



EMERGENCY LANDING OF AIR INDIA AIRBUS A320 PLANE BRINGS TO FORE PILOTS' CONCERNS

News / Airlines



The emergency landing of a 21-year-old Airbus A320 aircraft of Air India in a close shave for 159 people on board here yesterday brought to the fore concerns raised by pilots that these "lethal snag-prone" aging planes endangered passenger safety.

As the incident triggered a debate over passenger safety, Union Minister Mahesh Sharma today refuted allegations that Air India was operating "faulty" aircraft, saying yesterday's incident of fire in a plane of the national carrier was not due to any "safety" issue.

More than 150 persons onboard the Air India flight from Varanasi had a close shave when one of the wheels of the Airbus A320 aircraft caught fire due to friction after it landed under emergency conditions at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) here due to a hydraulic failure.

Upto five passengers received "minor" injuries during evacuation, according to airport sources.

"Practically, this was not a safety failure. This (the incident) was not practically fire but a hydraulic system leak after landing. The rim of the plane got heated up due to the oil leak and some fuel,"

Sharma, the minister of state for civil aviation, said.

He said there was no question of taking any chance with the lives of passengers or aircraft crew, adding that, "We follow all the safety guidelines from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation."

Indian Commercial Pilots Association (ICPA), one of Air India's pilots body, had in March urged the DGCA to ground the national carrier's aging Airbus 320 fleet.

"The classic A320 aircraft, which are 26 years old, are being operated with repetitive snags endangering flight safety. The DGCA should not permit AI to operate these lethal snag-prone classic aircraft in lieu of passenger safety," the ICPA had said in a letter.

The letter was written following a 24-year-old Airbus A230 plane, operated by Lufthansa's budget arm Germanwings, crashing into a mountainside in the French Alps, killing all 150 people on board.

Sharma said that no aircraft by any carrier operates unless it obtained airworthiness certificate, adding, "whenever we get a smallest iota of doubt (about safety of the plane) we recheck the plane. The aircraft is allowed to fly only when it is given airworthiness certificate."

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