

Air India's integration into Star Alliance may take longer

Air India's integration with Star Alliance may take longer than earlier expected because of the internal dynamics and changing profile of the carrier, top officials of the 21-member interline organisation said Friday.

'Air India is going through its own restructuring - its integration with Indian Airlines. So the process is much more complicated and challenging,' said Marcus Puffer, director for networking and marketing development with Star Alliance, (a few words on what Star Alliance is about).

'As a result, the ongoing integration process with Star Alliance has also become challenging,' Puffer told IANS on the sidelines of an event to induct Egyptair as the 21st member of Star Alliance.

Air India was expected to formally join Star Alliance in March 2009. The carrier was represented at the event by Shirin Lalwani, executive director for alliance management and international relations.

According to the interline organisation executive, a team of three-four senior members of Star Alliance was working with Air India executives on a daily basis to oversee the integration process.

'You must understand that our integration involves as many as 75 elements under 12 categories ranging from flight safety to membership agreements,' Puffer added.

'Air India is facing a series of internal challenges since its operations have to be integrated with Indian Airlines. But I can also say that the simultaneous integration with Star Alliance will speed up matters.'

Officials explained that among the various benefits for the Indian carrier in integrating with the Star Alliance would be partnerships with some of the member-carriers for marketing, sourcing of spares and long-term contracts for fuel.

This apart, the flying returns scheme of Air India would also be integrated with the frequent flier programmes of member-carriers, where miles earned on one carrier can be redeemed with any of the other member-airlines.

With 21 members led by Lufthansa, Star Alliance has rivals in OneWorld, led by American Airlines and British Airways, and SkyTeam, led by Air France-KLM and Delta Air Lines.

Ahead of the induction of Egypt Air as its 21st member, the alliance members ferry 492.77 million passengers annually, from as many as 965 airports across the globe with a combined fleet of 3,294 aircraft.

According to Star Alliance executives, the process of integration involved a host of issues and normally took 12-18 months.

While the integration of China Air and Air Shanghai took a similar time, Egypt Air was able to accomplish that in just nine months, they added.

Star Alliance officials said along with the process of integrating Air India, they were also looking

closely at the concept of members under one roof in India for convenient transfers on connecting flights among members and sharing of infrastructure like lounges.

'We are in talks with the airport managers in Delhi and [Mumbai](#) for our members to be under one roof. Of course, Air India is also helping us in this regard,' said Puffer.

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