

## Zoom fatigue pushes airlines to expect business travel rebound

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Doha : After over a year stuck on video calls and online virtual meetings, company executives are prepared to hit the skies and meet customers in person again, making the global aviation industry believe that business travel is about to revive despite the rise of Covid-era workarounds like Zoom.

The lifting of travel restrictions will trigger a sharp rebound in corporate travel, executives from Qatar Airways, IAG SA and Rwandair said on June 22 on a panel at the Qatar Economic Forum.

Business-class occupancy on Qatar Airways flights is 10 percentage points higher than it was before the pandemic in markets where travel is allowed, said Akbar Al Baker, CEO of the Gulf airline.

"People don't like to just sit in front of a screen and conduct business," Al Baker said. "Businessmen like to face people, they like to feel people, they like to notice the body language."

Even as air travel slowly rebounds with the rollout of vaccines gathering pace in most major economies, getting business travel back on track is a key objective for airlines since the premium seats are such a big profit contributor.

With in-person travel cut off, many companies have adopted new methods of reaching out to customers and co-workers. Those adjustments, along with a rising

imperative to reduce carbon emissions, has led to questions about whether corporate road warriors will return in force after the health crisis is over.

"The shape of business travel may change, but face-to-face meetings are going to be crucial," said Luis Gallego, CEO of British Airways parent IAG. About half of IAG's corporate customers -- a group which contributed about 13 per cent of the carrier group's revenue pre-pandemic -- have said that they will fly before the end of the year, Gallego said.

A measure of relief may be coming, as the UK prepares to allow Britons who have been fully vaccinated to travel to more than 150 medium-risk countries by August without the need to quarantine on their return.

While companies may cut down on internal travel, they will continue to send executives to meet customers and build new markets, Boeing Co CEO David Calhoun said on the same panel.