

## Australia's move to block flights very unfair: Qatar Airways CEO

- A Monitor Desk Report

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**Dhaka: The Australian government's move to block Qatar Airways's request for extra flights to Australia was "very unfair", said the airline's CEO Akbar al-Baker, as per reports.**

"We found it to be very unfair [for] our legitimate request to be not granted, especially at a time when we were so supportive of Australia," said al-Baker on September 17, adding that he was "very surprised" at the decision.

"[We were] repatriating their stranded citizens from around the world to and out of Australia, helping them receive medical supplies and spare parts etc during the Covid-19 period," al-Baker added.

"The national carrier and its partners completely stopped operating in Australia. We were there for the people of Australia."

The Doha-based airline had requested to fly an extra 21 services into Australia's major airports. However, Australia's Transport Minister Catherine King in July formally rejected its bid to add flights to Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, saying the proposal was not in Australia's interests.

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During the pandemic, Qatar Airways flights to Australia continued, transporting as few as 20 people per flight, while flights from Qantas, Australia's national airline, were grounded.

"I am always hopeful for the government to listen to our case very carefully and then make a decision," said Qatar Airways CEO, adding that it is difficult for him to comment as an Australian parliamentary inquiry was under way to look into the government decision on Qatar Airways.

"We have full confidence in the government, in the Senate and in the parliament," al-Baker said.

Earlier, Catherine King, the transport minister, said that "the context" for her decision to not grant Qatar Airways more flights was linked to invasive body searches conducted on a group of Australian women at Doha's Hamad International Airport in Qatar.

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In October 2020, more than a dozen female passengers were subjected to "invasive" and "humiliating" internal exams in Qatar after a newborn infant was found abandoned at the airport.

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