

IndiGo plane's nose damage incident: DGCA probe reveals severe weather, non-timely action in rerouting as probable causes

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The pilots successfully navigated the storm by flying manually amid wide speed variations and rapid altitude

changes, and landed safely at the Srinagar airport. (File photo)

Aviation safety regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation's investigation into the May 21 incident in which an IndiGo Airbus A321 aircraft suffered a damaged nose after flying through a severe hailstorm has identified severe weather and "non-timely action" in rerouting the aircraft to keep it clear of inclement weather as the probable causes, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol informed the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

The Airbus A321 aircraft operating the flight 6E 2142 with over 220 people on board—including a five-member Trinamool Congress delegation—had hit a severe hailstorm on its way to Srinagar from [Delhi](#), which led to a turbulent few minutes for those on board. The pilots successfully navigated the storm by flying manually amid wide speed variations and rapid altitude changes, and landed safely at the Srinagar airport. While no one on board the aircraft was injured, the [plane's nose](#), which houses the radome, suffered visible significant damage. The radome is an aerodynamic weatherproof fairing that protects the plane's radar antenna. It is manufactured with materials that allow transmission and reception of the radar radio waves with minimal interference.

"IndiGo A321 neo aircraft VT-IMD while operating flight 6E-2142 from Delhi to Srinagar encountered severe weather, including hail during cruise. After landing at Srinagar, the aircraft radome was found damaged. The incident has been investigated by Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The investigation has revealed that severe weather existing en-route and non-timely action in re-routing the aircraft clear of weather was the probable cause of the occurrence," Mohol stated in a written response to a question in the Upper House. No further information was provided by Mohol on the DGCA investigation into the incident.

Two days after the incident, the DGCA had said that the [pilots flying operating that flight](#) had requested the Indian Air Force Northern Area Control for deviation towards the India-Pakistan international border to avoid inclement weather, and later contacted the Lahore air traffic control (ATC) to briefly enter Pakistani airspace—a no-go zone for Indian aircraft—to circumvent the storm. Both these requests were denied, and the flight crew decided to go through the inclement weather and continue the journey to Srinagar, the DGCA had said then based on the pilots' statement.

"While cruising at FL360 (36,000 feet), aircraft entered hailstorm and severe turbulence near Pathankot. As per crew statement, they requested Northern control (IAF) for deviation towards left (International Border) due to weather on the route, however it was not approved. Later crew contacted Lahore to enter into their airspace to avoid the weather but the same

was refused too. Crew initially attempted to return back but as they were close to the thunderstorm cloud, they decided to penetrate the weather. Subsequently, they encountered hailstorm and severe turbulence. Crew chose to continue at same heading to exit the weather by the shortest route towards Srinagar (sic),” the DGCA had said on May 23.

At the time, sources in the Indian Air Force had said that the Northern Area Control’s advice to the pilots was within the frame of the ban on Indian aircraft in Pakistani airspace, adding that the flight was assisted immediately in coordinating its route diversion.

“The aircraft was immediately assisted in coordinating their route diversion by contacting Delhi Area and passing requisite contact frequencies of Lahore control for overflight weather diversion request. Once Lahore refused overflight clearance, and the aircraft proceeded towards Srinagar, the flight was subsequently professionally assisted till a safe-landing at Srinagar airfield by giving control vectors and groundspeed readouts,” the IAF sources said. Air traffic services at the Srinagar airport are also under the control of the IAF.

In the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack, as diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan deteriorated, Pakistan shut its airspace to Indian aircraft and airlines, banning them from overflying its airspace. In the case of the IndiGo Delhi-Srinagar flight, Lahore ATC did not allow the use of its airspace despite the urgent weather situation that the aircraft was grappling with in view of the airspace closure.

The aircraft departed from Delhi at 5:13 pm on May 21, according to flight tracking data. Around 45 minutes into the flight, when the aircraft was passing over the Pathankot area, the seat belt signs were switched on by the flight crew, which was followed by severe turbulence for a few minutes and a hailstorm hitting the aircraft’s fuselage. The aircraft landed at the Srinagar airport at around 6:30 pm. Given the damage to the nose of the aircraft, it was grounded in Srinagar for necessary maintenance and inspections.

According to the pilots’ statement to the aviation safety regulator, the aircraft sounded various technical warnings while navigating the thunderstorm. These included warnings of “angle of attack fault, alternate law protection lost, and backup speed scale unreliable”.

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