

**RELIEF FOR PASSENGERS HARASSED BY AIRLINES** [Dated: 14-03-09]

Air India has been directed by the State Consumer Commission (Delhi) to pay Rs 1.4 lakh to a passenger for refusing to let her board a flight despite a confirmed ticket.

Penalizing the airlines for a "deficiency in service", the Delhi State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission has asked Air India to not only refund Rs 40,000 towards the cost of the ticket, but also to pay Rs one lakh as compensation to the complainant Geetika Sachdeva, for not letting her board the plane and for delayed baggage delivery.

In September 2002, Sachdeva had bought an open ticket through a travel agency on Air India's Delhi-London-Toronto-London-Delhi flight. Two months later, when she informed Air India of her intention to travel from London to Delhi, she was told that her ticket was confirmed for London to Delhi. She then boarded an Air Canada flight from Toronto and reached London. But at the airport she was told that the validity of her ticket had expired and she could not board the plane. Sachdeva was traveling alone and did not have money to buy another ticket. After waiting for several hours at the airport, she met another Indian passenger, who had come from Chicago and had also been denied boarding on the same grounds. With his help, she purchased a ticket of Virgin Atlantic Airways and came to Delhi. Her baggage, however, was transported a week later by Air India, for which she was charged an additional sum of Rs 650.

Air India, in its defence contended that the passenger had booked an open ticket for the Toronto-Delhi sector, which required prior confirmation before the commencement of journey and since she failed to do, so she could not be accommodated.

**OBSERVATION**

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The court however, observed that the consumer had intimated Air India's counterpart at Toronto in advance about her plan to travel from London to Delhi and therefore the argument that there was no confirmation, did not hold. "The passenger was a young lady and traveled alone and therefore must have faced immense hardship when she was denied a seat," Justice J D Kapoor, Commission President, said, adding that it was the "duty of the airline to make all possible arrangements" to accommodate Sachdeva on its flight leaving for

London. Justice Kapoor further ruled that "no airline has the right to refuse boarding to a person with a confirmed status ticket even if he has not re-confirmed the same 72 hours before, particularly when seats are available."