

Standing Committee Report Summary

Functioning of Airports Authority of India

- The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: T.G. Venkatesh) submitted its report on the subject 'Functioning of Airports Authority of India' on August 2, 2021. The Airports Authority of India, is a statutory authority under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, which is responsible for the integrated development, expansion and modernisation of: (i) air traffic services, (ii) passenger terminals, and (iii) cargo services in the country. It operates and maintains 136 airports in the country, out of which 110 are operational. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Air traffic management:** The Committee observed that there has been a continuous growth in air traffic in the country over the past few years. It noted that it is essential to adopt best practices regarding air navigation services to reduce congestion at airports. Therefore, the Committee recommended: (i) constituting a high powered committee for flexible air space management to reduce flight time, fuel consumption and carbon emission, (ii) establishing a high level committee with the Indian Air Force for filtering the navigation and landing related aspects of the Modernisation of Military Airfields project, (iii) upgrading infrastructure for helicopter and seaplane operations to enhance regional connectivity, (iv) upgrading the air navigation and landing facilities at all airports in a time bound manner, and (v) conducting timely recruitment for vacancies of Air Traffic Control officers and other administrative posts.
 - **Enhancing supporting infrastructure:** The Committee took note of issues related to lack of adequate infrastructure of airports like non-availability of land, delays due to compliance of regulations by the airport operators, large number of institutional clearances, and lack of connectivity to airports. To address these issues, the it recommended: (i) ensuring sufficient space for commercial shops, parking spaces and, hotels near airports, (ii) earmarking 100 acres of land across the country for future airports, (iii) setting up single window clearance mechanisms for timely grant of project clearances, and (iv) conducting maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) infrastructure workshops and enhancing collaboration between defence and civil MROs.
 - **Privatisation of airports:** The Committee noted the demand for more airports in the country. To meet the growing investment requirements to develop and maintain the airports, it underlined the need for Public Private Partnership (PPP) in this sector. In order to ensure transparency, the Committee recommended: (i) ensuring proper regulatory framework and auditing mechanism for governing PPP airports, (ii) ensuring airport charges for passengers which are proportional to operational costs, and (iii) ensuring career interests of employees of Airports Authority of India for airports undergoing privatisation.
- **Air connectivity:** The Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) UDAN scheme was launched by the central government in 2016 to enhance regional air connectivity. The Committee recommended utilising unused air strips and dormant airports for promoting air connectivity under RCS.
- **Cargo Sector:** To address bottlenecks in developing the country's air cargo sector, the Committee recommended: (i) establishing dedicated cargo airports, (ii) establishing facilities for screening, storage space, and temperature control, (iii) amending the Open Sky Policy to ensure a level playing field for Indian air cargo carriers, and (iv) ensuring uniform transit handling costs and procedures across the country.
- **Rescheduling or cancellation of flights:** The Committee noted the inconvenience caused to passengers due to rescheduling or cancellation of flights. It recommended: (i) ensuring necessary assistance to passengers in the event of rescheduling or cancellation of flights, (ii) establishing holding areas for stranded passengers with adequate facilities of food, water, medical help and accommodation.
- **Use of Technology:** The Committee took note of the various technological initiatives undertaken by the government. These include: (i) a digital passenger processing system at airports (Digi Yatra), (ii) a platform for registration, tracking and analysis of drones (Digital Sky), and (iii) an interactive web portal for grievance redressal of passengers (Air Sewa). It recommended further improvement in these schemes to benefit the aviation sector in the country.
- **Impact of COVID-19:** The Committee recommended that all airlines and aviation-related business must be made eligible for priority sector lending and short term loan waivers. Further, it recommended that the ministry should provide a sectoral fund, to provide structural debt to the industry.

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