

Funds parked for Cooch Behar airport



SATYABRATA DAS/HT

Industrialist R.P. Goenka at the AGM of the Indian Chamber of Commerce

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THE CIVIL aviation ministry has earmarked Rs 15,000 crore for development of the Cooch Behar airstrip into a full-fledged airport in the state. The ministry is also impressed with the Aerotropolis plan but has cautioned that unless it is marketed well, it may not be commercially viable.

Speaking at the 81st annual general meeting of the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), M Madhavan Nambiar, Union secretary of civil aviation, said that it is a pity that currently there is no direct flight to US from Kolkata and flights to UK have also been withdrawn. With only 56 international flights leaving the airport per week, there is a dire need to expand the existing infrastructure. "Kolkata is the gateway to

SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) as well as ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries. Despite this, Kolkata is only connected to Singapore and Bangkok and no other city in the Asia Pacific region," Nambiar said.

According to Nambiar, the North-eastern states are an untapped region and more airports can be developed there to improve connectivity with the far-flung areas of these states. "In a country with a population of a billion, till this year only 118 million people were tapped by the entire industry, losing out on revenue prospects. Guwahati airport can be developed as the sub-hub with Kolkata as the main hub to handle the increased capacity," said Nambiar.

Aerotropolis, an airport hub to the hinterland Durgapur is a part of the development plan of the avi-

ation industry in West Bengal. This would not only help the aviation industry to generate revenues like e-commerce that develops around such hubs but also create employment opportunities in the state.

Veteran industrialist and member of Rajya Sabha, R.P. Goenka, who was also present at the AGM, congratulated the Mamohan Singh-led UPA government for successfully implementing schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and the more recent unique national ID card scheme under Nandan Nilekani. Welcoming the much-awaited judicial reforms and the food policy initiated by the Centre, Goenka lauded the PM's efforts and said that thrust on infrastructure augurs well for India.

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