

India, China resume direct flights after 5 years

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Dhaka: Passengers on the first direct flight between India and China in five years landed on Monday (Oct 27), as Asia's two biggest nations resumed air links suspended since 2020 amid the pandemic and border tensions.

IndiGo flight 6E1703 from Kolkata touched down in Guangzhou shortly before 4 a.m. (2000 GMT Sunday), marking the restoration of nonstop passenger services between the neighbours.

More routes, including from New Delhi to Shanghai and Guangzhou, are expected in November.

New Delhi said the move would boost "people-to-people contact" and help the "gradual normalisation of bilateral exchanges".

Relations have slowly improved since a deadly Himalayan border clash in 2020 that killed at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers.

"It was such a smooth and easy, lovable trip," said Rashika Mintri, a 44-year-old interior designer from Kolkata. "I could come again and again."

Captain Abhijit Mukherjee, who piloted the flight, said passengers previously had to transit through Bangkok or Singapore. "It adds up," he said.

"This direct flight was very smooth," he added, holding flowers presented on arrival.

Kolkata's Chinatown community welcoming the link, said, "Air connectivity will boost trade, tourism and business travel".

The resumption follows meetings between Indian and Chinese leaders in Russia last year and in China this August.

Analysts say it marks a "first step" in rebuilding ties as both sides cautiously ease tensions along their 3,500-km border, where troops remain deployed.

India continues to run a large trade deficit with China but has restricted Chinese investment and banned several apps, including TikTok, since 2020. This month, soldiers exchanged sweets during Diwali in a symbolic gesture of goodwill.

An Indian daily editorial said improving ties with Beijing "sends an appropriate signal" to Washington, even as "managing an increasingly assertive China remains India's long-term challenge."

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