

New airport linked to various centres through UDAN scheme

Saurabh Sinha / TNN / Oct 21, 2021, 04:30 IST



A Sri Lankan flight carrying holy Buddhist relics arrives at Kushinagar airport on Wednesday

Kushinagar: The eastern UP town of Kushinagar -- the place of Buddha's mahaparinirvana -- will soon be a direct flight away for pilgrims from many places in India and abroad. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated the Kushinagar International Airport, taking the number of airports handling scheduled passenger flights in UP to nine – up from four in 2017.

The Rs 260-crore Kushinagar International Airport will facilitate pilgrimage to Lord Buddha's mahaparinirvana sthal, thereby boosting the economy of the region. Under regional connectivity scheme UDAN, SpiceJet and Truejet have been awarded flights to connect Kushinagar with Lucknow, Kanpur, Varanasi, Prayagraj, Gaya, Bareilly, Saharanpur and Hindon in Ghaziabad.

In 2017, the four airports in UP handling scheduled flights were – Lucknow, Varanasi, Gorakhpur and Agra. In addition to them, Prayagraj, Kanpur, Hindon and Bareilly also see regular flights. The upcoming Noida Airport and Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram Airport in Ayodhya will be international airports, taking the number of airports in UP getting flights from abroad to five – up from the current three that include Lucknow, Varanasi and Kushinagar. A senior UP government official said work is on at airports in 10 more cities – Aligarh, Azamgarh, Moradabad, Shravasti, Chitrakoot, Sonbhadra, Agra, Saharanpur, Noida and Ayodhya. "Of these, 95% work has been completed at Aligarh, Azamgarh, Moradabad, Shravasti and Chitrakoot," he said. The state is developing an airstrip in Lalitpur, Bundelkhand, as an airport now.

The Kushinagar airport was conceived in 2008 and the UP government acquired 590 acres of land for this greenfield project. In 2019, the state government and Airports Authority of India (AAI) entered into an agreement to develop and operationalise this airport. It was declared an international airport last June. AAI has built a new terminal that can handle 300 passengers per hour and a 3.2-km-long runway along with other associated infrastructure like taxiways and apron. AAI is awaiting 35 acres of land for setting up instrument landing system infra at Kushinagar Airport. The UP government is working on acquiring the same. Two other issues are yet to be resolved – completing the approach road to connect the terminal with NH 28, with AAI sending a reminder this August. And drainage work outside the airport is yet to be completed.

The delegation on the inaugural flight to Kushinagar on Wednesday comprised of anunayakas (deputy heads) of all four nikatas (orders) of Buddhism in Sri Lanka – Asgiriya, Amarapura, Ramanya and Malwatta – apart from five Sri Lankan ministers led by cabinet minister Namal Rajapakshe. A 12-member "Holy Relic entourage" brought Buddha relics for exposition. After inaugurating the airport, Modi participated in an event marking abhidhamma day.