

## US bound Air India flight diverted to Russia after engine glitch

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An Air India plane flying from Delhi to San Francisco has been forced to divert and land at an airport in Russia's far east after it developed a technical issue with one of its engines, the airline says.

The diversion of the Boeing 777 aircraft comes amid a global debate over the use of Russian airspace by some carriers, with the chief of United Airlines warning on Monday (June 5) of the dangers of a plane being forced to land in Russia with US citizens on board.

The 216 passengers and 16 crew onboard were being offered support on the ground and accommodated in local hotels for the night, Air India said.

US State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel Tuesday said it is "likely" there are US citizens onboard given its planned destination.

"We are aware of a US-bound flight that had to make an emergency landing in Russia and are continuing to monitor that situation closely," Patel said.

The airline said it planned to send a plane on Wednesday to pick them up and fly them to their original destination.

"The authorities are extending all co-operation in our effort to ensure that passengers safely reach their destination at the earliest," it said.

Air India said it could not share any passenger details.

Russia's aviation authority said it was checking on the plane's technical condition after landing at Magadan airport and it had given permission for the alternate flight to land there on Wednesday.

"At present, the question of passengers' stay and accommodation is being resolved by border, customs and regional authorities," Rosaviatsia said earlier in the day.

The airport at Magadan, a port town on the Sea of Okhotsk in Russia's far east, did not respond to a request for comment.

The diversion also raises questions over how quickly the \$US200-million (\$A301 million) Boeing 777, a high-profile US-built plane whose engines are made by General Electric, can be repaired amid US and European Union sanctions on exports of aviation items to Russia.

In 2018, a Norwegian Air Boeing 737 made an emergency landing in Iran with engine problems weeks after the US re-imposed sanctions and became stranded for more than two months.

The 186 passengers and six crew were able to fly out of Shiraz the next day.

But despite initial assurances from the airline that the plane would also quickly be repatriated, a GE engine venture waited weeks for a US Treasury export licence.

The US Department of Commerce did not immediately reply to requests for comment.

Patel declined to say if the United States would approve export of repair parts if needed.

GE Aerospace said it was aware of the diversion and working with Air India to resolve the issue.

On Monday, Air India CEO Campbell Wilson defended the airline's use of Russian airspace, noting the critical role the industry plays in connecting economies, people and cultures.

"Air India, we operate according to the ambit of what is provided to us by the nation of India and not all nations agree," he said on a panel at the International Air Transport Association (IATA) annual meeting.

Russia has barred US airlines and other foreign carriers from using its airspace in retaliation for the US banning Russian flights over the United States in March 2022 after Russian troops entered Ukraine.

However, Air India and some Gulf-based, Chinese and African carriers continue to fly over Russia, making flying times shorter and US rivals uncompetitive.

In February, US senators urged President Joe Biden's administration to halt Chinese airlines and other non-US carriers from flying over Russia on US routes.

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