

SINGAPORE, LAND OF THE WORLD'S BEST AIRPORT, WILL SOON MANAGE A FEW IN INDIA

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Changi Airport in Singapore consistently wins international accolades. Ranked No. 1 in the Skytrax World Airport Awards for the past three years, it's particularly noted for its 500,000 plants and many gardens, which are overseen by a team of dedicated horticulturalists. Now, the same company that manages Changi looks set to take over management and operations of two airports in India.

A Singapore government agency has signed an agreement with the state-run Airports Authority of India (AAI) under which Changi Airports International will manage the airports in Ahmedabad and Jaipur. The news follows a visit to Singapore in late November by India prime minister Narendra Modi. The decision was a government-to-government one with no bidding for the contract, details of which are yet to be finalized, AAI chairman RK Srivastava told the Economic Times.

Under the arrangement, Changi would be paid a fee (rather than enter a concessional arrangement) to manage the terminal operations and parking at the two airports, responsibilities currently handled by AAI, according to the Press Trust of India. In 2014-15 the Ahmedabad airport handled about 5 million passengers, out of which 1.2 million were international travelers, according to the news agency. By 2023-24, those figures will be 6.8 million and 3.7 million, respectively. (Jaipur's smaller airport handled 2.2 million in 2014-15.)

By contrast, last year Changi Airport handled more than 54 million passengers.

India, with its outdated airports and fast-growing air traffic, presents a promising scenario for airport operators. In a November report PricewaterhouseCoopers wrote that India has one of the world's highest forecasts for airport infrastructure investment, amounting to about US\$14 billion over the next decade. Srivastava estimates India needs 200 operational airports, compared to today's 125. (Many airports simply need to be made operational, as India currently has a significant number of eerie "ghost airports.")

In late October the country's civil aviation ministry proposed a slew of measures that could lower the cost of flying within Asia's third-largest economy and boost regional connectivity, which would lead to significant jumps in traffic in the years to follow. The nation is currently the world's 10th-largest aviation market and aims to be in the top three.

Ahmedabad is the nation's fifth-largest city and has a population of about 7 million. Set to receive both Singaporean airport management and Japanese bullet trains, the city has a powerful friend in the prime minister. Before winning the job in May 2014, Modi was the chief minister of Gujarat - the largest city of which is Ahmedabad.

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