर पर सपाट बंद हुआ। बीएसई-100 सूचकांक 0.15 फीसदी बढ़त के साथ 25,174.99 पर बंद हुआ।

इंडिगो के शेयर में तेजी घरेलू ब्रोकरेज फर्म इलारा कैपिटल के रेटिंग अपग्रेड करने के बाद आई है। ब्रोकरेज ने इस शेयर के लिए रेटिंग 'बेचें' से बदलकर 'खरीदें' कर दी है और कीमत लक्ष्य भी 3,847 रुपये से बढ़ाकर 5,309 रुपये कर दिया है जो 21 फीसदी की तेजी का संकेत है।

इलारा कैपिटल के गगन दीक्षित ने कहा, 'हमने वित्त वर्ष 2025/26/27 के प्रति शेयर आय (ईपीएस) अनुमान 2 प्रतिशत/27 प्रतिशत/15 प्रतिशत बढ़ा दिए हैं और वित्त वर्ष 2027 का ईवी-एबिटा आधारित कीमत लक्ष्य



3,847 रुपये से बढ़ाकर 5,309 रुपये कर दिया है।' इलारा कैपिटल के अनुसार, वित्त वर्ष 2028 तक मजबूत मांग, सालाना वृद्धि दर और प्रमुख हवाई अड्डों पर क्षमता विस्तार को ध्यान में रखते हुए रेटिंग में सुधार किया गया है। इलारा कैपिटल ने इंडिगो के शेयर की रेटिंग को अपग्रेड करने के लिए कई अन्य कारकों पर भी ध्यान दिया है।

## हवाई अड्डों पर विस्तार से वृद्धि को बढ़ावा

भारतीय हवाई अड्डा प्राधिकरण (एएआई) के आंकड़ों के अनुसार शीर्ष सात हवाई अड्डों के लिए भारत औसत उपयोग वित्त वर्ष की पहली छमाही में 90 प्रतिशत पर पहुंच गया। नए हवाई अड्डों और टर्मिनल उन्नयन के साथ हवाई अड्डों की क्षमता से वित्त वर्ष 2025-28 में सालाना 12

प्रतिशत की चक्रवृद्धि मांग की उम्मीद है।

## बेड़े के लिए बड़े ऑर्डर

इलारा कैपिटल के अनुसार वित्त वर्ष 2021 से बड़ी एयरलाइनों ने मजबूत मांग वृद्धि को पूरा करने और आपूर्ति को संतुलित करने के लिए बेड़े का मजबूत प्रबंधन किया है जिससे उनकी क्षमता का पता चलता है।

## अंतरराष्ट्रीय यातायात में देसी कंपनियों की बढ़ती हिस्सेदारी

कैलेंडर वर्ष 2024 में भारतीय कंपनियों के लिए अंतरराष्ट्रीय यातायात का योगदान 20 प्रतिशत रहा है, जो वित्त वर्ष 2025-28 में 12 प्रतिशत सीएजीआर से बढ़ने की उम्मीद है। भारतीय विमानन कंपनियां 4 प्रतिशत का ऊंचा सीएजीआर दर्ज कर सकती हैं।

## IndiGo stock takes off on rating upgrade

Elara Capital gives 'buy' rating after IndiGo's highest-ever traffic in November

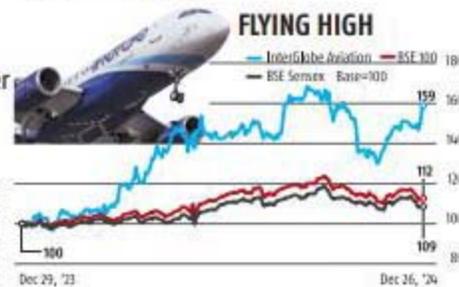
TANMAY TIWARY  
New Delhi, 26 December

IndiGo's share price rose 2.77 per cent to hit an intraday peak of ₹4,736.30 per share on Thursday as it gained momentum for the third straight session. Over the past three trading sessions, the stock has jumped 8.86 per cent, buoyed by the recent announcement of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

The country's aviation regulator announced that November 2024 saw the highest-ever traffic in the history of Indian domestic aviation. Reports indicate that IndiGo achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first airline in India to carry over 10 million passengers in a month. Of this, 9.07 million were domestic travellers, while the rest consisted of international passengers.

This also marked IndiGo's highest-ever domestic passenger count since its inception 18 years ago, surpassing the previous record of 8.64 million in October 2024 and 8.52 million in December 2023. December 2024 is expected to set another record. The airline's share settled at ₹4,716.90, up 2.35 per cent for the day, while the broader BSE Sensex settled flat with a negative bias at 78,472.48 levels. The BSE 100 ended 0.15 per cent higher at 25,174.99. The rally in IndiGo's share price followed a rating upgrade from domestic brokerage Elara Capital. The brokerage upgraded the stock to 'buy' from 'sell' and raised the target price to ₹5,309 from ₹3,847, indicating an upside of 21 per cent.

"We raise FY25E/26E/27E earnings per share (EPS) estimates by 2 per cent/27 per cent/15 per cent and upgrade FY27E enterprise value/



Source: Bloomberg, BSE

earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EV/Ebitda)-based target price (TP) to ₹5,309 (from ₹3,847), on one-year forward EV/Ebitda of 30.0x (from 8.0x)," said Gagan Dixit of Elara Capital.

According to the brokerage, the upgrade was led by strong demand growth till FY28E, given capacity expansion at major airports and the return of the Pratt & Whitney (P&W) fleet, even as competitors face constraints to aggressively add capacity. On the flipside, key risks to the rating are a jump in crude oil prices to above \$90/bbl and a delay in return in operations of the Aircraft on Ground (AOG) fleet.

### Expansion at major airports

The weighted average utilisation for the top seven airports peaked at 90 per cent in H1FY25, according to Airport Authority of India (AAI) data. With new airports and terminal upgrades, airport capacity is expected to support a 12 per cent demand CAGR in FY25E-28E. Historical trends suggest that following the opening of a new airport in Goa and the addition of a second runway in Bengaluru, respective demand grew 23 per cent and 9 per cent in a year, outperforming pan-India growth by 1,445 basis points (bps) and 838 bps, respectively.

Constraints at major airports

(excluding Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad) may reemerge beyond FY28, preventing over-supply. To sustain a 10 per cent plus demand CAGR over the next decade, analysts at Elara Capital said, India will require at least 12 additional airports with a 10 million plus passenger capacity. By comparison, China not only has about 300 per cent more airports handling 10 million plus passengers than India but also a higher share of such airports in the total (15 per cent in China versus about 7.5 per cent in India).

### Large orders to drive fleet addition

According to Elara Capital, since FY21, large carriers have demonstrated their ability to manage fleet retirements to balance supply while leveraging robust 1,600 plus orders to meet strong demand growth.

According to IndiGo's Q2FY25 call, aircraft on ground is expected to decrease from the current high-60s to the mid-40s by Q1FY26. A strike at Boeing's 737 Max production facility has delayed ramp-up, limiting monthly aircraft deliveries to Air India to four in H1FY25E (compared to four in H1FY25 and greater than six in H2FY24), creating an opportunity for IndiGo to gain market share, Elara Capital highlighted in a note.

# 38 dead after Azerbaijan Airlines plane crashes in Kazakhstan

Pilots attempt emergency landing after bird strike

MOSCOW, AP

**K**azakhstan officials say 38 people have died after an Azerbaijani airliner crashed on Wednesday near the Kazakhstan city of Aktau.

Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbaev disclosed the death toll while meeting with Azerbaijani officials, the Russian news agency Interfax reported.

Azerbaijan's prosecutor general's office said previously that 32 of the 67 people on board the plane had survived.

The Embraer 190 was en route from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus.

Preliminary information showed that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board, Russia's state news agency RIA



Emergency specialists working at the crash site of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane near the city of Aktau, Kazakhstan on Wednesday. REUTERS

Novosti quoted Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, as saying.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry said in a Telegram statement that those onboard included five crew. A total of 29 survivors, including two children, have been hospitalized, the ministry told RIA Novosti.

Another Russian news agency, Interfax, quoted medical

workers as saying that four bodies have been recovered and emergency workers at the scene as saying that both pilots died.

The plane crashed while attempting an emergency landing 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) from Aktau, Azerbaijan Airlines said.

The Prosecutor General's Office said that the number of

32 survivors wasn't final, and according to Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry some of them were in critical condition. The number of survivors could mean that over 30 people may be dead.

According to Kazakh officials, those aboard the plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhs and three Kyrgyzstan nationals.

Mobile phone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground in a fireball. Other footage showed part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft, lying upside in the grass. The footage corresponded to the plane's colours and its registration number.

Some of the videos posted on social media showed survivors dragging fellow passengers away from the wreckage.

Flight-tracking data from FlightRadar24.com showed the aircraft making what appeared to be a figure-eight once nearing the airport in Aktau, its altitude moving up and down substantially over the last minutes of the flight before impacting the ground.

FlightRadar24 separately said in an online post that the aircraft had faced "strong GPS jamming", which "made the aircraft transmit bad ADS-B data", referring to the information that allows flight-tracking websites to follow planes in flight. Russia has been blamed in the past for jamming GPS transmissions in the wider region.

# The world's busiest airline routes are largely in Asia

Seven of the world's 10 busiest international airline routes connected destinations within the Asia-Pacific region, according to a report by aviation data provider OAG.

Hong Kong to Taipei is the world's busiest international flight route with a total of 6.8 million available seats. In second place is Cairo to Jeddah, while Seoul to Tokyo rounded off the top three with 5.4 million scheduled seats.

"With the Asia Pacific region very close to a full recovery, the busiest routes are concentrated



PIC: GETTY IMAGES

in the familiar major hubs of Hong Kong, Seoul and Singapore," said John Grant, chief analyst at OAG.

## A new hub emerges

To determine the busiest routes, OAG analysed the volume of scheduled airline seats from January

to December 2024. The routes listed reflect round trip flights rather than one-ways in a single direction.

"One of the most interesting developments is the growth in Middle East markets, with a particular emphasis on Saudi Arabia," Grant added.

Surprisingly, it isn't businesspeople flying between corporate hubs that is driving the largest flight volumes in the Middle East. Rather, it's travellers heading between Jeddah and Cairo, a route that seems to point mostly to leisure vacations, proving that leisure continues to outshine corporate trips four years after the pandemic brought it to a standstill.

## An old favourite

The top-10 is rounded off by a familiar route — New York to London — in 10th place. It is the only transatlantic trip on the list, featuring four million scheduled seats — a five per cent increase over 2019 levels — and the only listed route with points in either Europe or North America.

## Crowded skies: Top 10 busiest flights

- 
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>10</b> John F Kennedy International Airport, New York, to Heathrow Airport, London: 4.01 million                    | <b>5</b> Incheon International Airport, Seoul, to Kansai International Airport, Osaka: 4.98 million seats               |
| <b>9</b> Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Bangkok, to Changi Airport, Singapore: 4.03 million seats                 | <b>4</b> Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Kuala Lumpur, to Changi Airport, Singapore: 5.38 million seats             |
| <b>8</b> Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, Jakarta, to Changi Airport, Singapore: 4.07 million seats               | <b>3</b> Incheon International Airport, Seoul, to Narita International Airport, Tokyo: 5.4 million seats                |
| <b>7</b> Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Bangkok, to Hong Kong International Airport, Hong Kong: 4.2 million seats | <b>2</b> Cairo International Airport, Cairo, to King Abdulaziz International Airport, Jeddah: 5.47 million seats        |
| <b>6</b> Dubai International Airport, Dubai, to King Khalid International Airport, Riyadh: 4.3 million seats           | <b>1</b> Hong Kong International Airport, Hong Kong, to Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, Taipei: 6.8 million seats |



# Corporate Communications Directorate

FREE PRESS JOURNAL

MUMBAI

26 DECEMBER 2024

## Vadodara's 1st int'l flight by mid-'25

### FPJ NEWS SERVICE

VADODARA

Vadodara is set to make its debut on the international aviation map with the launch of the Vadodara-Dubai flight service by Air India Express, tentatively scheduled for mid-2025. This milestone will mark the city's first international flight, further elevating its connectivity and global reach.

#### Launch Timeline Linked to Aircraft Delivery

According to officials, the much-anticipated flight service depends on the arrival of Boeing 737 aircraft ordered by Air India Express. The delivery, which has been delayed, is now expected by March 2025. Once the aircraft is received, the airline will be able to commence operations on the Vadodara-Dubai route.

Preparations for the service are already underway.



Customs officers have been appointed, and immigration staff has received the necessary training to manage international passengers. These efforts ensure the airport will be fully equipped to handle international flights once the service begins.

#### State-of-the-Art Terminal Ready for Operations

Vadodara Airport boasts a world-class Integrated Terminal Building, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016.

Constructed at a cost of ₹160 crore, the terminal is designed to handle international operations. In March 2023, during his visit to Vadodara, Union Home Minister Amit Shah officially approved customs and immigration facilities, paving the way for international services.

#### Strategic Importance of Vadodara Airport

The inclusion of Vadodara Airport in the National Monetisation Pipeline highlights its strategic importance.

Among the 25 airports earmarked for leasing between 2022 and 2025, Vadodara Airport stands out for its potential to enhance Gujarat's aviation network. Currently, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) operates nine airports in Gujarat, while Ahmedabad's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport is managed under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model by the Adani Group.

#### Boost to Regional Development

The Vadodara-Dubai flight service is expected to significantly boost regional development. It will provide direct international connectivity to residents and businesses, opening up opportunities for tourism, trade, and investment. Additionally, the service will strengthen Vadodara's position as a key player in Gujarat's aviation and economic landscape.



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HINDUSTAN

DELHI

27 DECEMBER 2024

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## विमान कंपनी से संपर्क के बाद घर से निकलें

नई दिल्ली। दिल्ली एयरपोर्ट की तरफ से यात्रियों को मौसम को ध्यान में रखते हुए यात्रा करने की सलाह दी गई है। उन्हें बताया गया है कि अभी तक दिल्ली में विमान सेवा पर कोहरे का कोई असर नहीं है, लेकिन इसके बावजूद यात्रा पर निकलने से पहले अपने एयरलाइन से उड़ान के समय की जानकारी ले लें ताकि उन्हें किसी प्रकार की परेशानी ना हो।



# Corporate Communications Directorate

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THE HINDU

DELHI

27 DECEMBER 2024

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## Bureau of Immigration imposes penalties on IndiGo

InterGlobe Aviation, parent of India's largest airline IndiGo, said the Bureau of Immigration imposed fines worth ₹2 lakh for visa-related violations of two passengers. In a filing, the airline said it was exploring the possibilities of filing an appeal against the orders passed by the Bureau of Immigration. PTI

# Russian air defenses may have hit Azerbaijan plane, say investigators

## Reuters

letters@hindustantimes.com

**BAKU:** Russian air defences downed an Azerbaijan Airlines plane that crashed in Kazakhstan, killing 38 people, four sources with knowledge of the preliminary findings of Azerbaijan's investigation into the disaster told Reuters, on Thursday.

Flight J2-8243 crashed down on Wednesday in a ball of fire near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from an area of southern Russia where Moscow has repeatedly used air defence systems against Ukrainian drone strikes.

The Embraer passenger jet had flown from Azerbaijan's capital Baku to Grozny, in Russia's southern Chechnya region, before veering off hundreds of miles across the Caspian Sea.

It crashed on the opposite shore of the Caspian after what Russia's aviation watchdog earlier said was an emergency that may have been caused by a bird strike.

Officials did not explain why it had crossed the sea. The nearest Russian airport on the plane's flight path, Makhachkala, was closed on Wednesday morning.

One of the Azerbaijani sources familiar with Azerbaijan's investigation into the crash told Reuters that preliminary results showed the plane was struck by a Russian Pantsir-S air defence system.

Its communications were paralysed by electronic warfare systems on the approach into Grozny, the source said. "No

one claims that it was done on purpose. However, taking into account the established facts, Baku expects the Russian side to confess to the shooting down of the Azerbaijani aircraft," the source said.

Three other sources confirmed that the Azeri investigation had come to the same preliminary conclusion. Russia's Defence Ministry did not respond to a request for comment. Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister Qanat Bozymbaev said he could neither confirm nor deny the thesis that Russian air defences downed the plane.

Asked about the possibility that Russian air defences shot at the plane, the Kazakh transport prosecutor for the region where the plane came down said the investigation had not come to a firm conclusion yet.

The Kremlin, asked before the Reuters report about the idea that the aircraft had been shot at by Russian air defences, said that an investigation was ongoing and that it would be improper to comment until the inquiry came to its own conclusions. "It is wrong to build hypotheses before the conclusions of the investigation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Photos of the wreckage showed apparent shrapnel damage to the plane's tail. Aviation security firm Osprey Flight Solutions also suggested in a Wednesday alert that the footage and airspace conditions in southwest Russia point to possible anti-aircraft fire hitting the airliner.



Emergency specialists work at the crash site of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger jet near the Kazakh city of Aktau, on Wednesday. AFP

## Mourners honour 38 killed in Kazakh crash

### Agence France-Presse

letters@hindustantimes.com

**ASTANA:** Azerbaijan held a national day of mourning Thursday after a passenger jet from the flag carrier crashed in Kazakhstan killing 38 people.

Jalil Aliyev, the father of flight attendant Hokume Aliyeva, told AFP that this was supposed to have been her last flight before starting a job as a lawyer for the airline. "Why did her young life have to end so tragically?" the

man said in a trembling voice before hanging up the phone.

Eleven of the injured are in intensive care, the Kazakh health ministry said. Azerbaijan state news agency Azertac reported that 12 of the survivors were being flown to Azerbaijan.

A plane carrying nine injured Russian nationals, including a child, also arrived at Zhukovsky airport in the Moscow region on Thursday, Russia's emergency situations ministry said.

Azerbaijani President Ilham

Aliyev declared Thursday a day of mourning. National flags were lowered across the country, traffic across the country stopped at noon, and signals sounded from ships and trains as the country observed a nationwide moment of silence.

Aliyev's office said the president "ordered the prompt initiation of urgent measures to investigate the causes of the disaster".

"I extend my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the crash... and

wish a speedy recovery to the injured," Aliyev said in a social media post, on Wednesday.

A Kazakh woman told the local branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) she was near where the plane crashed and rushed to the site to help survivors.

"They were covered in blood. They were crying. They were calling for help," said the woman, who gave her name as Elmira. She said they saved some teenagers.

## IndiGo may add long-range planes earlier than 2027

**Jagriti Chandra**  
NEW DELHI

IndiGo may add wide-body planes earlier than 2027 when the brand new Airbus A350 aircraft join the fleet in order to address a “growing demand” for travel and a shortage of new planes globally, it said.

Industry sources said the airline plans to wet lease (or rent aircraft along with crew) six Boeing 787s from Norwegian airline Norse Atlantic and deploy them for its network from February.

Though the airline declined to confirm a possible wet-lease agreement with Norse Atlantic, it said, “IndiGo is exploring interim solutions for an earlier introduction of long-range aircraft to its fleet.”

The airline explained it was doing so because it is “well positioned to expand our geographic reach and serve the ever-growing demand for international travel to and from India” as well as to “keeping also in mind global supply chain challenges”.

Route and network opportunities related to the solutions are being explored, IndiGo said. Its fleet of more than 400 planes include the narrow-body A320 aircraft.

To help carriers like IndiGo, which also has 70-80 aircraft on ground due to issues with Pratt and Whitney engines as well as SpiceJet which too has been wet leasing planes to overcome maintenance related aircraft groundings, the DGCA on Tuesday notified revised norms allowing airlines to take planes on wet-lease for up to 18 months instead of six months permitted earlier.



# Corporate Communications Directorate

THE MORNING STANDARD

DELHI

27 DECEMBER 2024



Japan Airlines planes on the tarmac at Haneda Airport in Tokyo on Thursday | AFP

## Flights delayed as Japan Air systems malfunction

### TOKYO

JAPAN Airlines said its systems were up and running again after a cyberattack on Thursday caused delays to domestic and international flights.

"We have identified the cause and scope of the malfunction, and the system has been restored," said the airline, Japan's second biggest after All Nippon Airways.

The "large data attack" did not leak any customer information and safety was unaffected, Japan Airlines (JAL) said in a post on social media platform X.

Japanese media said it may have been a so-called DDoS attack aimed at overwhelming and disrupting a website or server.

Ticket sales for domestic and international flights departing on Thursday were suspended during the incident but have now resumed, JAL said.

Although the cyberattack did not cause major disruption, the airline earlier said that 24 do-

mestic flights had been delayed by more than half an hour.

Problems with the carrier's baggage check-in system caused delays at several Japanese airports, local media said. Separately, a transport ministry committee tasked with probing a fatal January 2024 collision involving a JAL passenger jet released an interim report on Wednesday blaming human error for the incident that killed five people.

The collision at Tokyo's Haneda Airport was with a coast guard plane carrying six crew members - of whom five were killed - that was on a mission to deliver relief supplies to a quake-hit central region of Japan. According to the report, the smaller plane's pilot mistook an air traffic control officer's instructions to mean authorisation had been given to enter the runway.

The captain was also "in a hurry" at the time because the coast guard plane's departure was 40 minutes behind schedule, the report said. *AFP*





# Corporate Communications Directorate

THE PIONEER

LUCKNOW

26 DECEMBER 2024

## Domestic air passenger traffic rises 12 per cent in November, IndiGo leads market share



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian airlines carried 1.42 crore passengers on domestic routes in November, nearly 12 per cent more compared to the year-ago period, amid rising air traffic demand.

In terms of domestic market share, IndiGo topped the list with a 63.6 per cent pie, followed by Air India (24.4 per cent), Akasa Air (4.7 per cent)

and SpiceJet (3.1 per cent). While all these carriers saw their share rise, the share of Alliance Air was unchanged at 0.7 per cent in November, according to the latest data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

“Passengers carried by domestic airlines during January-November 2024 were 1,464.02 lakh as against 1,382.34 lakh during the corresponding period of the previous year thereby registering an annual growth of 5.91 per cent and monthly growth of 11.90 per cent,” the watchdog said in its monthly report.

Domestic air passenger traffic was at 142.52 lakh in November compared to 127.36 lakh in the same period a year ago.

In October this year, domestic passenger stood at 1.36 crore. Air India completed the

merger of full service carrier Vistara with itself in November.

The On Time Performance (OTP) of scheduled domestic airlines - computed for the four metro airports at Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai - took a beating in November. IndiGo's OTP stood at 74.5 per cent while that of Akasa Air and SpiceJet touched 66.4 per cent and 62.5 per cent, respectively.

The OTP of Air India and Alliance Air were at 58.8 per cent and 58.9 per cent, respectively, the data showed. Further, the data revealed that 2,24,904 passengers were affected by delays in November. Carriers shelled out nearly Rs 2.90 crore towards facilitation.

Last month, a total of 624 passenger-related complaints were received by the scheduled domestic airlines.



## Corporate Communications Directorate

THE TELEGRAPH

KOLKATA

26 DECEMBER 2024

### 'Blinded' plane crashes, 29 live

London: An Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashed Wednesday near the Kazakhstani city of Aktau, killing 38 people and leaving 29 survivors, a Kazakh official said.

Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbaev disclosed the figures while meeting with Azerbaijani officials, the Russian news agency Interfax reported.

The Embraer 190 was en route from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus when it was diverted and attempted an emergency landing 3km from Aktau, Azerbaijan Airlines said.

Flight-tracking data from

FlightRadar24.com showed the aircraft making what appeared to be a figure-eight once nearing the airport in Aktau, its altitude moving up and down substantially over the last minutes of the flight before impacting the ground.

FlightRadar24 separately said in an online post that the aircraft had faced "strong GPS jamming", which "made the aircraft transmit bad ADS-B data", referring to the information that allows flight-tracking websites to follow planes in flight. Russia has been blamed in the past for jamming GPS transmissions in the wider region.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 ►



A part of the wreckage of the Azerbaijan Airlines plane at Aktau, Kazakhstan, on Wednesday. (Reuters picture)

### Plane crashes, 29 survive

► FROM PAGE 1

Speaking at a news conference, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said it was too soon to speculate on the reasons behind the crash, but said that the weather had forced the plane to change from its planned course.

"The information provided to me is that the plane changed its course between Baku and Grozny due to worsening weather conditions and headed to Aktau airport, where it crashed upon landing," he said.

Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said that preliminary information showed that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board.

According to Kazakh officials, those aboard the plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhs and three Kyrgyzstan nationals. Azerbaijan's prosecutor-general's office previously said that 32 of the 67 people on board had survived the crash, but told journalists that the number wasn't final. The Associated Press could not immediately reconcile the difference between the numbers of survivors given by Kazakhstan and Azerbaijani officials.

Mobile phone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground in a fireball. Other footage showed part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft, lying upside in the grass. The footage corresponded to the plane's colours and its registration number.

Some of the videos posted on social media showed survivors dragging fellow passengers away from the wreckage.

Azerbaijan Airlines said it would keep members of the public updated and changed its social media banners to solid black. It also said that it

would suspend flights between Baku and Grozny, as well as between Baku and the city of Makhachkala in Russia's North Caucasus, until its investigation into the crash has been concluded.

Azerbaijan's state news agency, Azertac, said that an official delegation of Azerbaijan's emergency situations minister, the deputy general prosecutor and the vice-president of Azerbaijan Airlines were sent to Aktau to conduct an "on-site investigation".

Aliyev, who was travelling to Russia, returned to Azerbaijan on hearing news of the crash, the president's press service said. He was due to attend an informal meeting of leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a bloc of former Soviet countries founded after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in St Petersburg.

Aliyev expressed his condolences to the families of the victims in a statement on social media. "It is with deep sadness that I express my condolences to the families of the victims and wish a speedy recovery to those injured," he wrote.

He also signed a decree declaring December 26 a day of mourning in Azerbaijan.

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke to Aliyev on the phone and expressed his condolences, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Speaking at the CIS meeting in St Petersburg, Putin also said that Russia's emergency ministry sent a plane with equipment and medical workers to Kazakhstan to assist with the aftermath of the crash.

Kazakhstani, Azerbaijani and Russian authorities said they were investigating the crash. Embraer told The Associated Press in a statement that the company is "ready to assist all relevant authorities".

AP

# Did Russia air defences bring down Azerbaijan aircraft?

Report Says Azerbaijan's Preliminary Findings Suggest Russian Pantsir-S May've Hit Plane By Mistake; Kremlin Warns Against Building Hypotheses Before Probe Results

As authorities in several countries tried to determine what caused the deadly crash of a passenger airplane in Kazakhstan, investigators and experts on Thursday were focusing on the possibility that a Russian air defence system had struck the plane, casting doubt on a Russian agency's contention that the jet had hit a flock of birds. Four sources with knowledge of the preliminary findings of Azerbaijan's probe into the disaster told Reuters that Russian air defences downed the plane killing 38 people. Flight J2-8243 crashed down on Wednesday in a ball of fire near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from an area of southern Russia where Moscow has repeatedly used air defence systems against Ukrainian drone strikes.

The Embraer passenger jet had flown from Azerbaijan's capital Baku to Grozny, in Russia's southern Chechnya region, before veering off hundreds of miles across the Caspian Sea. It crashed on the opposite shore of the Caspian after what Russia's aviation watchdog earlier said was an emergency that may have been caused by a bird strike. Officials did not explain why it had crossed the sea. The nearest Russian airport on the plane's flight path, Makhachkala, was closed on Wednesday.

One of the Azerbaijani sources familiar with Azerbaijan's investigation into the crash told Reuters that preliminary results showed the plane was struck by a Russian Pantsir-S air defence system. Its communications were paralysed by electronic warfare systems on the approach into Grozny, the source said. "No one claims that it was done on purpose. However, taking into account the established facts, Baku expects Russian side to confess to the shooting down of the Azerbaijani aircraft," the source said. Three other sources confirmed that the Azeri probe had come to the same preliminary conclusion.

Russia's defence ministry didn't respond. Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov said earlier in the day: "The investigation is ongoing. It is wrong to build hypotheses before the conclusions of the investigation."

Kazakh deputy PM Qanat Bozymbaev said he could neither confirm nor deny the thesis that Russian air defences downed

## WHAT HAPPENED

> Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 with 67 people on board, en route from Azerbaijani capital Baku to the Russian city of Grozny, is diverted for reasons unknown. It crashes, killing 38 people, while trying to land in Aktau, Kazakhstan

> Cellphone footage circulating online appears to show the aircraft making a steep descent before hitting the ground and exploding in a fireball. Rescuers rush 29 survivors to hospitals

> No explanation yet on why the plane crossed the Caspian Sea, when Baku and Grozny are to its west and Aktau is to its east

## WHAT THE COUNTRIES ARE SAYING

> Azerbaijan Airlines & Russian civil aviation body initially cite collision with flock of birds as cause

> Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev says weather forced the plane to change course

> Russian state news agencies reported plane diverted because of fog

> On Thursday, officials from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia, urge no speculation, say probe is on



## WHY DID THE PLANE CRASH?

**RADAR JAMMING?** Aviation experts say plane subjected to radar jamming and spoofing near Grozny, and for part of its journey it did not send radar information

**TECH ISSUE?** Flightradar24 says available data indicate plane had problems with altitude control, cites images from the crash site that it says shows 'puncture damage' on aircraft

**DRONE HIT?** On Wednesday morning, around the time the plane had been scheduled to land in Grozny, a series of drone strikes took place, according to residents and local media reports

• Video and images of plane after it crashed show perforations in its body that look similar to damage from shrapnel or debris. The cause of these holes has not been confirmed



**STRUCK BY RUSSIA?** Osprey Flight Solutions, an aviation security company, says the plane likely been struck by Russian air defences 'during an incident of misidentification'

• Some commentators allege the holes seen in the plane's tail section possibly indicate it could have come under fire from Russian air defence systems fending off a Ukrainian drone attack



A still image taken from a social media video shows flyers using oxygen masks inside plane



ned the plane. Asked about the possibility that Russian air defences shot at the plane, the Kazakh transport prosecutor for the region where the plane came down said the probe had not come to a firm conclusion yet.

Pictures of the plane wreckage showed what appeared to be

some sort of shrapnel damage to the tail section of the plane. Aviation security firm Osprey Flight Solutions said in an alert to airlines that footage of the wreckage and the circumstances around the air space in southwest Russia indicated the possibility that it was hit by some

form of anti-aircraft fire. Ukrainian military drones have targeted Russia's southern regions in recent months, triggering Russian air defences. Earlier Wednesday, Russian defence ministry had reported the downing of 59 Ukrainian drones over several regions. REUTERS & NYT