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Tuesday, 18 April, 2017, 15 : 00 PM [IST]

Private airport at Durgapur comes back into business

In June last year, Air India withdrew its thrice-a-week service connecting the Bengal Aerotropolis Projects Ltd (BAPL)-run private airport near Durgapur in West Bengal with Delhi, citing lack of passengers. The decision virtually closed the airport. On February 12 this year, the airport, also referred to as Kazi Nazrul Islam airport, resumed services with daily Zoom Air flights on Kolkata-Durgapur-Delhi route. Two months down the line, the flight is reportedly witnessing 95% occupancy and Zoom is planning to launch services to Mumbai and Chennai.

"The flights are operating at 95% occupancy," said Partha Ghosh, MD, BAPL. According to him, Zoom hopes to launch two more connections to Chennai and Zoom Air flights to Delhi see 95% occupancy and new flights are planned to Mumbai and Chennai. by June-July. BAPL, which has Changi Airport of Singapore as one of its promoters, has been arguing that Durgapur, located in India's coal and steel heartland, offered great potential for airlines. The emergence of Durgapur as a private education hub has boosted its potential. In June last year, BAPL blamed flight delays and costly operations of AI for the losses suffered by the airline.

This is despite 75% passenger load on the Kolkata-Delhi-Durgapur route, which equalled AI's national average then. In the recently concluded first round of bidding for regional connectivity flights under the UDAN scheme, Air Deccan won the rights for flights from Durgapur to Kolkata and Bagdogra in North Bengal. The services were to be launched in July. But the government has now postponed it to September. Interestingly, Air Deccan also won the right to connect Kolkata with Burnpur, which is barely 30 km south of the Durgapur airport. Normally, two airports at such close proximity are unviable. BAPL sources are confident that even if flight services to Burnpur happen, they will not pose any threat to Durgapur airport. According to them, Burnpur merely has an airstrip that belongs to SAIL. In contrast, Durgapur is a full-fledged airport, with the latest technologies and is eyeing connectivity to metros.

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