

Air India cancels flight for Indian team charter

- A Monitor Desk Report

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New Delhi: Air India cancelled a scheduled flight from the US to India and used the Boeing 777 plane for running a charter to ferry the Indian cricket team back home from Barbados, prompting the civil aviation regulator to seek a response from the Tata Group-owned airline, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

A special Air India flight, chartered by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), is carrying the T20 World Cup-winning Indian team and support staff from Barbados in the Caribbean to Delhi.

The flight took off from Grantley Adams International airport in Bridgetown on Wednesday (July 3) and was scheduled to land in New Delhi on Thursday (July 4) at around 6 AM.

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) rules stipulate that an airline should not disrupt scheduled flights while operating a charter.

Air India had cancelled its flight AI 106, scheduled to operate the Newark-Delhi flight on July 2, according to people cited above.

A senior DGCA official said the regulator has asked Air India to clarify the steps taken to accommodate the stranded passengers. A carrier requires prior permission from DGCA for operating charter flights.

The people said DGCA had given special dispensation to the Air India plane crew to operate beyond their scheduled duty hours. The regulator allowed this on condition that no passengers would be inconvenienced, they said.

A spokesperson for Air India didn't respond to media queries.

A person aware of the development said the airline had informed passengers about the cancellation and made alternate arrangements for them.

"Some passengers were also accommodated on the flight from New York to Delhi and for the rest, hotel accommodations were given," the person said.

Ankur Verma, a passenger on the Newark-Delhi flight, said he wasn't provided any information by Air India.

"They did not inform me of the cancellation at all. When I reached out to them after getting to know of it on my own, they said they can offer me a flight on July 5, which I did not want to take as I have to reach on July 4. I have sought a refund," Verma told ET.

Although limited in number, charters are top revenue generators for airlines as they can charge more than individual or company contracts besides paying for the operation of an entire aircraft instead of just one or two seats, or a group of seats.

A hurricane warning had left the T20 World Cup-winning India team stranded in Barbados. The Bridgetown airport was closed since Sunday evening due to the hurricane.

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