

Regarding need to include Coimbatore Airport in the list of `Points of Call` for operation of International Flights-Laid

DR. GANAPATHY RAJKUMAR P. (COIMBATORE): Coimbatore is the third largest city of the state, one of the most industrialized cities in Tamil Nadu, known as the textile capital or the Manchester of South India. The expansion of the Coimbatore airport is important not only for the growth of Coimbatore but also for the neighbouring districts. The State Government of Tamil Nadu has given the land free of charge on a 99-year lease without any sub-leasing restrictions to Airport Authority of India. The State Government formally handed over 468.83 acres of land at the cost of Rs 2,088.92 crore required for the land acquisition to kick start the airport expansion project. The present flight services to Abu Dhabi and Singapore are available from Coimbatore International Airport. Tamil Nadu Government has urged the Minister of Civil Aviation to include Coimbatore airport as 'point of call in the Bilateral Air Services Agreement (BASA) and in the ASEAN BASA, which India has signed for international flight operations to and from various Indian cities by foreign carriers. The current BASA and ASEAN BASA agreements primarily benefited six metropolitan cities and eighteen tier-2 cities, allowing an unlimited number of international flights by foreign carriers. However, these agreements failed to accommodate the growing demand for international flights to fast-developing tier-2 cities like Coimbatore, which are currently excluded from the list of 'points of call'. At a recent aviation conclave held in Coimbatore, several international airlines, including AirAsia X, AirAsia Thailand, Fly Dubai, Oman Air, Royal Brunei, Qatar Airways, Malindo (Batik) Air and Thai Airways expressed interest in operating flights from Coimbatore to key destinations such as Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Dubai, Muscat and Doha. However, as Coimbatore is not a point of call, these carriers were unable to get rights to operate in Coimbatore. This inclusion, would provide people in the western Tamil Nadu region with direct access to international flights to key destinations in Southeast Asia and the Middle East introducing international flights to Coimbatore by foreign carriers would not hinder the growth of existing hubs in India. Instead, it would reduce the need of passengers from the region to travel long distances to other airports, despite Coimbatore being designated as an international airport. I urge upon the

Government to complete the Coimbatore Airport expansion on war footing and also grant "point of call" for introduction of new International Flights to and from Coimbatore Airport.