

## Tim Clark says Emirates is not a threat to Air India

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Air India, owned by Tata Sons, will not be a threat to Emirates, but as a partner, the UAE's flag carrier can help the Indian airline succeed, Tim Clark, president, Emirates, said.

"I have never looked at Air India as a foe or threatened by it. I do not consider them as a threat now," he told reporters during a roundtable discussion at the CAPA conference on Tuesday.

Air India under the Tatas have placed a record order of 470 aircraft, including 70 long haul aircraft for direct flights to Europe and the Americas—markets that Emirates connects through its hub in Dubai with a substantial number of Indian passengers stopping over to fly to these regions.

"Rather than considering Emirates as a threat to India, look at us as someone who is going to help Air India in doing all things it needs to do. If anybody wants to talk to me about how you establish an international hub, I would say bring it on I don't mind," he added.

Narrating his experience of flying Air India regularly back in the 1950s, Clark said he was mesmerised with the Maharajah's hospitality standards.

Over the years, Clark said he often wondered the reason behind Air India's lack of

presence in global aviation despite its early headstart. "The airline now under a strong conglomerate like the Tata Group, has no excuse left to do justice with the brand," he added.

Clark believes Emirates is in a "position to add value and support Air India's growth".

While Emirates may want to partner, Air India's long-haul plane order, backed by Singapore Airlines, which will own 25.1% in Air India, will mean it will compete with Emirates. Air India will also serve a large number of passengers from India and Southeast Asia flying to Europe and the US, which are key revenue generating markets for Emirates.

India wants homegrown airlines to expand to Europe and the US and to restrict foreign carriers by not allowing them to expand foreign flying rights.

Emirates, which is trying to increase flight operations from India since 2014, today operates 66,000 seats for Dubai under the bilateral agreement between the two countries.

For outbound and inbound international traffic in India, Emirates is the largest foreign carrier and third largest overall after IndiGo and Air India, with nearly 10% share, according to October-December data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

Clark expects both governments to agree on increasing flights due to high demand.

"About 65pc of all flights of Indian carriers to UAE come to Dubai, or 344 flights a week. Everybody is strapped... It is a pity not to be able to accommodate it (growing demand). I am sure there will be realisation and there will be meeting of minds between the governments. I would say hallelujah it is about time," Clark said.

Emirates currently flies to nine major cities in India but sees potential in launching direct flights to Tier-2 and 3 destinations as well like Surat, Lucknow, and Amritsar. The airline shares its bilateral flying rights with its sister airline flydubai.

As the bilaterals have not expanded for over 10 years, Emirates is looking at alternative ways to enhance operations in West Asia and reiterated that it is not dependent on one market. "If there is difficulty, we either move around or move on," Clark said.

While the aviation industry was anticipating consolidation during the pandemic Clark has maintained that he believes in organic growth of an airline.

"Everybody said to me post covid that there will be massive consolidation, but I don't share that view. I am not one of these people who feel the need to have carriers consolidate with us or vice versa. I believe in organic control of what we do. In the end you control your own destiny. "Our model is based on raising the bar, while others are playing catch up," he added.

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