

Hectic first day at Andal airport

Debjyoti Chakraborty

Andal: Narendra Modi on Sunday afternoon became the first passenger to fly out of the country's first private-sector greenfield airport. The Indian Air Force (IAF) B 737-700 Boeing Business Jet (BBJ) carrying the Prime Minister took off from Kazi Nazrul Islam Airport at Andal around 1pm and headed straight to Delhi.

However, Modi was not the first one to use the airport. On Saturday evening, minister for steel and mines Narendra Singh Tomar arrived at Andal from Ranchi in a non-scheduled Hawk 750 aircraft. On Sunday morning, minister for state for labour, employment, steel and mines Vishvadeo Sai, was the first to arrive in a Beech Super King Air BE-20 private plane. Officials of airport developer Bengal Aerotropolis Projects Ltd (BAPL) were the next to land at 10.15am. At 10.30am, the IAF BBJ arrived from Kolkata, ready to carry the PM to Delhi.

On Sunday, the private operator's resources were stretched to the limit as they had not anticipated handling of eight aircraft on its first day of operation. Two-three flights a day was what airport officials had optimistically hoped to handle initially.

Though activity at the airport has been hectic since Saturday evening and hit a peak on Sunday morning,



Narendra Modi with other dignitaries at the Andal airport on Sunday

Modi's arrival from the Polo Ground in Asansol on an IAF helicopter overshadowed the others. After inaugurating the revamped IISCO Steel Plant, Modi took the chopper ride to the brand new airport, reaching there at 12.40pm. Governor Keshari Nath Tripathi, Asansol MP Babul Supriyo and BJP state president Rahul Sinha travelled with him to the airport where state urban development minister Firdad Hakim was present to see the PM off.

Prior to his departure, Modi spent around seven minutes in the terminal building and interacted with officials of the private consortium that has constructed the airport. "I had heard about the airport project and am happy to see it. When I come to this part of the country again, I will use

Cong warns Mamata on bonhomie with PM

New Delhi: The Congress warned Mamata Banerjee that her growing bonhomie with Prime Minister Narendra Modi could lead to breaking the opposition unity over land acquisition bill and other controversial central legislations.

"All states vie with each other to extract maximum benefits from the Centre. We don't grudge Mamata Banerjee or TMC for trying to secure the best benefits for West Bengal. However, we want to warn Banerjee that Modi has a proven track record of use and throw politics and he will junk Trinamool the moment his political purpose is served," Congress's head of media department Randeep Surjewala said.

this airport," Modi told Partha Ghosh, BAPL managing director. BAPL director Utsav Parekh and James Thong, deputy managing director of Changi Airports International of Singapore, were also present to see off Modi. Changi has 36.2% stake in the project.

According to sources, it was chief minister Mamata Banerjee who had

earlier persuaded Modi to use the airport while departing for Delhi instead of taking a helicopter. Modi accepted the proposal after the National Security Guard gave a green signal.

Commercial operations at the airport will begin from May 18 with Alliance Air operating a 42-seater ATR flight between Andal and Kolkata six days a week and Pinnacle Air connecting Andal with Bagdogra and Cooch Behar.

Alliance Air has fixed the one-way fare at Rs 2,500 with special discounts to government officials, students and differently-abled persons. It will take 35 minutes to fly to Andal from Kolkata. While the flight will take off from Kolkata airport at 5.05pm, the return flight will leave Andal at 6.05pm. Pinnacle Air has fixed the fare at Rs 1,500 on the Andal-Kolkata leg and Rs 4,000 for Kolkata-Cooch Behar sector. Negotiations are also on with GoAir for flights to Delhi four days a week and Air Costa to connect Hyderabad and Vijaywada. The 4C category airport has a capacity to handle 4 lakh passengers a year.

Airport's director Virendar Singh said passengers to New Delhi and Mumbai will be able to avail baggage through check-in facility. Rajendra Prasad Khaitan, president of South Bengal Chamber of Commerce & Industries, said the airport has come as a relief for the entire industrial belt.