AIRPORT AGONY: NO EXCUSE FOR DELAYING MEDICAL AID TO SICK TRAVELLERS

News / Airports / Routes

When acute illness befalls passengers in mid-air, the provision of timely medical help must be the priority. Unfortunately, common sense is sometimes blinded by bureaucracy, as in the case of a critically ill mainland journalist on board a China Southern Airlines flight to Beijing last month. He had to wait almost 50 minutes after landing before he could be taken away for life-saving surgery at a hospital. Worse, he had to endure severe abdominal pain to climb onto a waiting ambulance by himself, as the cabin crew and the medical workers insisted it was the other side's responsibility to help him get off the plane.

Travellers can only hope that such an outrageous incident will not happen to them. But to the journalist from Liaoning, it is an ordeal that should never be repeated. His account went viral on social media, prompting the airline to apologise. He said he was not after compensation, he only hoped the parties concerned would ensure it would not happen again.

The delay was attributed to various reasons, including mechanical glitches and procedural compliance. But there is no excuse to delay medical aid to those in distress. The journalist was left in agony while listening to a quarrel between the crew and medical workers. He was later diagnosed as suffering a hernia and acute intestinal obstruction, for which part of his colon had to be removed.

Emergency medical aid for air passengers is part of aviation safety. While the procedures to

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handle such incidents may be documented in operation manuals, compliance is another matter. The dispute underlines the inadequacies on the part of the airline, airport management and medical personnel.

As the country continues to invest heavily in state-of-the-art airports and other infrastructure, service quality and procedural compliance remain far from world class. The parties concerned should learn from the mistake and prevent recurrence in future.

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