

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Govt of India,

Hon'ble Ministers from Asia Pacific region,

President of ICAO,

Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Govt of India

Directors General,

Distinguished Delegates,

## **INTRODUCTION**

On behalf of the Government of India, I warmly **welcome you all to the 2nd Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation**. It is an **honor and a great pride** for us to **host this historic event** alongside such esteemed **global aviation leaders**.

I extend **my sincere gratitude to the President of ICAO for his unwavering support and guidance**. **Congratulations to ICAO on its 80th anniversary**; your dedication to **advancing global aviation standards and safety** has been instrumental to the industry's progress, and **we deeply value your contributions**.

Yesterday, I **closely followed up on the symposiums and panel discussions** and as I **engaged with many of you during the reception dinner**, I was genuinely **moved by the enthusiasm and keen interest each one of you brings to this gathering**. It is truly **heartening to see the energy in the room** and the passion with which everyone is contributing. **It's clear that we all share the same vision—to make this event a resounding success**.

The growth story of civil aviation in the Asia-Pacific region is both rich and rapid. And **I would like to bring everyone's attention to the fact that commercial aviation operations began in the Asia-Pacific region almost a century ago. And today 100 years later in 2024, the coming together of all the regional partners for the conference reflects our aspirations and vision to build a more inter-connected Asia-Pacific.**

The region's economic boom in the late 20th century significantly contributed to the rise of aviation, and by the early 21st century, the **Asia-Pacific has emerged as one of the fastest-growing aviation markets globally**, with forecasts suggesting it will become **the largest aviation market by 2035, with over 3.5 billion passengers forecasted annually.**

With Asia-Pacific region poised to lead global aviation growth, **strategic investments in infrastructure and collaboration amongst the regional stakeholders is critical to achieving sustainable and balanced growth** across the sector.

India is truly privileged to serve as the host nation for this landmark event which is a **testimony of our collective commitment to build a more connected, resilient, and robust aviation landscape.** It provides a **valuable opportunity to exchange best practices and explore scalable models for advancing the aviation sector.**

### **THE GROWTH STORY OF INDIA'S AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE**

**As India hosts this significant conference, I must highlight the rapid advancements made by the country in this sector backed by a successful regional connectivity model under the visionary leadership and able guidance of Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi Ji.**

Much like the eagle that soars high with unmatched vision, **India's aviation industry has taken flight driven by innovation, ambition, and a commitment** to reach unprecedented heights.

**Our aviation market has been growing at an impressive rate of approximately 10-12% annually**, driven by Government policies that support regional connectivity. India's airport infrastructure has expanded significantly in past decade with the number of **operational airports growing from 74 in 2014 to 157 in 2024, and we have an ambitious plan of scaling this up to 350-400 airports by 2047.**

With our interventions, the **domestic air passengers have more than doubled in just a span of 10 years from 67 million in 2014 to 152 million.** The fleet size of scheduled airlines in the country has also increased from 400 in 2014 to around 800 and last year an order for more than 1200 aircraft was collectively placed by the domestic carriers. Today, India stands as the **third-largest domestic aviation market** and one of the fastest-growing markets globally.

We are also committed to **building world-class airports**, like the upcoming **Bhogapuram International Airport in Andhra Pradesh, Noida International Airport in Uttar Pradesh, Navi Mumbai Airport in Maharashtra**, which are set to revolutionize regional connectivity with state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructure. **Meanwhile, I have also been focusing on expansion of the existing mega Airports like the Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai airports.**

**My vision is to transform India into a global aviation hub** by modernizing existing facilities and constructing new ones to meet the growing demands of both domestic and international travelers.

Also, utilizing this platform, I would emphasize that **India's commitment towards air connectivity is not limited to our airspace only, we look at it as a shared responsibility** for the growth of the region as a whole. With that perspective, I would **highlight some of the impactful advancements that India has made** in strengthening domestic aviation which can be adopted for the greater region.

### **INDIA'S COHERENT REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY MODEL**

The Government of India in last 10 years has worked diligently to make flying accessible to all citizens. **We are guided by the vision of 'Ease of Flying' where affordable air-travel is accessible even in the remotest corners.**

**Our regional connectivity scheme UDAN focuses on connecting underserved and unserved regions with affordable flights. Over 2.8 lakh flights have been operated under the scheme, opening up 583 new regional routes in the country. This is a testament to our Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji's vision of democratizing air travel.**

As part of the initiative, **regional airlines receive support to operate** at unserved and underserved airstrips **through concessions on airport charges, reduced VAT and excise duty on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), and financial assistance to cover the gap between operational costs and revenue.**

We are **proud to be at the forefront of initiatives that are helping to transform air travel in this region.**

As we look to the future, our vision is to build a futuristic aviation ecosystem that meets the demands of the 21st century.

And for that, **my ministry is working with the vision of establishing a seamless aviation landscape in the country, integrating Helicopters and Seaplane operations alongside widebody aircraft under the regional connectivity scheme UDAN.**

**This would enhance accessibility to remote regions and foster economic growth.**

### **ADVANCING INNOVATION**

**I believe that for realizing the true potential of the aviation sector, we can't afford to miss on the 3 'I's of Aviation**

- **Infrastructure** – Developing robust air terminals and cargo facilities
- **Integration** – Seamlessly integrating the movements of widebody aircraft, seaplanes, helicopters and E-VTOLs

**And everyone here would agree that the third 'I' - Innovation is most crucial for advancement of the sector**

As India's Aviation Minister, **I have been spearheading incorporation and scaling up of modern technologies.** The Government of India has introduced '**Digi Yatra**', a **digital tool enabling seamless, contactless travel for the passengers using biometric technology, thereby decongesting our terminals. It has effectively reduced passenger entry time at the airport from 15 seconds to 1 minute earlier to 5 seconds now.** Since its inception, the system has also **helped save thousands of sheets of paper by eliminating the need to carry physical documents.**

**While the number of airports has doubled up in 10 years to 157, the annual passenger traffic has increased by 9 times at our airports. Therefore, I believe that we need to aggressively incorporate IT tools and applications to make air-travel sustainable.**

**Another interesting development is that India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has recently released encouraging guidelines for Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) aircraft in India. This is a transformative move toward the future of air mobility.**

**By encouraging the development and operation of VTOLs, the Government of India is paving the way for innovative, efficient, and sustainable urban transport solutions.**

**These initiatives are aligned with India's vision of enhancing regional connectivity, making air travel more comfortable for the passengers, and adopting cutting-edge aviation technologies.**

### **VISION FOR INDIA TO BE A DRONE POWERHOUSE**

**We are also actively fostering a robust drone innovation ecosystem, recognizing its potential to revolutionize multiple sectors. Drones are being actively integrated into agriculture, with programs like the Drone Didi Yojna which aims to train 15,000 women to operate drones for agricultural purposes such as fertilizing the crop, monitoring crop growth, planting the seeds etc. And we are promoting drones in various other sectors like Healthcare, Rural Development etc. given the immense scope of Drones to create jobs at the grassroots.**

Additionally, drones have been effectively used in **disaster relief efforts as well**, as seen during the **recent Vijayawada floods in the state of Andhra Pradesh**, where drones were deployed to deliver **medical aid, food, assess damage, and assist in rescue operations**.

### **EASE OF DOING BUSINESS**

We are also strongly focusing on **mechanisms to facilitate Ease of Doing Business** in the sector. Policies have been introduced to **foster aircraft leasing, Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) services**. Government is also in **continuous deliberations with various OEMs** and encouraging them to **set up their facilities** in India.

**With a strong talent pool and a strategic geographical location, India is well-positioned** to offer **cost-effective and high-quality MRO services** not only to our domestic fleet but also to international airlines.

And as we **gain expertise in the MRO ecosystem**, we inch closer to **India's commitment to manufacture aircraft in the country**. I am very keen on ways to boost indigenous production capabilities, and **position India as a key player in the global aerospace industry**.

**And we are continuously taking measures to facilitate MROs in the country** through important **policy announcements like application of a uniform rate of 5% IGST Tax to imports of components and equipment**.

The **period for export of goods imported for repairs** has been extended from six months to one year. Also, the time-limit for re-import of goods for repairs under warranty has been extended from three to five years.

The effective New MRO Guidelines have also abolished royalties and built in transparency and certainty in land allotments for MROs in AAI airports.

And most importantly, 100% Foreign Direct Investment is now permitted via automatic route for MRO.

### **SAFE AND SECURE AIR TRAVEL**

I would now seek your attention for the most basic as well as the most crucial aspect of aviation i.e. **safe and secure travel for the passengers**. We are committed to explore innovative solutions to enhance our navigation systems and create a safe environment in the ever-expanding air traffic space.

The safety and **security of the passengers is of utmost importance** to us. We must deliberate on upholding and enhancing aviation safety standards and work towards the seamless adoption of international regulations and standards.

**Security in aviation is non-negotiable**. As we continue our efforts to strengthen aviation security, collaboration between nations is essential. In a world of evolving threats, it is our **collective responsibility to ensure the safety of every passenger, crew, and aircraft**.



## **SUSTAINABLE AIR TRAVEL**

**As aviation leaders, we must increase our efforts toward making the sector carbon neutral. This includes transitioning to more sustainable aviation fuels, improving energy efficiency at airports, and adopting greener technologies that minimize emissions. The Asia Pacific region must be at the forefront of these efforts, leading the way toward a sustainable future for aviation.**

**This is in line with the mandate of ICAO, which through its normative work, oversight and implementation support serves the people of the world in facilitating international civil air transport that is safe, secure, efficient, economically viable and most importantly, environmentally responsible.**

The aviation industry has long been recognized as a significant contributor to global carbon emissions. **Commercial aviation, in particular, is responsible for nearly 2% of global carbon emissions, as reported by the International Energy Agency.** This substantial impact is largely due to the vast quantities of jet fuel required to power flights across continents. **Government of India is promoting adoption of Sustainable Aviation Fuel, the target is to blend 1% of sustainable aviation fuel with jet fuel in 2027, 2% in 2028 and 5% by 2030 for all international flights.**

Our airports have also made significant **advancements in decarbonization** of the aviation sector. **Delhi's IGI Airport and Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport have already achieved carbon neutrality. The, Cochin International Airport in Kerala has become the first airport in the world to operate entirely on solar power,** significantly reducing its carbon footprint and energy costs.

**These initiatives highlight India's commitment to sustainable air-travel. As stakeholders, we need to synchronize our efforts, for the sector's 2050 decarbonization target.**

### **GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVITY**

**Last, but not the least, I would also like to address an important issue which the Indian Government is prioritizing, and that is gender equality in aviation. It is time to promote and encourage greater participation of women in the aviation sector. Whether as pilots, engineers, air traffic controllers, or leaders in aviation governance, women bring a wealth of talent and perspective. We must ensure that our policies and practices create an inclusive environment where both women and men can thrive.**

**There are approximately 10,000 pilots with various airlines in India with women constituting 15 per cent of the country's pilots, which is almost three times higher than the global average.**

**India's DGCA has even issued an advisory recently to the stakeholders to increase the participation of women in aviation workforce to 25% by 2025.**

**Taking a cue from it, the Asia Pacific region must collaboratively make efforts for even greater participation of women in the aviation ecosystem.**

## **FUTURE ROADMAP**

Our discussions at this conference **must focus on strategies** to ensure that the **aviation sector is equipped with a skilled workforce** to meet future demands. And this calls for a **collaborative effort among Asia-Pacific members—governments, educational institutions, airlines and other industry stakeholders**. Especially to **make careers in the aviation industry lucrative for the youth**. The aviation needs **infusion of fresh enthusiasm and ideas** in the wider domains of aviation like **air-space utilization, policy and sustainability**.

## **CONCLUSION**

The world of aviation is changing rapidly. From advanced air mobility to electric aircraft, **new technologies are revolutionizing how we think about air travel**. It is **our responsibility to ensure that we not only keep up with these changes but also lead them**.

**We are a region marked by diversity—diverse cultures, economies, and geographies. Yet, in aviation, we share common goals**. Our ability to work together is what will define our success in the years to come.

I am very **optimistic that our shared aspirations and priorities will lead to the adoption of the Delhi Declaration, which will serve as a roadmap for elevating aviation in Asia Pacific region to new heights**.

I **eagerly anticipate the fruitful discussions ahead** and the enduring impact of our collective efforts. **Thank you, and once again, welcome to India, a land of infinite opportunities**.