

DGCA issues notice to Air India after flyer's death

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Mumbai : The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday (Feb 16) issued a show-cause notice to Air India after an 80-year-old passenger died of a heart attack on Monday morning when he was not provided a wheelchair. The DGCA has directed the airline to submit a report within seven days.

The passenger, B L Patel, and his wife, Narmadaben Patel, 76, had both requested wheelchairs for assistance upon disembarking from Air India's AI-116 flight from New York. In a statement, Air India said it had requested the husband to wait due to a shortage of wheelchairs, but he chose to walk alongside his wife.

Patil, a US citizen, collapsed near the airport health officer's office at the time of the immigration process at Mumbai airport. The staff took him to Nanavati hospital in Vile Parle West where he was declared dead.

The DGCA issued a notice citing non-compliance with civil aviation requirements provisions and violation of Aircraft Rules, 1937. According to Para 4.1.7 of the CAR, airlines are obligated to provide comprehensive assistance to such passengers, ensuring their seamless travel experience from the departure terminal to the aircraft and vice versa upon arrival.

AI sources said that there were 32 wheelchair passengers on this flight, but only 15 wheelchairs with accompanying staff on the ground waiting on the ground to help them. There were not enough staffers. Most airlines have reduced ground staff to cut costs. Due to wheelchair shortage, only one wheelchair assistant came for the Patels.

An Air India spokesperson said, "In an unfortunate incident, one of our guests flying from New York to Mumbai on February 12 fell ill while proceeding to clear immigration with his wife, who was in a wheelchair. Due to heavy demand for

wheelchairs, we had requested the passenger to wait till he was also provided with wheelchair assistance but he opted to walk along with his spouse. As advised by the airport doctor attending to him after taking ill, the passenger was immediately rushed to the hospital, where he was declared to have passed away. Air India is in constant touch with the family members of the bereaved, extending necessary assistance. Air India has a clearly laid down policy to offer wheelchair assistance to every passenger who requisitions for it during reservations.”

The DGCA has also advised all airlines to ensure that enough wheelchairs are available for passengers who need assistance during embarking or disembarking from the aircraft during their journey.

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