AIR INDIA PLANS WORLD'S LONGEST NONSTOP COMMERCIAL FLIGHT

News / Airlines

Air India could soon be operating the world's longest nonstop commercial flight. The airline is planning to link the it hotspots of India and U.S. -- Bengaluru and San Francisco (SFO) -- which are almost 14,000 km apart.

At present the longest nonstop commercial flight is operated by Australian airliner Qantas between Dallas Fort Worth in the U.S. and Sydney which is a 13,730 km journey.

Next year, UAE's mega carrier Emirates will link Dubai with Panama City, a distance of 13,760 km. Avoiding the war zones of Iraq and Syria will lead to diversions that will increase the length of the journey.

"We are planning to have a nonstop from either Delhi or Bengaluru to San Francisco on our Boeing 777-200 long range aircraft. And in addition we are planning a direct service between Ahmedabad and London due to the huge demand for travel between these two cities," said a senior AI official.

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If it opts for Bengaluru-San Francisco connection, the flying time will be almost 17 to 18 hours for the longest nonstop commercial in the world. These ambitious flights will be among the first key decisions to be taken by AI's new chairman Ashwani Lohani.

The announcement for the nonstop India-SFO flight could be made when Prime Minister Narendra Modi travels to Silicon Valley later this week. SFO has no direct flight to India despite a significant Indian population in Silicon Valley and the travel requirement of techies between the two cyber hubs.

Linking these two cities was the dream of now-grounded Kingfisher's promoter Vijay Mallya who had planned to acquire an Airbus A-340 for this service. But his Bengaluru-based airline ran out of cash up and got buried in debt before it could reach US. Naresh Goyal's Jet Airways had a one-stop flight from Mumbai to San Francisco that flew through China but this flight was stopped about five years back.

"All those plans were made when oil was prohibitively expensive. Now oil is a multi-year low and AI has the equipment to operate ultra-long haul flights using its mostly unused B-777-200 LRs. AI had acquired eight of these aircraft and five of them were sold to Abu Dhabi's Etihad on which it is operating nonstop to Los Angeles. Now AI will also do the same," said a source.

Termed "fuel guzzlers", AI found it more economical to simply keep these planes grounded when oil prices defied gravity. Now, low oil prices have changed the airline's thinking.

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