

Air India flight returns due to clogged toilets

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Chicago : An Air India flight bound for Delhi was forced to return to Chicago O'Hare International Airport after most of its lavatories became unusable mid-flight, according to reports.

The incident caused significant discomfort for passengers and has sparked discussions about onboard hygiene and passenger conduct.

Flight AI126, a Boeing 777, departed from Chicago on March 5. Around one hour and 45 minutes into the journey, the flight crew reported issues with several lavatories.

As the flight continued over the Atlantic Ocean, the situation worsened, with eight out of 12 toilets becoming inoperable, according to Indian media reports.

Faced with the growing sanitation problem and the potential distress for passengers on the long-haul flight, the crew was forced to make the decision to return to Chicago. At that time the flight was close to European shores, but due to night operation restrictions at many European airports, returning to the origin airport was deemed the best

option, the airline said in a statement.

'Polythene, rags flushed down toilets'

The airline said on Monday their teams found polythene bags, rags, and clothes that had been flushed down and stuck in the plumbing, IANS added.

This led the lavatories - eight of the 12 -- to become unserviceable on AI126 flight operating from Chicago to Delhi on March 5, Air India said in a statement.

"We fully empathise with passengers who faced discomfort and whose travel plans have been affected by the flight's diversion," the airline added.

The flight had crossed over Greenland. The airline then decided to head back to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport after issues with the toilets were raised by the travellers.

According to the airline, about an hour and forty-five minutes into the flight, the crew reported some of the lavatories in Business and Economy Class to be unserviceable.

"Our teams found polythene bags, rags, and clothes that had been flushed down and stuck in the plumbing. This led the lavatories to become unserviceable," the airline said.

Subsequently, eight of the 12 lavatories in the aircraft became unserviceable, causing discomfort to all on board.

"By this time, the aircraft was overflying the Atlantic, leaving points in Europe as potential cities to divert to. However, due to restrictions on night operations at most of the European airports, it was decided to divert back to Chicago," the airline added.

Upon landing in Chicago, all passengers were provided immediate assistance, including hotel accommodation and alternative flight options to continue their journey to Delhi.

"While not found on AI126 of 05 March 2025, our teams have previously also found objects such as blankets, innerwear, and diapers, among other waste, having been flushed down the toilets on other flights," said Air India.

"We take this opportunity to urge passengers to use lavatories only for the purposes that they are meant for," an Air India spokesperson added.

Meanwhile, a Mumbai-New York flight of Air India, with 322 people on board, returned from Azerbaijan skies eight hours after take-off on Monday due to a bomb threat, which was later found to be a hoax. The security alert was sounded after a bomb threat was found written on a paper in one of the plane's lavatories, said a security official.

After a safe landing in Mumbai, the aircraft underwent mandatory checks by security agencies, which, after a thorough investigation, declared the threat to be a hoax, said an official.

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