



# QUESTIONS RAISED OVER RUNWAY SAFETY OPERATIONS

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**The tragic incident at Mumbai airport**, where a technician of Air India airlines was killed after he was sucked into a plane engine, has raised serious questions on the **safety of runway operations** at the Indian airports.

As per civil aviation rules, a runway should be completely free from any kind of obstruction at the time of landing or take off. Many of the around 100 passengers who were on the Air India flight Wednesday are said to have been traumatised by the incident.

The incident comes a week after a turboprop plane belonging to budget carrier SpiceJet hit a group of wild boars and skidded as it came into land at Jabalpur airport in Central India. Though the plane — a Bombardier Q400 — suffered damage in the collision, all the passengers were safe. Three of the animals, however, were killed.

According to reliable sources in the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the accident occurred because the plane's parking brakes were not deployed which made the aircraft moved forward, leading to the death of a ground staff. The aircraft is normally pushed back with the towing bar and once the plane reaches the taxiway, a pin attached to the nose landing gear is removed by the technician.

## Similar incident

The removal of the pin allows the nose landing gear to retract after take off. Once this is done, a signal is given to the pilot that the plane is cleared for taxiing. However, that did not happen in this case.

A similar incident had occurred in the late 1990s in Chennai when a bird scarer was sucked into the engine after he ran towards the plane, while it was preparing for take-off. In 1995, a man who was crossing the Hyderabad runway on his motorbike as an aircraft landed was sucked into the engine.

“In an A-319 aircraft, the distance from the nose to the engine is about 30 feet. When an aircraft is being pushed back, the engine, even when it has been started, is on idle thrust, which is about ten per cent of its total thrust. During taxiing, it is never more than 35 per cent. Ground staff and technicians know quite well the area that should be kept clear in front of the engines. Thus it is a clear-cut case of laxity in operations,” civil aviation expert Sanjeet Jha told *Gulf News* by phone.

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