

DGCA orders urgent software fix on Airbus A320 aircraft

IndiGo, Air India and Air India Express move swiftly to prevent delays and cancellations

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An Air India Airbus A321 aircraft takes off. Airbus said a recent event involving an Airbus A320 family aircraft revealed that intense solar radiation may corrupt data critical to the functioning of flight controls following which it has identified a “significant number of Airbus A320 Family aircraft” that may be impacted. File image used for representation only. | Photo Credit: Reuters

Airlines moved swiftly to implement a software fix on the Airbus aircraft in their fleets after India’s aviation regulator ordered that planes which had not completed the modification by Sunday morning must be grounded. The order was based on an alert from the aircraft manufacturer.

“This is to be ensured that no person shall operate the product which falls under the applicability of this Mandatory Modification,” said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation’s order, issued early on Saturday. The grounding will kick in from 5:30 a.m. on Sunday, allowing airlines enough time to carry out rectification action in between flights as well as move aircraft from smaller airports to bigger ones where they have a maintenance base.

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The DGCA order followed an alert from Airbus on Friday evening about a recent event involving an Airbus A320 family aircraft, which had revealed that intense solar radiation can corrupt data critical to the functioning of flight controls. Airbus said it had identified a “significant number” of Airbus A320 family aircraft that may be impacted. This would entail either a software or a hardware modification for nearly half of the 12,000 A320 family aircraft worldwide, operated by about 300 airlines, it said. The A320 family includes the A319, A320 and A321 aircraft.

Quick compliance

In India, the alert will impact 338 planes being operated by IndiGo (200), Air India (113), and Air India Express (25). In less than 24 hours, that is, by Saturday evening, the software modification had been carried out in 270 of these aircraft, averting major disruptions during the peak travel season.

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The fix involves a software downgrade on the affected aircraft that takes airlines upto 40 minutes to implement. Older aircraft, such as the Airbus A319s, could possibly require a hardware replacement, industry sources explained.

The Airbus alert followed an incident aboard a JetBlue flight between Mexico and Newark on October 30 when the aircraft experienced an uncontrolled descent for approximately four to five seconds before the autopilot corrected the trajectory. The investigation traced the problem to a flight system called ELAC (Elevator and Aileron Computer), which sends commands from the pilot’s side-stick to elevators on the tail section of the aircraft. These in turn control the aircraft’s pitch or nose angle.

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#UPDATE

At Air India, safety is top priority. Following EASA and Airbus directives for a mandatory software and hardware realignment on A320 family aircraft worldwide, our engineers have been working round-the-clock to complete the task at the earliest. We have already completed [Show more](#)

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“Airbus acknowledges these recommendations will lead to operational disruptions to passengers and customers. We apologise for the inconvenience caused and will work closely with operators, while keeping safety as our number one and overriding priority,” the European aircraft manufacturer said on Friday evening.

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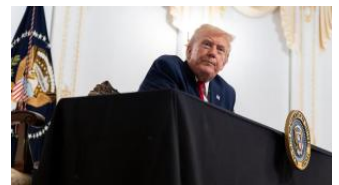
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