

## Lufthansa plans deeper links with Air India

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The maximum city last week witnessed a very high profile meeting of global airline heads ever in India, when Tata Sons and Air India chairman N Chandrasekaran conferred simultaneously with Singapore Airline (SIA) CEO Goh Choon Phong and Lufthansa Group chairman & CEO Carsten Spohr to chalk out the Maharaja's ambitious expansion plans.

While SIA will hold 25.1pc stake in the new AI, the German mega carrier plans to deepen the existing partnership with the Maharaja in several areas, including an expansion of code shares and potentially including engineering and aviation training.

During his India visit, Spohr exclusively met only TOI and spoke about the mega collaborative plans in the works. "India has not had an adequate seat at the (global) aviation table in the past. Air India with SIA on one side looking east and Lufthansa Group looking west has potential for something big, something that can change Indian aviation. As a partner it would be a privilege for Lufthansa Group to help bring AI to its rightful place on the global stage. Air India deserves it. India deserves it," Spohr, who as a Lufthansa pilot flew the Airbus A340 to Bengaluru several times between 2001 and 2006, told TOI.

According to him, the current high demand could enable the new AI “set to redefine its role” long term in the Indian market. “Until now, too much traffic between India and Europe and the USA used other hubs; for example, in the Gulf region. India and its flagship carrier AI should have a higher share of their own aviation market, one that will become the largest in the world,” said Spohr.

India and AI are also “well-positioned” to be a further hub and a hub airline for traffic between Southeast Asia, the Southwest Pacific, and Europe. “We are the commercial partners towards the west and Europe, and SIA the commercial partner towards the east. This is a very strong triangle,” added Spohr. Lufthansa Group has deep ties with US giant United Airlines and will “talk to our trans-Atlantic partner about possibly becoming the missing corner to turn it from a triangle to a rectangle. It helps to have a strong partner in a strong US market to be successful.”

Lufthansa Group is also looking at other business opportunities with the new Air India. “We own a very large aviation training company for flight attendants and pilots. We have many cargo flights. With a healthy and growing Air India, I can see many growth opportunities. Lufthansa Technik has become number one in the world by being present in many parts of the world, not just Europe. If Air India is looking for engineering support, Lufthansa Technik could possibly provide it,” Spohr said.

New planes as well as a wide range of premium products and services follow a clear goal, Spohr said. “We do not simply want to return to our pre-pandemic status quo from 2019 but once again set the standard in our industry.”

Lufthansa Group had last week raised its earnings forecast for 2022 from more than Euro 1 billion to Euro 1.5 billion euros. “We continue to see strong demand for air travel. Average yields for our airlines remain well above pre-crisis-level. Lufthansa Cargo and Lufthansa Technik are expected to achieve record results in the current fiscal year,” Spohr said.

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