

## **Kolkata Airport plans dedicated zone for helicopters, chartered flights amid surge in VVIP election travel**

- A Monitor Desk Report

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**Dhaka: Authorities at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport in Kolkata are planning a dedicated operational zone for helicopters and chartered flights to manage a sharp rise in non-scheduled flight movements ahead of upcoming assembly elections in the Indian state of West Bengal.**

Airport officials said the facility has become a major hub for political leaders traveling to campaign rallies, with chartered and helicopter movements increasing three to four times compared to normal periods.

The surge is linked to frequent visits by senior political leaders, including the country's prime minister, Narendra Modi, and union home minister, Amit Shah, who have already traveled to the poll-bound state multiple times since January.

Officials added that the prime minister is also expected to address another major rally at Brigade Parade Ground later this month, further increasing air traffic linked to campaign events.

To manage the spike, airport authorities are preparing a dedicated helicopter movement zone and additional infrastructure, including revolving doors for high-profile arrivals to allow several passengers to move through security areas simultaneously.

Under normal circumstances, the airport handles around five to six helicopter movements daily. However, with election activities intensifying, that figure has already doubled to roughly 10-12 flights each day. Officials expect the number to exceed 20 daily operations during peak campaign periods.

Compared with the 2021 assembly elections, when travel was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, officials described this year's movement as "record-breaking."

Security coordination has also increased among airport authorities, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), and state police to manage large crowds and motorcades accompanying political leaders.

Helicopters carrying VIP passengers are typically parked in designated areas away from public zones or commercial aircraft activity.

Before boarding, the aircraft undergo mandatory anti-sabotage checks by bomb disposal units and sniffer dogs. VIP passengers usually bypass regular terminal queues and proceed through a dedicated lounge, where specialized security screening is conducted by CISF personnel.

However, during the election period under the supervision of the Election Commission of India, baggage carried by political leaders is subject to inspection to prevent the transport of cash or prohibited items.

Operational protocols for such movements are defined by agencies including the Airports Authority of India, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

Officials said advance coordination meetings are usually held 24 to 48 hours before any VVIP flight movement, ensuring that the aircraft receives priority clearance and a protected airspace window during

arrival and departure.

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