FOREIGN CARRIERS MAY NOT GET LANDING RIGHTS ON DEMAND, SAYS CIVIL AVIATION MINISTRY

News / Airlines

Some foreign carriers pitch for more landing points as well as higher number of seats but at times allowing such requests could hurt domestic carriers, said a senior official from the Civil Aviation Ministry.

Signalling a major shift in granting air traffic rights, the government is looking at restricting the number of landing points for overseas airlines irrespective of their seat entitlements.

The thinking on these lines comes against the backdrop of Gulf carriers cornering a large chunk of international air traffic from India because of having landing rights across a number of airports in the country.

A senior Civil Aviation Ministry official said it was looking at restricting the ports of call given to foreign airlines under bilateral rights, while remaining flexible on seat entitlements.

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allowing such requests could hurt domestic carriers, the official said.

"There should be a balance between the interests of passengers and the interests of Indian carriers," he said, adding, at present, the balance seems to be tilted towards overseas airlines.

According to the official, restrictions would in a way ensure that foreign airlines do not make certain places their regional hubs for air services.A firm decision on restricting the landing points for overseas airlines is yet to be taken, the official added.

The bilateral rights allow carriers of two countries to operate a fixed number of seats to a limited number of destinations in each other's territory.

India has Air Service Agreements (ASA) with 109 countries covering aspects relating to the number of flights, seats, landing points and code-share.The utilisation of bilateral rights at any point of time differs from country to country and is subject to periodic re-negotiation.

As per the draft aviation policy, the government plans to liberalise the regime of bilateral rights leading to greater ease of doing business and wider choice to passengers.

Meanwhile, the Ministry is preparing to put in place a mechanism to provide additional seats to interested foreign carriers through auction and the proceeds would be used for funding regional connectivity scheme.

"If the foreign carrier has exhausted its seat entitlement, then additional seats can be provided through auction," he said.

Noting that separate guidelines would be there for the auction process, the official said, "If seats are auctioned, there will not be any problem as it will ensure transparency... We (the Ministry) want to try this route".

Initially, the rights would be auctioned for a period of three years and it is being proposed as a "temporary measure" as of now, the official noted.

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