

India, UK to sign new deal to increase flights

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London : India and United Kingdom (UK) are likely to finalise a new agreement which will allow airlines to deploy more flights between Delhi, Mumbai and London Heathrow airport.

Sources said that the new agreement will increase the quota of flights between the two Indian cities to London from 56 to 70 per week. With London having a large Indian diaspora in London and the UK's popularity as a tourist and business destination for Indians.

The air service agreement between India and the UK has a different structure, with flight quotas based on destinations. Under an open sky agreement signed in 2017, there are no limits on flights between Indian cities except Bengaluru and Hyderabad, where the capacity is limited to 14 flights per week.

However, for flights between Delhi, Mumbai, and Heathrow, the current capacity of 56 flights per week will be increased to 70. This expansion of the agreement became necessary because UK airlines such as British Airways and Virgin Atlantic had reached their quota and were unable to launch any new flights. Presently, British Airways operates 54 flights per week connecting Mumbai and Delhi with London, while Virgin Atlantic operates 42 flights per week.

British Airways CEO Sean Doyle has earlier this year highlighted the importance of keeping up with growing demand. He had told ET that the flight capacity to Mumbai and Delhi is subject to the air services agreement. “I think as demand grows, it is very important that the policy keeps pace with that. Ultimately, we should have liberalized air service agreements to allow the development of direct services,” he had said.

Similarly, a spokesperson from Virgin Atlantic acknowledged the strong demand from India to the UK and expressed their intention to serve various segments such as holidaymakers, corporate travelers, students, and visitors to friends and relatives.

While Indian airlines, such as Air India and Vistara, currently operate flights to London from Delhi and Mumbai, they face constraints due to limited slots at Heathrow Airport. According to the report, Indian airlines have requested government intervention to secure additional slots, as they intend to take advantage of the new agreement.

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