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Qatar Airways eyes stake in India's IndiGo

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DOHA -- Qatar Airways CEO Akbar Ali Baker made a pitch for a stake in Indian airline IndiGo calling IndiGo a "most successful and efficiently-run airline," and we always like to forge partnership with a successful venture.

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Baker made this comment at a press conference held at Ritz Carlton during the 70th IATA annual general meeting on Monday. He shared the dias with IATA Director General and CEO Tony Tyler, and IATA Vice President for Corporate Communication Tony Council.

Baker and Tyler were asked in the conference, what their wish list from the new Indian government were and, in the same breath, Baker was asked for his views on the reported Qatar Airways move to buy a stake into IndiGo.

Baker expressed this keenness after urging the new Indian government of Narendra Modi to use aviation to grow the country's economy. "It (aviation) is the root of all development. It will fuel economic growth through trade and tourism, provide job opportunities and prove beneficial for India," he said.

"The previous government did not do anything to boost this industry. India is a sleeping economic giant, and if the government does what Modi had asked 1.2 billion Indian to do -- take a step forward so it would be 1.2 billion steps forward -- the nation would benefit," he added.

"I would also hope the government is able to rein in private airport owners who levy high charges and that's detrimental for airlines."

Echoing Baker's sentiments on seeking equitable charges being levied by airport owners in India, Tyler said his wish list would also include the doing away of excessive regulations and high state taxes.

Tyler, when asked whether safety would be compromised by cyber attacks, said. "It is definitely a threat. But we do not see it as a major threat for now. But we are taking this issue (cyber attacks) seriously and working with experts to counter it."

Tyler, when asked whether IATA would be only tracking data or will be streaming data, said: "We will do something that is easily done, and the priority is tracking. Experts from around the world are working together to identify the best recommendations for improved global tracking. By September we'll have draft options."

Baker, expanded on the point of safety, stating that Qatar is exploring tracking systems that would help in ensuring future safety. "After the Air France incident we began exploring possibilities of enhancing safety, but we need IATA and Tony (Tyler) to see that nobody is able to switch off tracking in any airlines. This is a concern for all, especially as safety of passengers is paramount."

In another session, the IATA unanimously adopted a resolution that calls on governments and industry to work together to tackle the unruly passenger problem.

The resolution also confirmed the determination of airlines to defend the rights of the passengers and crew. Many airlines have trained ground staff and cabin crew in procedures not only to manage incidents of unruly behavior but also measures to prevent them.

"But a robust solution needs alignment among airlines, airports and governments," said Tyler.

The IATA also announced three new pilot programs to test the New Distribution Capability (NDC) schemes. They include Aeroflot, Aer Lingus, Qatar Airways and JR Technologies (JRT). This is the second NDC pilot for JRT.

NDC is a travel industry-sponsored program launched by IATA for the development and market adoption of a new XML-based data transmission standard.

NDC will enable the travel industry to transform the way air products are retailed for corporations, leisure and business travelers, by addressing the industry's current distribution limitations: product differentiation and time-to-market, access to full and rich air content and transparent shopping experience.

"We are delighted to be the first Middle East airline to launch the NDC pilot," said Al Baker.

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