

THAI hopes to resume flights to US

Carrier needs ICAO and FAA clearance

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Thai Airways International Plc (THAI) aims to resume flights to the United States, though they would be routed through either Seattle or San Francisco instead of Los Angeles, which was the previous destination.

THAI president Charamporn Jotikasthira said the timing of the move to resume flights to the US depends on the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) withdrawing its "red flag", and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) upgrading the country's aviation status. He revealed the goal at a seminar on aviation safety yesterday.

THAI suspended its flights from Bangkok to Los Angeles in October last year in line with its rehabilitation plan following years of losses.

With increasing demand, the national flag carrier is now considering flights to either Seattle or San Francisco because passengers could transfer to other destinations, Mr Charamporn said, adding the flights are expected to be launched next year.

Thailand was downgraded by the FAA on Dec 1 last year to Category II, meaning

Thai-registered airlines were not allowed to open new routes, increase the frequency of existing flights to the US, or change aircraft types deployed on current services.

This came after the ICAO issued a "red flag", indicating significant safety concerns, in June last year following Thailand's failure to meet standards in regulating aviation businesses and granting air operator certificates (AOCs).

"If the Thai aviation regulator solves the problem and the red flag is lifted, the FAA would also allow Thai-registered carriers to fly in and out of the country [US] as usual," he said. The opening of the new route to the US would come when THAI receives two new Boeing aircraft next year, he added.

Mr Charamporn said non-stop flights would be offered on the route, which is a major selling point as no other carriers offer this service. In the past, THAI operated flights to the US with a stop in either Japan or South Korea, he said.

Mr Charamporn restated the Thai national carrier's plan to open a new route to Tehran in October. Iran is a potentially lucrative market for business and tourism with a population of 77.5 million.

THAI also aims to resume services to Moscow which were also suspended last year during the company's restructuring. Seven flights will operate every week, up from four in the original plan.

THAI also is gearing up efforts to improve service to meet passenger

demand in a bid to boost market share and ensure aviation safety following the ICAO's decision to issue the red flag, he said.

The airline also launched the Safety Beyond Compliance project last year to boost safety standards in the aviation industry in compliance with European Aviation Safety Agency standards. THAI will also work with Scandinavian airlines to share aviation safety data in a system called Enpire to devise measures to ensure safety.

Referring to the impact of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, Mr Charamporn said British travellers may avoid going to the US due to the weakening pound so they might decide to come to Thailand more.