

Helicopter crash-lands near Kedarnath

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: A helicopter carrying pilgrims to Kedarnath was forced to make an emergency landing on a road in Rudraprayag district on Saturday (June 7).

According to official sources, the chopper, which had five pilgrims on board, made a hard landing on the Guptkashi-Gaurikund Highway near Barasu. The impact damaged a parked car and broke the tail portion of the aircraft. Fortunately, no passengers or bystanders were injured in the mishap.

According to the Uttarakhand Civil Aviation Development Authority (UCADA), the helicopter operated by Kestrel Aviation Private Limited had taken off from Sirsi with pilgrims for Kedarnath. The pilot had to make an emergency landing on a road due to a mechanical glitch. None of the passengers on board or any member of the public was injured in the mishap.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation has been informed about the incident. The other shuttle services on the route are operating as per the schedule, according to UCADA.

It is pertinent to mention here that eight companies are operating helicopter services to Kedarnath this year. Apart from ferrying pilgrims to and from Kedarnath, the helicopter services have so far also transported emergency medical cases from the high altitude shrine for necessary medical treatment.

It is for the fourth time in a month that pilgrims travelling by air on the Char Dham Yatra route had a close shave.

The hard landing of the helicopter on Saturday comes just about a month after another private helicopter on its way to Gangotri temple crashed near Gangnani in Uttarkashi district on May 8, killing six people including five women and the pilot, and leaving one male passenger seriously injured.

On May 12, a helicopter returning from Badrinath to Sersi with pilgrims on board was forced to make an emergency landing due to poor visibility in a school playground in Ukhimath. All pilgrims were safe. The helicopter took off again after about an hour when the weather improved.

On May 17, a heli ambulance from AIIMS Rishikesh crash-landed near the Kedarnath helipad in Uttarakhand due to damage to its rear part. Fortunately, all three occupants on board — a doctor, a pilot and a medical staff member — escaped unharmed.

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