

Air India widebody fleet upgrade delayed again

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: Air India's plan to upgrade its older widebody aircraft has been pushed back once more. The airline now aims to finish the \$400 million retrofit project by October 2028, extending the original five-year timeline by about a year.

Persistent supply chain issues since the Covid pandemic have caused delays in Tata Group's effort to enhance the legacy fleet's operational reliability and deliver a world-class flying experience.

The airline said it had finally started the upgrade programme for its legacy widebody fleet with the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. The work is now expected to finish by October 2028, "with the timeline having shifted due to supply chain delays".

In its last few cash-starved state-owned years, Air India had no funds for cabin maintenance or upkeep, and poor in-flight experience on those

planes remains among the biggest irritants for passengers on long-haul routes on which these aircraft are deployed.

"Air India has commenced the widebody retrofit programme for its legacy B787-8 aircraft, with the first of 26 aircraft (VT-ANT) having flown to a Boeing facility in Victorville, California, in July. A second aircraft is scheduled to depart for the same facility in Oct, with both expected to return to service in December.

Retrofit programme for Air India's B787-8s, now on a steady schedule for completion by mid-2027, will introduce brand-new interiors featuring a three-class configuration," the airline said in a statement.

Starting early 2027, the airline will additionally retrofit 13 of its legacy Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, aiming for completion by Oct 2028, with the timeline having shifted due to supply chain delays.

As part of a reliability enhancement programme, Air India said it would upgrade the avionics and other critical components of the 26 legacy B787-8 aircraft. "This is intended to reduce operational disruptions."

Additionally, seven of the 26 B787-8s will undergo heavy, scheduled maintenance (D-checks) in Victorville. The airline said the retrofit programme for 27 legacy narrowbody A320neo aircraft commenced last Sept. It is "progressing per schedule".

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