

## Ex-Turkish Airlines chair Ayci becomes Air India MD, CEO

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Former Turkish Airlines chairman Ilker Ayci will pilot Air India as its managing director (MD) and chief executive officer (CEO).

On Monday, the airline's board sat to confirm the recruitment, which needs regulatory approvals. Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran was a special attendee at the meet.

Ayci took over as the chairman of Turkish Airlines in 2015 and under his watch the airline has become a mega carrier connecting 328 destinations in 128 countries with a fleet of 373 aircraft.

In 2014 it flew to 261 destinations in 108 countries with a fleet of 261 aircraft. The airline's transition to a new hub in Istanbul, wide body aircraft orders and growth of cargo business also happened in his tenure.

Born in Istanbul in 1971, Ayci studied political science, public administration and international relations. He began his career in 1994 and was an advisor to Recep

Tayyip Erdogan Turkey's current president and then mayor of Istanbul. He then served in the insurance sector and in 2011 became the president of Turkey's national investment promotion agency.

In a statement, N Chandrasekaran, said, "Ilker is an aviation industry leader who led Turkish Airlines to its current success during his tenure there.

"Working closely with my colleagues at Air India and the leadership of the Tata Group, we will utilize the strong heritage of Air India to make it one of the best airlines in the world with a uniquely superior flying experience that reflects Indian warmth and hospitality," Ayci said in a statement.

On social media, the Tata group's decision generated mixed responses including those pointing to Ayci's closeness to Erdogan and Turkey's pro-Pakistan stand at different forums.

Industry experts however welcomed the move. "Ayci's appointment is a positive development. It indicates that the Tatas are looking not just at a turnaround but at growth. Turkish Airlines has become a successful long haul airline in the face of stiff competition from West Asian airlines. It also has a successful cargo and MRO business. As its chairman Ayci would have had a 360 degree view of the entire aviation ecosystem and that would be his biggest strength," said Rohit Tomar, managing partner of Caladrius Aero Consulting.

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