

FAA grants Southwest approval for Hawaii flights

Southwest Airlines has received Federal Aviation Administration authority to fly passengers to Hawaii after the government shutdown delayed regulatory approval.

The FAA granted the carrier the extended twin-engined operations authority (ETOPS) required to operate the overwater flights, the airline adds.

“We’ll finalise our plans for offering service to Hawaii, and we’ll publicly announce our timing for selling tickets and inaugurating flights to the Hawaiian Islands in the coming days,” a spokesperson for Southwest says in a statement.

The FAA confirms the approval in a statement, adding, “as standard practice, we will increase our surveillance of its operations for six months as service begins”.

The Dallas-based airline had hoped to sell tickets for Hawaii flights before the government shutdown in January delayed the process. It aims to offer flights between Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego and San Jose, and Honolulu, Kahului, Kona and Lihue, it has said.

Earlier this month Southwest said it intended to conduct a validation flight from Oakland to Honolulu using a Boeing 737-800.

Amazon.in Widgets

It's advantage Narendra Modi all the way

New Delhi: India's air strike early on Tuesday morning, well into Pakistan territory in reply to the Pulwama attack on Indian jawans earlier this month, could well change the narrative for the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2019 general election.

Noted economist Swaminathan Aiyar on Tuesday said India's pre-dawn air strikes on the terror camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) in a strong response to the Pulwama terror attack may have improved the prospects of the Narendra Modi BJP in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"I always rated Modi's prospects in the forthcoming elections as 50:50. This may now boost Modi's prospects," Swami told ETNow in an interview. He, however, said a lot will depend on how the situation evolves from here on. "The key thing to watch is how Pakistan responds," he said.

Reeling under the Rafale controversy, economic slowdown, growing unemployment, the alliance of Opposition parties taking a threatening shape and Priyanka Gandhi's entry into politics, the BJP had its back to the wall.

Tuesday's early morning air strike, destroying the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terror camp inside Pakistan, could put the BJP way ahead of others in the run-up to the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Within hours of the strike, an aggressive Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared at a public rally in Churu in Rajasthan: "I promise this that I will not let this country bow down. India is in safe hands."

Swami said Pakistan's economy is not in good condition, but that may not be relevant at this time, as the question of national honour is bigger than the economy.

He said this action is not a guarantee that there will not be any further terror attacks. "After Uri strike, there were more cases of infiltrations," he noted.

The Opposition, which was sharpening its knives to take on the government over the reported "intelligence failure" on the Pulwama terror attack, was not merely stumped but was all praise for the Indian Air Force.

Even as they chose to ignore the PM in their praise, a senior Congress leader pointed out: "No doubt Modi has surged ahead with the air strike." With the strike, Mr Modi has regained his image as a "strong and decisive" leader. A BJP leader said, "Now you know what the man with 56-inch chest can do."

BJP president Amit Shah tweeted, "I congratulate and salute the bravery and valour of our armed forces. Today's action further demonstrates that India is safe and secure under the strong & decisive leadership of PM @narendramodi."

...

Amazon.in Widgets

**Vietnam Airlines and
Cambodia's Ministry of**

Tourism ink co-operation agreement

National carrier Vietnam Airlines and Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism signed a tourism development co-operation agreement in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on Tuesday that runs through 2021.

The signing ceremony took place under the witness of Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen and General Secretary and President Nguyen Phu Trong, who ended his two-day working visit to Cambodia on Tuesday.

As one of airlines that carries the highest volumes of passengers to Cambodia, Vietnam Airlines said it would make an important contribution to the development of the tourism in "Southeast Asia's golden land" through this co-operation agreement.

According to the agreement, the airline will promote Cambodian tourism through fairs in collaboration with Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism to build common tourism products and organise workshops.

Vietnam Airlines will consider opening new routes connecting Ha Long Bay and Da Nang to Cambodia's destinations including Siem Reap, Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville.

The carrier will also support the provision of free tickets for Cambodian officials and experts attending workshops and training programmes for resource development; create employment opportunities at the airline for outstanding students in the tourism industry; implement marketing programmes; and introduce products to key markets to improve the quality of travel and accommodation services in Cambodia.

CEO of Vietnam Airlines Duong Tri Thanh said the co-operation between Vietnam Airlines and Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism

meant consolidating and expanding the fundamental relationship between the two countries.

“Vietnam Airlines is delighted to be the ‘air messenger’ along with Cambodia in the fields of aviation tourism and trade promotion, contributing to boosting the Cambodian economy,” Thanh said.

In 2018, the two-way passenger volume of Viet Nam and Cambodia on Vietnam Airlines was more than 700,000 seats.

Vietnam Airlines has operated the route connecting Viet Nam with Cambodia for more than 40 years. The carrier is currently operating two routes across Indochina and three direct routes to Cambodia including Ha Noi-Siem Reap, HCM City-Siem Reap and HCM City-Phnom Penh with a total frequency of 56 flights per week.

In addition, Cambodia Angkor Air also operates routes from Da Nang to Siem Reap, and between HCM City and Siem Reap, Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville, with a total frequency of 56 flights per week.

It is expected that from April 2019, Vietnam Airlines will run four flights per week on the Da Nang-Siem Reap route. Vietnam News/ANN

Amazon.in Widgets

SBI calls emergency meeting

on Jet Airways to thrash out contentious issues

State Bank of India, which leads the consortium of lenders for Jet Airways, has called an urgent meeting of its members on Wednesday to thrash out contentious issues between promoter Naresh Goyal and his joint venture partner Etihad Airways as well as resolve other matters with the banks.

According to sources, top executives of both the companies are expected to come for the discussion.

It is believed that Goyal, as well as Etihad group Chief Executive Officer Tony Douglas, has been invited for the meeting.

Etihad, according to sources, wants the size of the rights issue to be increased to Rs 5,000 crore instead of Rs 4,000 crore as envisaged in the bank-led provisional resolution plan. That is because it wants to limit its exposure to Rs 1,400 crore and peg its stake in the company to its current level of 24 per cent. It wants banks and another financial investor (talks are on to bring in the National Infrastructure and Investment Fund) to bring in more funds – from the earlier planned Rs 2,000 crore now to Rs 3,000 crore.

It does not want to be designated promoter of the company. Instead, it wants Goyal to be the sole promoter, a condition not acceptable to him because he is on the brink of losing control of the management of the company and might not have board membership.

Etihad also wants Goyal to pledge his shares in Jet as well as Jet Privilege Pvt Ltd to the banks and raise money, again a move not acceptable to Goyal.

The Gulf carrier has been pitching for the lenders and the new investor taking 51 per cent in the company.

It has sought the right of first refusal after one year in the case of a sale of shares and has asked SBI to get an endorsement from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) that in case it exercises this right, the mandatory open offer requirement will not be triggered.

However, Sebi is not willing to make an exemption and neither is SBI willing to give the right of first refusal.

A Jet Airways spokesperson, when contacted, said: "In line with its policy, Jet Airways does not comment on speculation".

An e mail query to Etihad did not elicit any response.

However, in a joint statement on Monday Jet Airways and Etihad said they were working together on a resolution plan to make the airline robust and viable. Etihad Airways is learnt to have abstained from voting on resolutions to convert Jet Airways' debt into equity in the extraordinary general meeting on Thursday.

The airlines wanted clarity on all the questions they had raised before they endorsed the resolution plan.

The lenders, however, may seek additional securities, including share pledges or guarantees from promoters, while sanctioning loans, and are not planning to move the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) at present. A delay in clearing the resolution plan would make it difficult for the airlines to negotiate interim funding from banks. The lenders' consortium is considering a Rs 500-crore loan, but a final decision is yet to be taken, Punjab National Bank Managing Director Sunil Mehta had said on Friday.

Amazon.in Widgets

Flights axed, diverted as India-Pakistan tensions soar

Numerous flights were cancelled or diverted Wednesday after Pakistan closed its airspace and India shut airports, as soaring tensions between the nuclear-armed rivals stoked fears of a full-blown conflict.

The closures came after Pakistan said it had shot down two Indian Air Force planes in its airspace over disputed Kashmir. India said its forces shot down a Pakistani fighter jet, but also lost one of its own planes.

The air traffic disruption was affecting routes passing through the region that are popular with Western holidaymakers, with an industry body saying that a huge number of flights to Southeast Asia may have to be diverted.

Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority and the military said the country's entire airspace had been closed, with a CAA source telling AFP that all airlines had been notified to "suspend their operations in Pakistan until further notice".

Pakistan International Airlines, the country's flag carrier, warned that "flights may be affected due to closure of Pakistan commercial air space".

In India, at least six airports were shut – Srinagar, Jammu and Leh in Kashmir and Amritsar, Chandigarh and Dehradun, and a vast area of airspace north of New Delhi was closed to civilian flights.



Scores of flights were cancelled and many between Asia and Europe that would normally fly over Kashmir have been diverted, aviation company officials said on condition of anonymity.

The Aviation Authority of India did not respond to requests for comment.

A map of live air traffic in the area by monitoring group Flight Radar showed almost no flights over Pakistan or in a strip of land across the border on the Indian side.

“International flights that transit between Indian and Pakistani airspace now being affected,” the group said on Twitter.

“Some flights returning to origin, while others appear to be seeking alternate routing.”

A spokesman for the International Air Transport Association, an industry group representing many of the world’s airlines,

did not immediately have details about all the affected flights.

But he said about 220 flights usually pass through Pakistani airspace each day between Europe and Southeast Asia.

“Alternative routes are available for the flights impacted by the closure of Pakistan airspace,” he said.

India and Pakistan’s ties have been under intense strain since a February 14 suicide bombing in Indian Kashmir that killed 40 troops.

Tensions escalate as Indian airstrike hits inside Pakistan

Tensions escalated sharply on the Asian subcontinent Tuesday with nuclear-armed neighbors Pakistan and India trading accusations and warnings after a pre-dawn airstrike by India that New Delhi said targeted a terrorist training camp.

The Feb. 14 attack was the worst on Indian forces since the start of the 1989 insurgency in Kashmir and came as anticipation rises for an Indian general election, which is due by May.

Addressing a rally of former soldiers in the Indian state of Rajasthan hours after the airstrike, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India was in “safe hands.”

“I vow that I will not let the country bow down,” he said.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi condemned Tuesday’s incursion, saying New Delhi had “endangered” peace in the region for political gains.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan dismissed India’s account of the airstrike on a terrorist training camp as “self-serving, reckless and fictitious.”

Earlier this month, Khan had authorized the army to “respond

decisively and comprehensively to any aggression or misadventure” by India, after New Delhi vowed a “jaw-breaking response” to the Kashmir suicide bombing.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo encouraged both countries to exercise restraint and avoid escalation.

A statement from his spokesperson’s office said Pompeo spoke to government ministers of both countries and underscored to Pakistan the urgency of taking meaningful action against terrorist groups on its soil.

Pakistan has vowed to help investigate the suicide bombing and to take action against anyone found to be using Pakistani soil for attacks on India.

It also offered to hold a dialogue with India on all issues, including terrorism.

Kashmir, which is split between the two countries but claimed by each in its entirety, has been the cause of two wars between the neighbors.

They fought a third war in 1979 over East Pakistan, which gained independence with the help of India and became Bangladesh.

Insurgents in Indian-controlled Kashmir have been demanding either outright independence or union with Pakistan.

India routinely accuses Pakistan of arming and training militants who cross the mountainous Himalayan region.

The Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing. The bomber, who made a video beforehand, was a resident of Indian-controlled sector of Kashmir.

Muhammad Amir Rana, a security analyst and executive director of the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies,

urged the international community to move quickly to de-escalate tensions.

“It’s quite critical and it is important that the international community intervene quickly to start a peace process between India and Pakistan,” he said, adding that the United States, China and Russia should take the lead.

China, a close ally of Pakistan, urged both sides to show restraint.

“We hope that both India and Pakistan can ... take actions that will help stabilize the situation in the region and help to improve mutual relations,” said China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang.

Pakistan said Tuesday that Indian warplanes crossed into its airspace over the ceasefire line in Kashmir and dropped payloads, after tensions spiked between the nuclear-armed neighbours over the disputed region.

“Indian Air Force violated Line of Control,” Pakistan military spokesman Major General Asif Ghafoor tweeted, referring to the de facto border between Indian- and Pakistani-administered Kashmir.

Pakistan Air Force jets were scrambled in response to the incursion, Ghafoor said.

“Facing timely and effective response from Pakistan Air Force (the Indian aircraft) released payload in haste while escaping near Balakot. No casualties or damage.”

He did not provide further information on the location, and whether it was a town of that name in Pakistani-administered Kashmir or further into its territory.

Ghafoor tweeted images of what he said was the payload, showing what appeared to be pieces of metal in a heavily forested area.

There was no immediate comment from New Delhi.

However, Indian news reports said that air force jets hit multiple targets including camps run by Jaish-e-Mohammad, the Islamist group that claimed the February 14 suicide attack in Kashmir that sent tensions soaring.

“Top government sources said that there were nearly 200 casualties from the (Indian Air Force) strike,” private broadcaster CNN News 18 said.

New Delhi had threatened to retaliate after the deadliest attack in three decades in Kashmir killed more than 40 Indian paramilitaries.

Islamabad has said it had nothing to do with the attack, and warned it will retaliate if India launches any strike.

JeM is one of several anti-Indian groups fighting in Kashmir, which has been claimed by both India and Pakistan since independence in 1947.

They have fought two of their three wars over the Himalayan territory.

Pakistan’s interior ministry announced last week that authorities had seized control of a complex believed to be the JeM headquarters.

Amazon.in Widgets

Makkaḷ Needhi Maiaḡ growing

in stature : Kamal Haasan

Tirunelveli (TN): Addressing a party rally late on Sunday night, Haasan, without directly naming any outfit, said he was being targeted as his party was growing in stature.

One of the attacks was calling his party “the BJP’s B team,” he said.

Rejecting the claim that his party was BJP’s “B team,” Makkal Needhi Maiam chief Kamal Haasan said it was being targeted as they were growing in stature.

Refuting it, he said, “I am not a B team for anyone, this is Tamil Nadu’s A team.”

Days ago, the DMK organ ‘Murasoli’, had alleged that he was accusing it of corruption due to “BJP’s pressure”.

During such times, only his party would stand upright – without giving room for horse trading – for the Tamil Nadu people, he said.

His party’s voice will be heard in such a situation, he said, adding “we cannot say what is going to happen,” an apparent reference to the Lok Sabha poll outcome.

During such times, a voice should be heard saying that at least the Prime Minister should be changed, Haasan said.

“Let us see if there is humility if another person takes over,” he said in an attack perceived to be aimed at the BJP.

He said that he was not facing the Lok Sabha election alone and pointed to the huge crowd and sought donations from them to face the polls.

“It will be an investment for the future,” he said.

Describing himself as a fan of Mahatma Gandhi, he said the Father of the Nation was his mentor and because of him, he founded the party.

On a sword being gifted to him, he said it was an old practice, adding only "ahimsa is a big valour."

Outlining his party's principles, he said: "People's welfare alone is MNM's ideology."

Redeeming the lost political dignity and ethos of the Tamil people, upholding secularism, poverty alleviation and ensuring the education of international standards are among the party ideals, he said.

...

Amazon.in Widgets