



AIR INDIA FLIES GROUNDED PLANE OUT OF SHARJAH

News / Airlines



Air India pilots flew back to India a plane grounded by authorities at Sharjah airport, prompting the national carrier to bar a senior captain from operating international flights for violating regulations.

The incident drew a sharp response from UAE's general civil aviation authority (GCAA), which threatened to ban the aircraft from entering the country's airspace. The carrier later rushed a senior official to Dubai for damage control, an AI official told HT.

The incident came weeks after a technician died after being sucked into the engine of an AI plane at Mumbai airport. HT had reported on February 5 that an AI pilot travelling as a passenger had obtained clearance from air traffic control for the flight.

In the latest incident on January 26, AI's flight 967 (Chennai-Thiruvananthapuram-Sharjah) arrived in Sharjah and was inspected by local authorities who found the plane's cargo net damaged, a nick in one of the tyres and engine blades.

"While these shortcomings were within the maintenance limit, they weren't documented properly. The official instructed the AI captain not to depart till formal rectification and proper documentation with referral numbers was made," the AI official said.

The captain, who had completed his duty hours, left for the hotel without informing the pilots who were to operate the return flight that the plane had been grounded. Oblivious of these facts, the other pilots operated the return flight.

“It was only after the plane was airborne and entering Muscat airspace that airport authorities realised the ‘grounded’ plane had taken off. Unlike cars, airplanes do not have keys and regulatory authorities expect pilots to be responsible (for their acts),” the official said.

AI management didn’t know about the incident till January 31 when the G CA A sought an explanation from the airline’ s safety department. An AI spokesperson said the inspection and observation of the Sharjah authorities were “routine ”.

“The pilot was advised to ensure observations were attended to before departure. There was a change of crew at Sharjah and all the observations were attended to by the maintenance agency,” the spokesperson said, adding that action against the captain “is an internal administrative matter”.

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