

Air India cuts costs with new route

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Dhaka : Air India has begun using Mongolian airspace for select North America-bound flights from Delhi, as part of a strategy to reduce operational costs that have surged following Pakistan's airspace closure last month, sources confirmed on Tuesday (May 13).

Additionally, some of these flights now make a technical stop in Kolkata.

The Tata Group-owned airline has been exploring alternatives for the services from the national capital to North America in order to reduce the flying time as well as operational expenses.

At present, Air India operates 71 flights a week to North American destinations and out of them, 54 services are from the national capital. The airline flies to Chicago, New York, Washington, San Francisco, and Newark in the US, and to Toronto and Vancouver in Canada.

Mostly, the Mongolian airspace is used by some of Air India's flights

from San Francisco and Vancouver. The flights from Delhi to these two cities are mostly using the Pacific route, according to the sources.

The flights AI186 from Vancouver to Delhi and AI174 from San Francisco to Delhi have been using the Mongolian airspace for the past few days, as per information from flight tracking website Flightradar24.com.

For some of the flights connecting North America cities and Delhi, the utilisation of the Mongolian airspace and a technical stop at Kolkata are among the alternatives that have been chosen by Air India, the sources said.

With such an arrangement in place, the airline does not have to make a stop in a European city while operating certain long haul and ultra long haul flights from Delhi to North America.

Having a stop in a European city means higher expenses, including landing charges and fuel costs, according to the sources.

The alternative also helps in addressing the challenges of higher fuel burn, operational expenses and Flying Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) for the crew.

Under the norms of aviation regulator DGCA, flight crew can work continuously only for eight hours and with normal flight time getting longer, the crew will be in breach of the Flying Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) rules.

Air India MD and CEO Campbell Wilson, in a message to staff on May 2, said there have been a number of network-related developments and the airline has temporarily adjusted some of its Europe and US routes in response to recent airspace restrictions, as well as adding a few technical stops.

"We have made good progress in identifying other alternatives so aim to reduce the number of overseas tech-stops, and restore more non-stop operations, soon," he had said, without disclosing specific details.

On May 2, sources said the airline was looking at various alternatives for its North America flights from the national capital, including operating the services with a technical stop in a city within India.

In the wake of retaliatory measures taken by India after the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22 that killed 26 people, Pakistan closed its airspace for Indian airlines on April 24.

The airspace closure has resulted in longer flying hours, higher fuel consumption, payload and aircraft availability issues as well as crew flying duty time limitation challenges for airlines operating international flights to the West.

India also closed its airspace for Pakistan airlines on April 30.

On Saturday (May 10), India and Pakistan reached an understanding to stop all firings and military actions on land, air and sea with immediate effect.

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