

ಪತ್ರಿಕಾ ತುಣುಕುಗಳು

PAPER CLIPPINGS

9

ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: prime ministers

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: The Hindu

ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE: 11/12/2022

Seaplane makes a splash on Sabarmati

PM makes the first trip on 50-year-old aircraft; Civil Aviation Ministry says safety norms complied with

MAHESH LANGA
JAGRITI CHANDRA
AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched the country's first seaplane service between the Statue of Unity near Kevadiya in Narmada district of Gujarat and the Sabarmati riverfront in Ahmedabad. He took the maiden flight of the twin-engine plane from pond-3 close to the Sardar Sarovar Dam and landed on the riverfront, where a water aerodrome has been set up.

The 19-seater seaplane will be used for flights between the two points as part of the regional connectivity scheme. Initially, the plane will make four trips a day.

Age limit clause

The twin-engine Otter aircraft operated by SpiceJet for the seaplane service is nearly 50 years old, though the Directorate General of Civil Aviation has reservations on allowing planes older than 20 years to be imported.

Further, SpiceJet has wet-leased the aircraft from the Maldives Island Aviation Services, a wholly government owned entity, which means that both the aircraft and its



First ride: The seaplane with Prime Minister Narendra Modi aboard lands at the water aerodrome on the Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad on Saturday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

crew belong to a foreign entity. The aircraft bears the Maldivian registration code 8Q ISC.

This arrangement for renting aircraft and crew is allowed by the DGCA only in "emergency situations" and its rules prohibit their use for "capacity or route expansion".

The plane saw its first flight on July 14, 1971 and over the past five decades, the aircraft has changed hands 13 times with owners in Canada, Turkey and Sri Lanka.

"All safety regulations

have been complied with in order to commence seaplane operations," a spokesperson of the Civil Aviation Ministry said in response to a question on violation of DGCA rules.

An airline spokesperson said the plane had undergone regular maintenance and overhaul, adding, "all the required SoPs are in line with operational guidance on seaplane operations."

The DGCA's Civil Aviation Requirements, or rules, require pressurised aircraft imported and used in passen-

ger services not to be older than 18 years. But for unpressurised aircraft such as the one used on Friday, a decision is taken on a case-by-case basis though it doesn't "allow such aircraft which are more than 20 years old". The age limit for cargo aircraft is 25 years.

The DGCA explains that the reason for imposing age restrictions is to ensure that the aircraft "does not have problems of corrosion, fatigue, metal fatigue, cracks" which can be missed even during major maintenance

checks. However, it recognises that foreign countries operating aircraft older than the design-economic life may be better equipped than India to ensure their proper upkeep and modifications as per advice of manufacturers and regulatory bodies.

Maintenance costs

"The DGCA would have done their due diligence to allow the aircraft to be imported. Old aircraft aren't necessarily unsafe as long as they are maintained as per OEM's (Original Equipment Manufacturer) requirements and updated from time to time. As aircraft get old, they become expensive to maintain, which is primarily why airlines do not fly them for too long," said Vinamra Longani, Head of Operations at Sarin & Company, a law firm that specialises in aviation-related matters.

Though SpiceJet and the Civil Aviation Ministry claim that this is the first-ever seaplane journey in the country, Mr. Modi had undertaken a similar ride from the Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad to Dharoi dam in Mehsana while campaigning for the Gujarat election in 2017.