

PM flags off Kushinagar airport, says will help region’s economy

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Ministers Kiren Rijju, Jyotiraditya Scindia, G Kishan Reddy & Arjun Ram Meghwal, UP Governor Anandiben Patel, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and others, during the inauguration of the Kushinagar International Airport. (PTI)

Inaugurating the third international airport of Uttar Pradesh in Kushinagar on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the project is a tribute to the devotion of Buddhist society across the world. He also said completion of the project comes as fulfilment of one of his “commitments” to the region as its representative in Lok Sabha.

Modi said the airport, built at an estimated cost of Rs 260 crore, will boost economy of the region. Stating that vaccination against Covid-19 will play a significant role in the tourism sector, he said fast and wide-scale vaccination in India would develop trust among global tourists and encourage them to visit the country.



A group of Buddhist monks disembark the inaugural Sri Lankan Airlines flight after landing at Kushinagar International Airport. (PTI)

At around 9 am Wednesday, the inaugural flight — a Sri Lankan Airlines flight carrying many Buddhist monks and dignitaries from the island-nation — touched down at the airport. The monks brought with them relic from Waskaduwa Sri Subuddhi Rajvihaa Temple in Sri Lanka.

The monks from Sri Lanka were accompanied by that country’s minister Namal Rajapaksha, who is also son of the Lankan Prime Minister.

The first direct flight from the airport — to New Delhi — will start on November 26, and direct flights from Mumbai and West Bengal are scheduled from December 18, said Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who was present on the occasion, along with UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, among other leaders and dignitaries.

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Referring to the Centre’s recent decision to privatise Air India, he said, “Desh ka aviation sector professionally chaley, suvidha aur surkasha ko prathamikta miley, iske liye haal mein Air India se jura bada kadam desh ne uthaya hai. Yeh kadam Bharat ke aviation sector ko nayi urja dega (The recent big step on A-I was taken to ensure the domestic aviation sector is run professionally, and convenience and safety get priority. This will give new energy to the aviation sector).”

At the same time, he added, opening up defence airspace for civilian use is a “similar big reform”.

On the flight from Lanka, Modi said the Kushinagar airport project will connect the region associated with different phases of Lord Buddha’s life such as Kushinagar, Sarnath, Bodh Gaya and Kapilvastu to the rest of the world. He said the project will not only provide better connectivity to followers of Buddhism in India but also to those in countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Singapore, Cambodia, Japan, South Korea and others.



Outside view of the Kushinagar international airport. (PTI)

Modi said Kushinagar airport is a “tribute to the devotion of Buddhist society around the world” and that there is special focus of the government to develop places associated with Buddha.

Stating that Kushinagar will be the ninth airport of UP, he assured that work on another international airport in the state — at Jewar, near Noida — is also going on at a fast pace, as is work on airports at Ayodhya, Aligarh, Azamgarh, Chitrakoot, Moradabad and Shravasti districts.

Referring to the recently announced drone policy, Modi said it would bring “life-changing transformation” — from agriculture and health to disaster management and defence.

Later in the day, Modi visited Mahaparinirvana Temple in Kushinagar to mark Abhidhamma day and said the delegation of monks will visit Varanasi — his Parliamentary constituency — as well. At a time the world is talking about environment conservation and climate change, and several questions are being raised, “if we adopt the message of Lord Budhha, then we will know what to do”, he said.

He said that Buddha is “viashvik” (universal) because he talked about starting from within and that “Buddhatva” of Buddha is the “sense of ultimate responsibility”. Modi said Buddha’s message “Appa Deepo Bhava” is a motivation for India to become self-reliant.

Among those present during the occasion were Union ministers G Kishan Reddy, Kiran Rijju, Jyotiradhitya Scindia. Sri Lanka’s Cabinet minister Namal Rajapaksha, Buddhist delegations as well as diplomats from South Korea, Nepal, Singapore, Japan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Lao, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and other countries.

Later in the day, as Sri Lankan Cabinet Minister Namal Rajapaksha handed over the copy English Shinala and Tamil translation of Bhagwat Gita to Prime Minister Modi, he tweeted ” The greatest gift Sri Lanka received from India is Buddhism! We have always shared a close relationship between our nations & our people! It is the vision of President Gotabaya Rajapaksha & PM Narendra Modi to strengthen this bond between our nations & our people”

Meanwhile, in response, Prime Minister Modi said, “India-Sri Lanka ties are getting stronger and stronger across different sectors. This augurs well for the people of our nations.”

Referring to teachings of Sri Lankan president as his friend, Prime Minister tweeted,”The teachings of Lord Buddha unite our nations and make our planet better.”