

ICAO updates global standards for aircraft accident investigations

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Dhaka: The Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has approved landmark changes to global aircraft accident investigation standards, aimed at preventing conflicts of interest from compromising safety findings.

The decision, announced on Friday, March 27, amends Annex 13 — Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation of the 1944 Convention on International Civil Aviation, reinforcing the independence, transparency, and credibility of aviation safety investigations worldwide.

ICAO noted that recent accidents linked to suspected unlawful interference raised concerns about whether investigations were conducted independently and brought to completion. In some cases, investigations were terminated or transferred to other organizations, resulting in delayed or missing final safety reports — limiting critical

lessons for future accident prevention.

Under normal circumstances, the responsibility for investigating an accident lies with the country in which it occurred, carried out by a specialized, independent authority. However, the amended standards now address situations where actual or perceived conflicts of interest may undermine confidence in the findings.

New measures available to states include delegating investigations to another state or a regional accident investigation organization, inviting ICAO and third-party states to observe proceedings, and providing timely, verified factual information to the public.

The amendment also stresses the importance of appropriate communication with accident victims and their families, directly or through their states, as part of a transparent investigative process.

Additionally, changes were approved clarifying that accident investigation authorities must have unrestricted and immediate access to all evidential material, removing any ambiguity that could allow authorities to restrict such access.

The amendment further aligns Annex 13 with updated provisions in Annex 19 — Safety Management, strengthening the role of accident investigation data in proactive safety management under state safety programs.

The amendments reflect several years of technical work through ICAO's Accident Investigation Panel and Safety Management Panel, incorporating feedback from a broad range of states and international organizations.

Amendment 20 to Annex 13 will become applicable on November 23, 2028, giving states sufficient time to incorporate the revised provisions into national laws, regulations, and procedures.

ICAO said it will support implementation through updated guidance material, revised manuals, and regional workshops involving accident investigation, judicial, and aviation security authorities.