

British F-35B Jet Departs India After Emergency Landing and Repairs

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A British F-35B Lightning II fighter jet, grounded in India since mid-June after an emergency landing, has finally returned to active service. The aircraft departed Thiruvananthapuram International Airport on Tuesday morning, en route to Darwin, Australia, following more than a month of repairs and safety checks carried out by a UK engineering team.

The F-35B, a fifth-generation stealth multirole combat aircraft designed for short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL), made an emergency diversion on 14 June, forcing it to land at the civilian airport in Kerala. Since then, it had remained parked in an Air India hangar while a 14-member British engineering team, deployed on 6 July, worked on restoring the aircraft to flight condition. The successful departure followed a final round of safety clearances and functional assessments.

A British High Commission spokesperson confirmed the jet's departure and expressed appreciation for India's cooperation throughout the repair process. "A UK F-35B aircraft, which landed following an emergency diversion on June 14, departed today from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport. A UK engineering team, deployed since July 06, completed the repairs and safety checks, allowing the aircraft to resume active service," the statement read.

The spokesperson added, "The UK remains very grateful for the support and collaboration of the Indian authorities and airport teams throughout the repair and recovery process. We look forward to continuing to strengthen our defence partnership with India."

Ahead of its departure, the jet was towed from the hangar to the main apron on Monday. Meanwhile, the support crew that conducted the repairs is scheduled to fly out on Wednesday aboard a Royal Air Force C-17 Globemaster, a heavy-lift transport aircraft used for rapid deployment of troops and equipment.

According to airport sources, the necessary fees, including landing charges, parking rent, and maintenance dues, amounting to Rs 5–6 lakh (roughly £4,500–£5,300), were settled before the jet's departure. It remains unclear whether separate payments were made to Air India, which provided hangar space throughout the aircraft's stay.

The incident, although disruptive, served as a reminder of the robust logistical and diplomatic channels between the UK and India. While the aircraft's extended presence in a civilian airport generated light-hearted commentary online, it also demonstrated the UK's commitment to maintaining operational readiness and upholding international defence partnerships, even in complex, unplanned situations.