

# Andal airport receives first flight

East India's first green-field airport will 'usher in new era of development'

**PRATIM RANJAN BOSE, ABHISHEK LAW**

Andal/Kolkata, May 18

Two fully-gearred fire tenders greeted the first commercial flight to Andal airport as a host of Bollywood stars like Dev and Moon Moon Sen (also Trinamool Congress MPs) and two Cabinet Ministers - Malay Ghatak and Aroop Biswas - made history by being the first passengers on board the historic flight.

Conceptualised in 2008, it was a pet project of former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. The commercial flight operations to Andal airport, which has now been named as Kazi Nazrul Islam Airport, had finally begun on Monday.

Located just 180 km from the city, Kazi Nazrul Islam airport is Eastern India's first Greenfield airport. It is promoted by the Bengal Aerotropolis Projects Ltd (BAPL), in which Singapore's Changi Air-

ports International has a 36 per cent stake.

This apart, BAPL's Indian promoters include Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Limited (IL&FS), Pragati Social Infrastructure & Development, Pragati 47 Development Ltd, Lend Lease (India) Ltd. and Citystar Infrastructures.

Years ago, a private air taxi was allowed to operate Durgapur-Delhi flights from the nearby Panagarh military airport. It was a roaring success. Unfortunately the air taxi operator went bust, says Kripal Singh, President of Durgapur Small Scale Industry Association.

Singh, however, is sure the private green-field airport will be a commercial success.

Durgapur has 15,000 engineering and management students; which form a rich catchment area with Bengaluru, Delhi and the north-east being the preferred destinations.

"Travelling by road and the risks associated with it can be done away with," he said. SAIL's modernisation project should also provide scope for traffic to airlines



**Making history** A host of Bollywood stars and two Cabinet Ministers were the first passengers on board the historic flight **PRATIMRANJANBOSE**

operating from the new airport. But it will still take some time before operations at the airport stabilise, a BAPL official says.

For starters, flights will have to re-organise their schedules to connect to Durgapur through direct flights to cities such as Bengaluru or New Delhi or Mumbai. As a result, many operators need to re-work their fleet utilisation plans.

"The summer schedules are already done, so it will take some more months before things pan out," the official adds. Air India became the first operator connecting Kolkata to Durgapur and back.

The inaugural flight was operated by Alliance Air, the wholly-owned subsidiary of Air India, with a 48-seater ATR-42 aircraft.

Apart from Air India, non-scheduled operators such as Pinnacle Air are expected to start operations soon. Pinnacle Air, in technical collaboration with BAPL, carried out trial runs over the last two days from Kolkata to Cooch Behar, touching down at Durgapur and Bagdogra respectively.

According to Partha Ghosh, MD, BAPL, the airport will "usher in a new era of development in the State."