

Air India to complete wide-body aircraft refits by mid-2027

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Dhaka : Air India, which is undergoing a transformation, expects to complete the upgrade of all legacy wide-body aircraft by mid-2027, CEO Campbell Wilson said on Tuesday (March 18). He also noted that the global aviation market is likely to remain 'supply constrained' for the next four to five years.

The Air India CEO and MD also said the repainting and refurbishing of Vistara aircraft is expected to be completed in one-and-a-half years.

Full service carrier Vistara was merged with Air India last year.

Asserting that refit of aircraft is the number one priority for the airline, Wilson said refit of the legacy Boeing 777 planes was supposed to start last year but there were seat supply issues. "We are now pulling these aircraft through heavy refresh programme."

"By early mid 2027, all of the legacy wide body aircraft will be upgraded... still slower than we would have liked," Wilson said and pointed out that there are supply chain constraints as well as challenges with respect to the number of aircraft that can be taken out of service at any point of time.

Meanwhile, Air India plans to have first class cabin in some of the new aircraft in the coming years, with Wilson saying, "we do see a place for first class... and it is work in progress".

"First class is actually less profitable product than business class... We are obviously positioning ourselves as a Tier 1 airline," he said while speaking at the Skift India Forum here.

Skift is a travel industry intelligence platform.

Since Tata Group started piloting Air India, the airline has placed orders for 570 new aircraft.

While talking about the supply situation, the airline chief said there are pinch points everywhere such as there are no engines for some narrow body aircraft, there are issues with seat suppliers as well as availability of components and parts of fuselage.

"Reality is that it is going to remain a supply-constrained market, not just for Air India, India, (I am) talking about worldwide... for another 4-5 years," Wilson said.

Air India expects to refit all of the 27 A320 neo aircraft by the third quarter of this year.

Under the USD 400 million retrofit programme for narrow body and wide body planes, the first retrofitted A320 neo plane is back in operations.

The retrofit schedule will see more legacy aircraft, including 40 wide body B787 and B777 planes, undergoing makeover with the first B787 flying out for retrofit next month, the airline said in a release.

On the sidelines of the event, in response to a agency query on how the airline plans to address the supply constraint situation, Wilson on Tuesday said, "we are victims of the circumstances as is every other airline".

"... I think our problem is actually one that of supply rather than demand... Even if there is a global slowdown, we still have a lot of opportunities," the Air India chief noted.

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