

State craving for more airports



Rajan Raikwar

BHOPAL

After getting Rewa airport, the state is craving to have some more airports. The state aviation department and the Airport Authority of India are in touch with each other in this regard. It was learnt that works related to developing an airport in Datia are in an advanced stage. The government is also looking forward to having airports in Ujjain, Shivpuri and some other places as well.

Director of Bhopal Airport, Ramji Awasthi, said works related to the proposed airport in Datia are in the final stage. The AAI has already constructed a building and the available land as of now is 116 acres. To have the landing facility for big aircraft, additional 200 acre land has been sought from the state government, which is pending. The Datia airport, once developed, will also prove beneficial to people of Jhansi as both the towns are situated at a short distance. Sources in the avi-

Rewa airport awaits inauguration

The Rewa airport, which recently received a licence from the DGCA, is waiting for the inauguration. It is equipped for a night landing facility as well. Sources said that inauguration will be done shortly.

ation department said once the Uttar Pradesh government was making all efforts that the airport shall come up in Jhansi instead of Datia. However, finally Datia was selected.

In the meantime, the state government has also approached the Centre to have an airport in Ujjain. The AAI is working on the proposal. Sources said that Chief Minister Mohan Yadav is keen to have a modern airport in Ujjain. One of the officers of the aviation department said the government wants to have a big airport on the lines of Bhopal and Indore in Ujjain. It was learnt that a small airport is also proposed in Satna as well as Guna and Neemuch.

Airport conducts annual quake drill



Staff Reporter

PUNE

Pune Airport successfully conducted its annual earthquake preparedness mock exercise at the New Terminal Building on Saturday. The exercise aimed to assess and enhance the airport's disaster management capabilities by simulating an earthquake scenario and ensuring seamless coordination between key agencies during emergencies. While the focus of the drill was on earthquake response, firefighting teams were present to address any potential hazards.

The exercise involved multiple agencies, including the Airports Authority of India (AAI), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) Fire Department, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), local police, traffic police and the State Health Department. Their collective efforts demonstrated the importance of coordinated response during disaster situations.

During the drill, a simulated earthquake was announced, prompting airport staff to initiate an immediate evacuation of passengers to designated safe zones. NDRF and SDRF teams conducted rescue operations, simulating the recovery of individuals from impacted areas within the terminal. Medical teams, deployed by the State Health Department, provided first aid and managed the triage process for simulated injuries, while fire safety teams remained on standby to mitigate any potential fire hazards.

The drill emphasised the importance of regular preparedness exercises. Following the completion of the exercise, Pune Airport Director Santosh Dhole thanked all participating agencies for their cooperation and highlighted the value of these drills in refining emergency protocols and ensuring effective coordination during real-life emergencies. The event concluded with a debriefing session, where observations were shared and strategies for improvement were discussed.



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BUSINESS STANDARD

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

Fully compliant: DreamFolks amid airport lounge issues

ROSHNI SHEKHAR

Mumbai, 22 September

DreamFolks, a lounge access provider, clarified on Sunday that all its “contractual agreements remain in full force” amid disruptions experienced by passengers accessing airport lounges.

The company is currently addressing a temporary dis-

ruption in its services. A spokesperson for DreamFolks said, “...We are fully compliant with our obligations and are executing our services accordingly.”

This clarification follows an announcement from Adani Airport Holdings (AAHL), which said that passengers were facing these disruptions due to an unexpected suspen-

sion of services by DreamFolks.

According to AAHL spokesperson, DreamFolks has violated its service agreements with the affected airports. “AAHL is actively working with banks to facilitate the immediate resumption of services. Despite our requests, services through DreamFolks have not yet been restored,” the spokesperson added.



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DAINIK JAGRAN

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

कई एयरपोर्ट पर यात्रियों को लाउंज एक्सेस में परेशानी

मुंबई, प्रेट्र: देशभर में एयरपोर्ट पर लाउंज एक्सेस करने आ रही दिक्कतों को लेकर अदाणी एयरपोर्ट होल्डिंग्स लिमिटेड (एएचएल) की ओर से बयान जारी किया गया है। एएचएल ने बताया कि, लाउंज एक्सेस में दिक्कतें ड्रीमफोल्क्स सर्विसेज लिमिटेड की सेवाओं में आई गड़बड़ी के चलते आ रही हैं। अब कंपनी की ओर से लाउंज एक्सेस के लिए नई वैकल्पिक व्यवस्था का प्लान किया गया है।

एएचएल के प्रवक्ता ने बताया कि भारत भर के एयरपोर्ट पर यात्रियों को लाउंज एक्सेस में व्यवधान का सामना करना पड़ रहा है। यह ड्रीमफोल्क्स सर्विसेज लिमिटेड द्वारा सेवाओं के अप्रत्याशित निलंबन के चलते हुआ है। ड्रीमफोल्क्स सर्विसेज लि. की कई बैंकों के साथ साझेदारी है। जो यात्रियों को लाउंज एक्सेस सर्विस प्रदान करती है। एएचएल ने कहा कि, यह एयरपोर्ट के साथ सेवा समझौतों का उल्लंघन है।

In A Nutshell

■ Lounge Access Hit at Key Airports: AAHL

MUMBAI Adani Airport Holdings Ltd



(AAHL) said on Sunday that passengers across some airports in the country are facing disruptions in lounge

access due to DreamFolks Services Ltd suspending its services. DreamFolks, the lounge access provider, acknowledged the disruption but said it is not related to any contractual issues and that they are working to resolve the problem quickly. AAHL, which runs seven airports in India—Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Jaipur, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram, and Mangaluru—said the problem is affecting services at four of these airports. AAHL expressed frustration, saying DreamFolks' decision violated service agreements with the affected airports. "Passengers at airports across India have been experiencing disruptions in lounge access. This is due to the unexpected suspension of services by DreamFolks, despite our requests to restore them. We are working with banks to resume services as soon as possible," AAHL said. DreamFolks, however, denied any agreement issues, saying, "We are addressing a temporary disruption. All our contracts are in place, and we are fully compliant with our obligations." They added that their priority is to minimize passenger inconvenience and restore normal operations soon. It has a market share of over 90% in the domestic lounge access market for India-issued debit and credit programmes. -Our Bureau



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THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

DELHI

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AIRPORT LOUNGE ACCESS HIT ACROSS INDIA, SAYS AAHL



ADANI GROUP'S
SUBSIDIARY Adani
Airport Holdings on
Sunday said passengers

at airports across the country
have been experiencing
disruptions in accessing airport
lounge, owing to suspension of
services by Dreamfolks.



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FREE PRESS JOURNAL

MUMBAI

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MP demands more airports

Rajan Raikwar

BHOPAL

After getting Rewa airport, MP is craving to have more airports. The state aviation dept and Airports Authority of India are in touch with each other. It was learnt that works related to developing an airport in Datia are in an advanced stage. The government is also looking forward to having airports in Ujjain, Shivpuri and some other places as well.



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THE INDIAN EXPRESS

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

System snag hits lounge access platform: Working to resolve issue, says DreamFolks

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 22

AIRPORT LOUNGE access platform major DreamFolks is working to identify and fix the technical snag in its systems that has hit airport lounges at numerous airports in the country over the past couple of days. The travel services aggregator acknowledged a "temporary disruption" in its services, which has impacted card-based airport lounge access at a number of Indian airports.

The DreamFolks platform is among the top lounge access platforms that has tie-ups with various banks, credit card issuers, card networks, and airport lounge service providers. Due to the technical snag, customers at many airports have been unable to authenticate their credit and debit cards for lounge access. Card-based

'TEMPORARY DISRUPTION'

■ The travel services aggregator acknowledged a "temporary disruption" in its services, which has impacted card-based airport lounge access at a number of airports

lounge access through other platforms like that of Collinson Group remains unaffected.

The number of airport lounges and customers affected due to the system snag is not clear. According to information available in DreamFolks's latest available earnings presentation, it has 95 per cent market share in card-based lounge access in the country and covers 71 airport lounges.

"At DreamFolks, we are currently addressing a temporary disruption in our services. Our dedicated team is working diligently with our partners to identify the root cause and implement solutions as quickly as possible," DreamFolks said in a statement on Sunday. "We would like to clarify that all our contractual agreements remain in full force. We are fully compliant with our obligations and are executing our services accordingly," it added.

The clarification came after Adani Airport Holdings (AAHL) said earlier on Sunday that passengers were facing disruption in airport lounge access due to "unexpected suspension of services" by DreamFolks. The airport operator, which has seven Indian airports in its portfolio, blamed DreamFolks of "violation" of its agreements with airports. **FULL REPORT ON**
www.indianexpress.com



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MINT

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

Adani Airports face lounge disruptions

Adani Group's subsidiary Adani Airport Holdings Ltd (AAHL) on Sunday said passengers at airports across the country have been experiencing disruptions in airport lounge access, owing to the abrupt suspension of the services by Dreamfolks.

AAHL, in a statement, said it is "actively working" with the banks to facilitate the immediate resumption of services, which have not yet been restored.

AAHL operates seven airports in the country- Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Jaipur, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram and Mangaluru.

PTI

जयपुर एयरपोर्ट

ऑफ-सीजन में यात्रीभार 15 हजार के पार... सस्ती यात्रा, ईएमआइ से प्री-बुकिंग बढ़ी

पत्रिका न्यूज़ नेटवर्क
patrika.com

जयपुर. इस बार जयपुर इंटरनेशनल एयरपोर्ट पर ऑफ-सीजन में भी यात्रियों का रुझान हवाई सफर की ओर बढ़ा हुआ है। एयरपोर्ट प्रशासन के मुताबिक, मानसून सीजन में यात्रीभार में मामूली गिरावट देखने को मिली है। जहां आमतौर पर गर्मियों और मानसून के दौरान जयपुर एयरपोर्ट पर यात्रीभार 9 से 10 हजार तक गिर जाता था, इस बार यह संख्या 15 से 16 हजार प्रतिदिन बनी हुई है।

हवाई किराया ट्रेन के फर्स्ट एसी के बराबर

यात्रियों की इस बढ़ी संख्या का मुख्य कारण हवाई किराए में मामूली वृद्धि और सस्ती दरों पर बुकिंग है। जयपुर से मुंबई, पुणे, अयोध्या और अन्य शहरों की हवाई यात्रा का किराया ट्रेन के फर्स्ट एसी के आसपास ही है। उदाहरण के लिए, मुंबई की फ्लाइट का किराया 3695 से 4471 रुपए तक है, जबकि ट्रेन के फर्स्ट एसी का किराया 3500 से 3545 रुपए है। ऐसे में यात्री, खासकर परिवार और स्टूडेंट्स, हवाई यात्रा को प्राथमिकता दे रहे हैं।

जयपुर से प्रमुख शहरों का हवाई और ट्रेन किराया (फर्स्ट एसी)

शहर	फ्लाइट किराया	ट्रेन (फर्स्ट एसी) किराया
मुंबई	3695-4471	3500-3545
अहमदाबाद	3783-5540	2335-2850
अयोध्या	3194-4299	2990-3100
कोलकाता	6518-7295	4185
पुणे	4719-6852	3820-4100
बेंगलुरु	5799-6380	5460

(हवाई और रेल किराया बिना किसी अतिरिक्त शुल्क के)

प्री-बुकिंग और ईएमआइ के जरिए टिकट बुकिंग

कम किराए और ईएमआइ ऑफर के चलते लोग तीन से चार महीने पहले ही अपनी हवाई टिकटें बुक करवा रहे हैं। क्रेडिट कार्ड के जरिए भी टिकट बुकिंग की जा रही है, जिससे मध्यमवर्गीय परिवारों को किफायती दरों पर हवाई यात्रा का मौका मिल रहा है।

मानसून में ट्रेनों का संचालन बाधित

इस बार मानसून के कारण ट्रेनों के संचालन पर भी असर पड़ा है। रेलवे ने कई रूटों पर ट्रेनों का संचालन रद्द कर दिया या रूट में बदलाव किए, जिससे लोगों ने हवाई यात्रा को चुना। री-डवलपमेंट, दोहरीकरण और विद्युतीकरण के कार्यों के कारण भी कई ट्रेनों का संचालन प्रभावित हुआ है।



Corporate Communications Directorate

RASHTRIYA SAHARA

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

ड्रीमफॉक्स की सेवाओं के निलंबन से एयरपोर्ट लाउंज तक पहुंच बाधित

मुंबई (भाषा)।

देशभर के हवाई अड्डों पर यात्रियों को एयरपोर्ट लाउंज तक पहुंच में बाधा का सामना करना पड़ रहा है। अडाणी समूह की अनुबंधी कंपनी अडाणी एयरपोर्ट होल्डिंग्स लिमिटेड (एएचएल) ने रविवार को कहा कि ड्रीमफॉक्स द्वारा सेवाओं को अचानक निलंबित करने के कारण ऐसा हो रहा है।

एएचएल ने एक बयान में कहा कि वह बैंकों के साथ सक्रिय रूप से काम कर रही है, ताकि सेवाओं को तुरंत फिर से शुरू किया जा सके। बयान जारी किए जाने तक सेवाएं बहाल नहीं हुई थीं। एएचएल देश में सात हवाई अड्डों मुंबई, अहमदाबाद, लखनऊ, जयपुर, गुवाहाटी, तिरुवनंतपुरम और मंगलुरु का संचालन करती है।

कंपनी ने बयान में कहा, 'भारत भर के हवाई अड्डों पर यात्रियों को लाउंज तक पहुंच में व्यवधान का सामना करना पड़ रहा है। ऐसा ड्रीमफॉक्स सर्विसेज लिमिटेड द्वारा सेवाओं को अप्रत्याशित रूप से निलंबित करने के कारण हुआ, जो कई बैंकों के साथ साझेदारी में बैठक पहुंच देती है।'



Corporate Communications Directorate

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Congestion at Delhi and Mumbai airports adding to flight delays: Air India

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New Delhi: The pillar collapse tragedy at Delhi Airport T1 this summer and the subsequent worsening of congestion at IGI's T3, along with runway capacity constraints at Mumbai Airport, have added to the punctuality woes of Air India.

"As a large hub and spoke operator with multiple domestic and international connections from India's two largest airports, Mumbai and Delhi, the knock-on impact of airport congestion and air traffic control restrictions at these airports has a greater impact on our operations when compared to point-to-point carriers," AI said in a statement Sunday. "Flights departing and arriving at Mumbai have been impacted by runway capacity. In Feb-March, 58% of all delays in Mumbai were caused by these issues. With Mumbai being our second largest hub, with multiple international and domestic connections, the cascading delays to our operations are much greater compared to other domestic carriers," the AI statement added.

The airline said peak periods at these two main Indian airports remained congested despite airlines being mandated to cut flight scheduling to ease congestion. At Delhi, only a part of

the newly built T1 has been made operational for a handful of IndiGo and SpiceJet flights. The collapsed portion first needs to be repaired and possibly strengthened before the entire terminal could be used.

"Air India flies on average over 70,000 passengers every day across the network. This includes over 25,000 international passengers covering over 40 international destinations in 30 countries. Due to Air India's high volume of connecting passengers as a full-fledged carrier, at times we have to delay multiple flights to accommodate connecting passengers of incoming flights from domestic and/or international destinations," the airline said.

Back with founder Tata Group since Jan 2022, AI says it has "invested significantly in building resilience in its operations by keeping at least 3 to 4 operational spare aircraft and crew at its major hubs in Delhi and Mumbai. These four aircraft include widebody and narrowbody aircraft, which serve as standby in case of sudden disruption affecting on-time performance".

DGCA data shows Air India's on-time performance of domestic flights has been better than only SpiceJet and Alliance Air in a majority of the last 12 months. AI's international flights' on-time performance also leaves a lot to be desired, say flyers.

BE READY TO NAVIGATE AIRPORT SNARLS LIKE A PRO

Yvonne Jacob

The festive season is a time for celebration, travel, and big family reunions, but it's also the peak time for airport congestion and unexpected delays. With the upcoming Navratri, Dussehra and Diwali celebrations, October is packed with celebrations. This also means longer queues at security checks, packed flights and long layovers, besides delays caused by unpredictable weather. However, with a bit of pre-planning, you could navigate through the airport chaos smoothly. Here's how:



Preferably buy tickets directly from the airline

One of the many tips and tricks shared by author Christopher Schaberg in his book *The End of Airports* was to not try and save money by choosing third-party vendor ticket deals. "When delays and cancellations happen, if you have such a ticket, the airline will have less interest in aiding you. Buying tickets directly from the airline will help you get back in the air quicker," writes Christopher.



• The number of passengers affected due to flight cancellations and delays rose by **34%** during January to March 2024

• Over **9.5 lakh** passengers were affected due to cancellations and delays in the first three months of the year

(As per the Directorate General of Civil Aviation)

Have a Plan B

Be prepared for things to not go as per plan during the festive rush. Try to keep a few hours between connecting flights to avoid the hassle. Another useful tip is to do your homework and research hotels close to the airport or connect with people you know from the same city so you can have a comfortable spot to rest.

• The most important tip is to be patient. Delays and cancellations can't be controlled by airline employees or the airport staff, so it's only human to not inconvenience them or other passengers in case something unexpected happens

— Swati Hirudkar, travel enthusiast and marketing head at a Pune-based finance firm



Prepare for unexpected baggage delays

Ritik Bansal, a videographer who frequently travels for work, suggests labelling your luggage with all possible details. "The best practice is to keep all your essentials in your carry-on luggage and label all your bags with your name, contact details, address, and alternate phone numbers and addresses of people from the connecting or arrival destination," adds Ritik.

Pack smart for layovers

A layover survival kit comes in handy for an unplanned stay. "Carrying an extra set of clothes, comfortable shoes, toiletries, medicines, and non-perishable snacks in your carry-on luggage can help you be comfortable in case of layovers. Download books, podcasts, or movies on your device to keep yourself entertained," suggests Charul Shrivastava, a Mumbai-based travel enthusiast.

Enjoy lounge access and other airport perks

The airport can be a fun place if you take some time to explore its perks. Yash Khinani, co-founder of a manufacturing company, and a frequent flier, shares, "Getting stuck at airports for hours can be made easy if you explore bookstores, cafes or go for a quick spa treatment. If not, you can access a lounge to get comfortable seating and enjoy complimentary food, beverages, and WiFi to catch up on work or a movie."

Air India takes on competition with new products, improved service

Aneesh Phadnis

London

Air India launched its Mumbai-London flight in June 1948. It was the first regular service by an Asian carrier to Europe and with its launch, Air India challenged established global airlines of the era. Seventy six years later, the Tata group run airline is attempting to do something similar if not as historic.

Air India is investing in new products and putting a greater emphasis on customer service as it woos customers on international routes.

Over 66 million passengers flew on international routes to/from India in FY 2024, a growth of 22 per cent over the previous year. While Indian carriers have widened their footprint, foreign airlines control 55 per cent of India's overall international traffic. Air India's consolidated international market share is 24 per cent, and the airline aims to grow it further with network expansion and service improvements.

The airline management has identified 27 touch points mapping the entire customer journey, including booking process, airport experience, in-flight service and on-arrival baggage delivery, etc. While the website and app have been redesigned, customer care



FLYING HIGH. Under the Tatas, Air India has been able to innovate and has plans to catch up with tier-I carriers REUTERS

contact centres have been strengthened too.

"Earlier, whenever customers would call our contact centre, they had to wait for 3-4 minutes for their call to be answered but now the wait time is in seconds. The average handling time is eight minutes, which is at industry level. We are doing pretty well on closure of requests and grievances," said Air India's chief customer experience officer Rajesh Dogra.

NEW SOFT PRODUCTS

Air India is providing lounges across all international airports through tie-ups and hopes to ready its exclusive lounges in Delhi, New York and San Francisco next year. It is also looking at cities such as Chennai, Dubai, Hyderabad, London and Mumbai to develop exclusive

airport lounges. "We are also working closely with F&B partners and ground handling partners so that end customer experience is of the standard we have benchmarked," Dogra said.

Earlier this month, Air India deployed brand new Airbus A350 aircraft on the Delhi-London route, elevating the customer experience.

While the A350 aircraft has full flat seats in business class, Air India also introduced new soft products, including wool-blended blankets and pillows made from Egyptian cotton, among others.

The tableware on the aircraft is a mix of fine bone China and other materials that make it light-weight and aid in saving fuel.

"We have seen an uptick in business class occupancy on the Delhi-London route and

revenue is also picking up," Dogra said.

This is crucial as the United Kingdom is the fourth largest air travel market for India. Over four million passengers flew between the two countries in FY 2024 and though Air India is a market leader with 28 per cent share, it faces stiff competition.

To attract frequent flyers, it has tied up with Bicester Collection, an open air shopping destination on the outskirts of London.

CHINKS IN ARMOUR

Next, Air India plans to roll out new soft products (blankets, pillows etc) on all its US flights from November and entire global routes by next March.

Menus on domestic routes on Vistara and Air India-operated flights have been aligned. Air India's A320 planes are being reconfigured with the addition of a premium economy cabin for uniformity in service.

The soft products of the two airlines will be harmonised after a few months. While there is a positive change, every thing is not hunky dory. The refurbishment of Boeing 777 and 787 aircraft has been delayed. Air India's on-time performance has been below par compared to peers.

A few days back the airline was forced to refund a pas-

senger after his video of a shabby first class cabin in Boeing 777 aircraft went viral. Yet experts believe that Air India is poised to reap success in coming years.

"Air India has managed to secure a part of its A350 fleet and adopted a product that is now widely available in the market. Although they entered the game late, this delay is a legacy issue from the airline's time under government ownership. Under the Tatas, Air India has been able to innovate and has plans to catch up with tier-I carriers," said Mayur Patel, (head of Asia), OAG Aviation, a data platform for the global travel industry.

"Whilst competition is intense, there are enormous home market advantages. With the dynamic new management and investment in fleet and products, Air India is poised to reap profitable success in the years ahead," added John Strickland, Director of JLS Consulting.

The writer was in London at the invitation of Air India

businessline.

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Corporate Communications Directorate

BUSINESS LINE

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

Goodbye Vistara, Hullo Air India

Shekaar Subramanian

When this writer was recently on a Vistara flight en route to Mumbai, he could not help but notice the apprehension of the flight crew members.

There was a palpable sense of uncertainty over the new organisational environment and set-up that they would have to work in, courtesy the Air India-Vistara merger which is slated to become operational from November 12.

The Vistara brand is likely to be discontinued and is set to operate under the Air India name.

Vistara commenced operations on

January 9, 2015. This JV between Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines in the domestic aviation sector had given a fresh lease of life to the discerning traveller post Jet Airways' demise. From their fresh fleet of aircraft to the quality of service, the airline brand will be sorely missed.

Despite the number of fleet and gates at destinations, among other facilities offered by Air India, when it comes to domestic travel that is reliable and elegant, Vistara would have been preferred to its bigger suitor. The latter has been found wanting in customer service and hospitality.

The grapevine doing the circles is that post the merger, the Singaporean bosses

will now be operating out of Singapore. Now, there is the familiar Air India culture to deal with — one marred by unions, financial troubles and government interference.

It is another matter that the latter two seem to be taken care of.

Some experts have suggested leaving the Vistara brand alone till Air India finds its footing in terms of comparable service metrics.

COMPETITION GEARED UP

Post-merger attritions could take place as a result of the inability of the Vistara management cadre to assimilate with the new culture of Air India.

Meanwhile, the competition has

already responded. Indigo announced its intention to make a beachhead into the business class segment by offering the newly minted "Indigo Stretch" a 2-2 seat configuration bundled with a host of other features like extra baggage allowance that aims to cater to the Business Class traveller.

And what's more, Indigo's offering is expected to take-off in the month of November, when Vistara may cease to exist.

Meanwhile, Vistara employees prepare to fly with the new organisation amidst a new culture.

The writer is Head of Structured Finance with a leading non-banking finance company. The views are personal



Corporate Communications Directorate

BUSINESS LINE

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

One Air adds third Boeing freighter

British cargo airline One Air has entered its second year of operations by adding a third Boeing 747 freighter to its fleet to meet the demand for cargo capacity in Asia and Europe.



The Boeing 747-400ERF comes on a five-year lease from AeroTransCargo FZE and has completed its first flight for One Air from Hong Kong to East Midlands Airport.

It is the first aircraft in One Air's fleet to offer a nose door as well as a side door

for loading and unloading. The 400ERF version also offers higher payload capacity of 1,24,000 kg.

One Air commenced B747F flights in July 2023 after receiving certification from the UK Civil Aviation Authority and added a second 747-400 aircraft to its fleet in December for flights between China/Hong Kong and Europe.



Corporate Communications Directorate

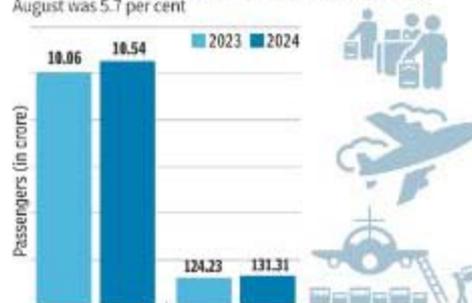
BUSINESS LINE

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

Domestic airlines fill more seats

Domestic airlines ferried 10.54 crore passengers during January–August 2024, as against 10.06 crore a year ago, a growth of 4.82 per cent. Month-on-month growth during August was 5.7 per cent



SpiceJet Aims for Fleet of 100 in 2 Yrs Keeping it Competitive

CMD Ajay Singh hopes to prevent duopoly, bullish on comeback amid mkt tailwinds

ET EXCLUSIVE

Arindam Majumder

New Delhi: SpiceJet aims to have 100 aircraft by the end of 2026, its chairman and managing director Ajay Singh said, a day after the low-cost airline raised Rs 3,000 crore (about \$360 million) through selling new shares.

"SpiceJet is an airline that has

strong fundamentals but was hamstrung by two black swan events one after the other – the worldwide grounding of Boeing 737 Max, followed by Covid pandemic," Singh told ET in an interview.

"But we have all the infrastructure ready to become a 100-strong fleet again... We have the airport slots, international traffic rights, pilots and crew, as well as the maintenance infrastructure," he said.

Keeping it Competitive >> 12



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"Most importantly, we have 30 aircraft on the ground, in a market which has significant supply constraints," Singh told ET.

SpiceJet on Saturday said it has successfully closed a qualified institutional placement (QIP) with participation from marquee funds such as Tata Mutual Fund, Discovery Global and Goldman Sachs.

Singh owns around 35% of the airline post fresh equity allotment.

The recapitalisation, he said, was not only important for the company, but also for India's aviation sector, which is turning into a duopoly between IndiGo and the Air India group. "The sector has a lot of space. What is important is that we don't allow a duopoly to be created and that it remains a competitive market, where customers have choice," he said.

SpiceJet was in desperate need of funds as it has defaulted on statutory dues and payments to vendors, including aircraft and engine lessors, some of whom have pleaded in courts for the carrier to be declared bankrupt.

It has been unable to get new planes, missing the post-Covid boom that its rivals have cashed in on. At the end of August, SpiceJet had a little over 2% share of India's do-

mestic aviation market, down from 10.5% in 2021.

However, Singh — not new to a crisis, having salvaged SpiceJet from a similar near-death situation in 2014 — said the environment is more conducive this time for a turnaround. "We have the advantage of a market where demand is stronger and yields are better than ever before, (apart from) a benign fuel (price) environment."

SpiceJet plans to quickly return to service its 36 aircraft grounded due to lack of spares.

By March 2025, the airline will have a fleet of 40, or equivalent to what Akasa Air will have, and then add another 40 in the next year. Additionally, during periods of strong demand, the airline will take planes on short-term wet leases, Singh said. For instance, it will induct eight aircraft for the festive and year-end season.

"Despite shrinking in size, in FY24, there were eight airports where we had more than 50% of seat capacity and 40 routes where SpiceJet had a monopoly. We have 30 exclusive destinations under the regional connectivity scheme," Singh pointed out.

FINANCIAL WORRIES

Experts have cautioned of SpiceJet's deteriorating credit worthi-

ness among banks and aircraft lessors due to multiple defaults, impacting its plan for expansion. But Singh said he has managed amicable resolutions with both aircraft manufacturers and lessors, and that Rs 750 crore from the current funding will be used to settle the remaining dues.

"Defaulting on lease payments is not a unique situation for us as multiple airlines couldn't manage to pay after Covid," he said. "But lessors are very much invested to do business with airlines that have managed to stay alive, and refinanced themselves. We have settled with many of our largest lessors and the remaining will be done quickly."

Singh said he met Boeing's new chief executive, Kelly Ortberg, who has assured that supply of aircraft will begin soon. "Boeing wants a stronger SpiceJet as we have been a long-term customer for them," he said.

An investor who has participated in SpiceJet's latest round told ET that he was confident because of the company's sharp focus on controlling costs. "SpiceJet has throughout been able to maintain cost (rationality). The airline will get new aircraft and upgrade the existing fleet, which will not only increase market share but also spread out expenses," the person said.



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THE ECONOMIC TIMES

DELHI

23 SEPTEMBER 2024

Air India Plans Upgrades to Lure Premium Flyers

Looks to step up offerings on international routes with better cabins, service & exclusive lounges at select airports

Arindam Majumder

New Delhi: Air India is planning for a faster upgrade of its in-flight products on key international routes to the US and Europe, as the Tata Group airline tries to attract premium customers who opt for Middle Eastern carriers like Emirates and Qatar Airways due to their higher service standards.

The airline is planning to amplify its offerings with a first class on top of the business class in its new A350 planes and is also upgrading cabins in its A320 narrow-body aircraft. Simultaneously it has planned to have exclusive lounges for customers in Delhi, Mumbai, Dubai, London, New York and San Francisco by the end of 2025.

"We have been talking about the Air India transformation and took a lot of initiatives, but with our new product people are now able to feel it. We have received good reviews

from our customers and they feel that it is the sign of a new Air India which will be ready in the next two years," said Rajesh Dogra, its chief customer experience officer.

The airline which currently operates the Airbus A350 aircraft between Delhi and London plans to connect New York and Newark from January. The A350 is a brand-new aircraft where business class comes with a suit with sliding doors ensuring privacy.

It is also upgrading the inflight product in legacy aircraft like the old Boeing 777 and 787 where passengers have complained about worn out cabins and poor food. On long-haul international routes, the airline's business class passengers will dine in fine chinaware, access a collection of over 2,000 movies on-board and use amenity kits by Italian luxury fashion house Ferragamo.

However, its planned refurbish-

Flight Status



A350 is a new aircraft where business class comes with a suit with sliding doors

Air India looks to lure premium customers from Emirates, Qatar

Upgrading inflight products in legacy aircraft like old Boeing 777 and 787

Amenity kits by Italian luxury fashion house Ferragamo also on the cards



Flyers will dine in fine chinaware, access collection of over 2,000 movies

ment of over 40 legacy widebody planes which operate on long-haul routes has been delayed from 2024 to 2025 as vendors have been unable to provide new seats due to a global supply chain crisis.

Retrofitting of the narrow body A320 aircraft has already started and they will soon join the airline's fleet of eight recently delivered and operational A320neos that feature

upgraded cabin interiors and, VIJAY P configurations.

"We could have waited, you know, for the aircraft to be retrofitted. But we wanted to introduce the enhanced soft product for our customers," Dogra said, adding that inflight Wi-Fi will also be introduced on board soon.

The attentiveness, the airline hopes will justify the premium that

the most status-conscious pay for their tickets and who according to industry estimates constitute only a third of the passengers but drive two-thirds of airline revenue.

For instance, business-class passengers flying Delhi to London next month might pay ₹98,000 for a return fare, versus ₹37,000 in economy.

Yet, many business class flyers say they are most conscious about getting through the airport faster and without standing in a queue.

"We broke down the entire journey of a passenger into 27 touch points, right from taking a decision to fly and then, doing the bookings and then arriving at the airport. We have recruited new staff, redefined service standards for our ground-handling providers so that our customers have the assistance that they look for," Dogra said.

The reporter was in London recently at the invitation of Air India

AI chases international market with full revamp

SWARAJ BAGGONKAR
London, September 22

TATA GROUP-OWNED AIR India will spruce up its long-haul product further when pending deliveries of its flagship offering, the A350, is pressed into service, as it aims to tighten its stranglehold on the international market amid rising competition.

The 34 new Airbus (A350-1000) widebody planes, which are scheduled to join Air India's fleet from 2026 onwards. The new aircraft will sport distinct, tailor-made interiors.

The six A350s (A350-900) that Air India inducted over the past few months were originally built for Russia's flag carrier Aeroflot but following sanctions on the east European country, these were rerouted to Air India. "The new A350s will start arriving from 2026. Those on pending delivery will have a different end product," Rajesh Dogra, chief customer experience officer, Air India, said.

"We have them coming in different sets. We will have them coming in 2026, 2027, 2028," he said at a recent media interaction.

This comes at a time when Indi-

ON THE RUNWAY

■ 34 new Airbus (A350-1000) widebody planes scheduled to join Air India's fleet from 2026

■ Six A350s (A350-900) were inducted by Air India over the past few months

■ Originally built for Russia's flag carrier Aeroflot but rerouted to Air India after sanctions on Moscow

■ IndiGo is also preparing a transition to a hybrid airline by offering business class cabins to tap international traffic

■ IndiGo has also placed orders for A350s whose deliveries are slated in 2027

■ From November, Air India's A350 will service New York's John F Kennedy International Airport from Delhi

■ Air India says daily bookings in premium classes have more than doubled on the A350

■ By February-March 2025, many more international destinations will be serviced by the A350



■ Air India is also investing in setting up new exclusive lounges across its key markets

Go, the country's largest airline, is preparing a transition from a low-cost carrier to a hybrid one by also offering business class cabins, specifically to tap international traffic. It has also placed orders for A350s with deliveries slated in 2027.

"With the A350 launch (on the Delhi to London, Heathrow route), the

overall perception (about Air India) has seen a massive boost. There has been an uptick in the business class occupancies. We have been talking about transformation and we took several initiatives, worked on so many new things and people acknowledged the change," Dogra added.

Air India says daily bookings in

premium classes have more than doubled on the A350. The airline is also keen on having first class in its legacy aircraft but owing to supply chain challenges with the seat manufacturers, the plan is going slow.

From November, Air India's A350 will service New York, John F Kennedy International Airport from Delhi. By

February-March 2025, many more international destinations will be serviced by the A350, Dogra said.

Besides new aircraft, Air India is investing in setting up new exclusive lounges across its key markets both in India and overseas to upgrade the on-the-ground experience for its customers. While some are operational at Delhi and New York airports, more lounges are scheduled to open in San Francisco (by 2025), Dubai and London. An exclusive lounge for international passengers is planned at the Mumbai airport also.

"Cost will not be a constraint as we will not compromise on quality. From the design perspective we have looked at multiple lounges worldwide," Dogra added.

Air India is awaiting regulatory clearance to start offering Wi-Fi onboard the A350 as all the ground work with its partner has been completed. Dogra added that the wireless networking technology can go live on the aircraft within 15 days of receipt of approval of the regulator.

(The writer was in London at the invitation of Air India)

AIR INDIA MAY INTRODUCE WI-FI ON INT'L FLIGHTS BY THE YEAR END

Neha LM Tripathi

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LONDON: Air India plans to introduce Wi-Fi connectivity on its international flights by the year end, an airline executive has said, listing a series of improvements passengers will see within six months.

The changes include upgrading all flights with new soft products, retrofitting legacy planes and introducing new A350 aircraft on international routes.

Since the Tata Group took control of the airline from the government in January 2022, it has been implementing measures to improve the struggling carrier. These efforts include hiring 9,000 staff including cabin crew to enhance service quality.

Rajesh Dogra, chief customer experience officer, said: "The airline is working to improve passenger comfort on both domestic and international routes. With the launch of the A350, there is a massive boost in customers' overall perception... Customers see this as a signal of how the new Air India is going to be. For domestic routes too, we have begun retrofitting our old legacy narrow-body aircraft and expect all of them to be retrofitted by March next year".

Air India is currently following a multi-phase transformation plan with enhancements to its fleet and network, overhaul of its customer services and improvements to operational reliability.

Officials familiar with the development said the airline's load factor on the newly introduced A350 has picked up, with a significant uptick in business class occupancy.

Regarding Wi-Fi on board, Dogra said, "A lot of effort has been made to launch Wi-Fi on board, and international flights will get it first. We are waiting for approvals from the concerned authority, which are expected anytime. The service should start with our A350s within one month after we receive the approvals".

The airline currently has six A350s, and expects 34 deliveries 2026 onwards.

Behind Air India cockpit: Rebuilding brand image

From New Aircraft To IT Revamp, Tata Group Kicks Off Five-Year Transformation Plan

Asmita.Dey@timesofindia.com

London: A lot has been going on at Air India which, under the management of the Tata Group has set in motion a five-year transformation plan.

From spending billions of dollars on adding new aircraft to the fleet, revamping IT systems, overhauling internal processes and investing heavily to better the consumer experience, the group is trying to rebuild the brand's image and shed the tag of a legacy airline riddled with issues — which it has earned over the years.

“To transform an organisation which needed large investments both in terms of the infrastructure, people, processes, in every possible area and to build it up and bring it to this level and to continue to work towards building it to a world class airline is a tough and interesting journey... but we are moving at a very good pace,” Rajesh Dogra, chief customer experience officer at Air India, told media at a briefing here.

According to Dogra, the first year following the airli-

ne's acquisition by the Tata Group in 2022 was spent fixing the basics — or the “bare minimum” required — to make sure that Air India started looking like what was expected of it by customers and the industry alike. “The idea is to transform it from a legacy or-

“The idea is to transform it from a legacy organisation which has had several issues into a new world-class airline. A lot of focus was put on training programmes, recruitment — Rajesh Dogra | CHIEF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OFFICER, AIR INDIA

ganisation which has had several issues into a new world class airline. A lot of focus was put on training programmes, recruitment,” he added.

The stakes are high for Air India, which is attempting to position itself as a “world class global airline” in a competitive \$908 billion (industry revenue estimates as of 2023 by IATA) global aviation market. Hence, the urgency to overhaul the brand and the experience it offers is understandable. With the total number

of travellers expected to reach a record high of 4.9 billion in 2024 globally, it is a big market opportunity if it can be tapped well. In the local market, rival Indigo is set to launch business class for fliers from mid-Nov on 12 domestic routes.

In its new A350-900 aircraft — which have already been deployed on routes including the Delhi-London long haul flights — Air India has been rolling out new bedding, chinaware, tableware and updated amenity kits for business and premium economy customers.

“By Feb-March 2025, we will have it all over the world,” Dogra said. All its refurbished legacy aircraft will offer the new in-flight experience over time too, he added. Of the 40 A350 aircraft ordered by Air India as part of its \$70 billion aircraft purchase deal, six of them have been delivered while the rest are expected to be added to the fleet in phases starting from 2026, Dogra said.

(The writer was in London at the invitation of Air India)

SpiceJet to clear employee dues by next month: CMD

Saurabh.Sinha
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New Delhi: SpiceJet is back from the brink after yet another near-collapse by getting a Rs 3,000-crore funding from investors, including mutual funds, and is now aiming to have a fleet of 100 narrow-body aircraft before the end of 2026.

Airline CMD Ajay Singh told **TOI** that it will now clear all its dues to employees latest by early next month, improve on time performance to bring back flyers, add flights by getting the 30-odd grounded aircraft back in the air and pay off statutory dues.

“We are in dialogue with Boeing to resume delivery of the Boeing 737 MAX ordered by us. Since the last two days, we have been flooded with job applications. We will rededicate all efforts to be an efficient and on-time airline,” he said. SpiceJet had ordered 200 B737 MAX

and got 13 of them before 2019. Now, determined to clean up the “balance sheet” and “honourably clear all dues,” it wants deliveries to resume again.

“We will revamp our existing fleet. The turboprop Q400s are owned by us and will be used on regional UDAN routes. We will expand very quickly now and look at wide body operations too,” Singh said.

The airline, which “refuses to die”, clearly has its task cut out with these funds over for the next few weeks. It will keep some funds in reserve for the next black swan event/s.

“After acquiring SpiceJet (from Kalanidhi Maran) in 2015, we had improved its operational and financial metrics in a very short time. With highest aircraft occupancy, there were profitable quarters on the trot. We ordered 200 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft. Everything was going just fine when two black swan

events happened in quick succession: Global grounding of the 737 MAX in March 2019 and then Covid in 2020,” Singh, whose stake is now diluted to 35% from the earlier 48% after this QIP, said.

While the airline ventured into cargo in a big way during Covid, its payables to all stakeholders and liabilities kept mounting. PF and TDS of employees could not be paid for over two years. Engine & aircraft lessors dragged it to court for repossessing their assets. Things came to a head this summer when it nearly completely ran out of cash and SpiceJet obits were being written.

So in this situation how did he convince investors to put money? “We just told them the truth about our airline. They saw what we had done after 2015... They saw potential in us to grow. At no time did I feel that it is curtains for the airline,” Singh said.



FLYING COLOURS

After tech & pharma, Hyderabad has now become a sought-after destination for international aviation players, who want to get their aircraft painted & branded

HYD GIVES THE SKIES A DASH OF COLOUR

Photo: Surman Reddy/D

Sudipta.Sengupta@timesofindia.com

The freshly minted fleet of Air India Express that took to the skies recently, has a strong Hyderabad connection. Most of these Boeing 737 Max planes flaunting Indian art on their tails – from Bardhani to Kalamkari and Phulkari to Jamdani – were hand-painted by a dedicated team at the city's GMR Aero Technic MRO facility, based at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA).

But the domestic airline isn't the only one making a landing in Hyderabad.

The Aero Technic MRO has aircraft flying in from multiple foreign locations – UAE, Kuwait, Maldives, Philippines, Bangladesh to name a few – for a similar glam up, fast turning the local facility into a global hub for aircraft livery (painting and branding done on the exterior of an aircraft). It also has a bunch of private luxury jets, owned by top industrialists across the world, being wheeled in here for a makeover.

Booked for 2 years

Such is the demand that the MRO is booked for the next 24 months, with about 35 to 40 projects scheduled per year. And this, despite it serving only narrow-body aircraft (small commercial planes) for now.

"Apart from the luxury of space, our USP also lies in having a dedicated team of skilled painters who have been hand-picked and trained at the facility. This work requires great precision," said Ashok Gopinath, president and accountable manager at GMR Aero Technic, adding, "Given the growing demand for livery work, we are now planning to start a similar painting facility for wide-body aircraft – adjacent to the existing unit – by 2025."

Eye on future markets

There are other plans as well. To tap into the markets in Africa and CIS countries, like Azerbaijan. "Though we are getting some work from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the market has tremendous potential which we wish to explore. We are also eyeing Africa and Europe and are soon making over the

OTHER CLIENTS

• Jazeera (from Kuwait), Fly Dubai (UAE), Indigo, Jet Airways, Go Air, SpiceJet, Vistara, Air India Express, Oman Air, Fly Beond (Maldives) etc

• GMR Aero Technic MRO facility has till date completed livery work on 150 aircraft which includes Airbus A320 Family, Boeing 737 NG/MAX, ATR 72

SOME ICONIC LIVERY

• JRD Tata livery on Air Asia Aircraft

• Kabali livery AirAsia to commemorate release of Rajinikanth's movie, Kabali



'Work needs precision, patience'

Dressed in white overalls, Satish Kumar and his colleagues are busy giving final touches to a 737 Max – parked within the 3,000 square meter space at the MRO. The Air India Express flight is almost ready for delivery and will soon be seen cruising through air, for its destination up north.

"The job is fascinating but needs tremendous concentration," says Kumar who has been doing this work for the last 10 years. He made the shift to aviation from the shipping yard. Incidentally, the majority of this work is done at night as it gives painters a quiet

environment to concentrate. "The tail of the aircraft requires maximum time and effort. The technique is tough and there is no room for error," said Sridhar Reddy, who joined the team about a year ago. Previously, he worked at an oil company in Qatar.

An entire wall at the MRO is adorned by the livery work completed by these painters over the years. They explain how every line, dot, pattern that appears like simple brush strokes to regular people, is measured and turned into engineering drawings before being

Painted onto the aircraft. "Apart from patience, this work also needs tremendous precision because if the paint is not appropriately distributed on the aircraft it can adversely impact the flight's stability. So, every part is weighed post the livery work to ensure there's no excess anywhere," said Ashok Gopinath, adding how the paint for the work is imported from western countries that are also environment friendly.



"We have been seeing 20%-30% growth in livery work every year. Also, while we started with domestic airlines alone, currently 70% (approx.) of our business comes from international aviation players – Ashok Gopinath | PRESIDENT, GMR AERO TECHNIC



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We are pleased our second aircraft is now entering service. Our new and returning customers will be impressed to see this stunning aircraft at their home airports. –Tero Taskila | CHAIRMAN AND CEO OF BEOND, WORLD'S FIRST PREMIUM LEISURE AIRLINE FROM MALDIVES

It takes at least 8-10 days (on an average) to complete each aircraft. At least 10 people are at work at the same time to complete it because it involves a lot of intricacies –Satish Kumar | MANAGER

The tail of the aircraft requires maximum time and effort. The technique is tough and there is no room for error – Sridhar Reddy | PAINTER