

Corporate honchos oppose Bangalore airport closure

Top corporate heads Friday strongly opposed the closure of [Bangalore](#) city airport May 23 when the new international airport is set to commence operations from Devanahalli, about 40 km from India's silicon hub.

Under the banner of Bangalore City Connect Foundation (BCCF), a multi stakeholder platform of Bangalore's citizens, Biocon chairperson Kiran Mazumadar-Shaw, Infosys Technologies director T.V. Mohandas Pai, Mico-Bosch India joint managing director M. Lakshminarayan and former state chief secretary A. Ravindra opposed the unilateral decision of the government to shut down the state-run Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) airport in the city.

The corporates said the move would severely impact investment and employment prospects of Bangalore due to connectivity and capacity constraints of the new airport.

'We continue to hold the view that in the interest of public, business, industry and air passengers, HAL airport should not be shut when the new airport begins commercial operations from May 23. We urge the central government and Karnataka government to re-negotiate the concession agreement (CA) with the new airport consortium - Bangalore International Airport Ltd (BIAL),' Shaw said.

As per the CA the civil aviation ministry concluded with BIAL July 5, 2004, HAL airport will be closed for commercial operations and no other airport will operate within 150 km radius of the Rs.25-billion greenfield airport.

'At a time when Karnataka is in the midst of assembly election and a popular government is absent, the decision to open the new airport May 23 is unfortunate and against public interest, as connectivity and capacity constraints have not been resolved by the stakeholders,' Shaw asserted.

Though the Karnataka High Court and the Supreme Court had directed the civil aviation ministry, Airport Authority of India (AAI) and BIAL to re-negotiate the contract terms to allow the HAL airport to operate simultaneously, the union government's decision to shut the city airport is not transparent. Minutes of the two meetings where such a decision was taken have not been made available to the public.

'We have applied for details of the two meetings held April 29 and May 12 by the ministry and AAI with BIAL under the Right to Information Act, 2005, as we are given to understand that minutes of the meetings were not available. The decision to shut the HAL airport is also not in accordance with the high court order of April 24 and the apex court directive May 5,' foundation secretary Ramesh Ramanathan said.

'It is also contrary to the oral submissions made by the additional solicitor general in the Supreme Court that the union government would re-negotiate the contract in accordance with the high court order and the law of the land after taking into account all aspects of the matter,' Ramanathan pointed out.

Foundation member Devesh Agarwal said the initial capacity of the new airport (10-12 million passengers per annum) was not commensurate with the city's air traffic, which has already crossed

10.1 million from 2.7 million in 2002, doubling every three years.

'When the decision to build the greenfield airport was taken over a decade ago, Bangalore air traffic grew by 34 percent per annum. When the agreement was negotiated four years ago, the growth was 80 percent. Since the project work was taken up in 2005, the traffic growth was an astronomical 255 percent. In such a scenario, how can the new airport handle the growing traffic with 10-12 million capacity? Hence, the need to continue operations from HAL airport too,' Agarwal noted.

At the same time, the foundation members clarified that they were not opposed to the opening of the new airport but only to the closure of the HAL airport in the interest of the seven-million Bangaloreans and thousands of passengers flying in and out of the tech hub from all over India and abroad.

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