Why Noida airport will give Delhi-NCR double ballast

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Delhi's rapid spread southward (Gurgaon) and eastward (Noida) over the last two decades — both neighbouring cities becoming magnets for corporate investment and consequently jobs and real estate — means India's capital region is now home to an estimated population of 3.5 crore. That makes it the second-largest urban agglomeration in the world after Tokyo. United Nations projections show Delhi-NCR will displace Tokyo at the top in another four years.

It could happen sooner.

This Dec, commercial airliners will begin taking off and landing from Jewar, the brand new international airport developed as a public-private-partnership between the state of UP and Swiss giant Zurich AG. The airport

tion demand of the region". "It will serve as the primary international airport for major cities such as Noida, Meerut, Ghaziabad, Mathura, Agra, etc and will be the gateway to various pilgrim and tourist destinations," it said.

The NIA story begins with one runway and one terminal building (T1) that can handle 12 million passengers annually. Airports grow gradually with demand. Delhi's IGI, which began its life as a passenger airport over six decades ago in 1962 when flights were shifted there from Safdarjung, is yet to see its final phase development that will see T2 make way for a brand new T4.

NIA CEO Christoph Schnellmann sees T1 getting expanded to handle 3 CPA "by the end of this decade". In fact, work on Phase II of NIA has started with the airport building and more parking bays, given the demand for peak-hour slots from airlines who want

can effectively mirror it (to add the portion to handle 1.8 crore (18 million) passengers a year). We've specifically planned for the growth trajectory," Schnellmann recently told **TOI**. "We'll start operations with domestic flights. Subsequently, we will have international flights too. But we expect a vast majority of our flights to be domestic."

While the future holds immense potential for NIA, what will it mean for passengers, airlines and the overall economy when it starts operations this summer? "Building a greenfield airport allows us to deploy the latest technology that's available. NIA will have touchless DigiYatra all the way from terminal entry to security and boarding for domestic passengers," Schnellmann said.

NIA is also expected to decongest IGI and improve passenger experience at the big brother airport, which incidentally wanted to make peak-

GETTING READY: Noida Int'l Airport has, in its first phase, an 87-acre cargo hub. There are also plans to build a 40-acre aircraft repair, maintenance and overhaul facility

likely to supercharge growth in the east in the coming years, like Indira Gandhi International airport did to the south.

And whatever the initial hiccups Noida International Airport (NIA) may face over airline routes and road connectivity — since Jewar is a good 60km from Noida city — ...ere is no shortage of ambition to make it successful. UP sees Jewar as a crown jewel, and the Modi govt has mega plans to see NIA grow into one of the world's biggest aviation hubs.

"Airlines are very excited to operate from Jewar airport. There is huge potential in that area. So, I can see that at least 10 cities will be connected (to begin with) as seen in discussions that are happening with the airlines," Union aviation minister Ram Mohan Naidu said in Sept.

In its tariff order, Airports Economic Regulatory Authority said, NIA will "complement IGI airport to meet avia-

to base aircraft in NCR at night because of the space crunch at IGI. NIA made 25 parking bays, according to its original plan, but has decided to add nine more.

UP has handed over land to Zurich AG for a 40-year concession period where two runways and as many terminals will be built in phases to handle 70 million passengers a year. Work on the second runway and T2 will start as soon as traffic at T1 touches 24 million passengers a year. When that happens depends on how air traffic grows. Achieving 80% traffic of the built capacity is the trigger for the next phases of development at NIA. NIA will reach 7CPA capacity when all its four phases are complete.

UP govt plans to expand NIA's area almost fourfold from the current 1,334 hectares (Phase II) to over 5,000 hectares in the coming decades. For perspective, the current spread of IGI — which is India's busiest airport — is 2,023 hectares. Its four runways and three terminals are expected to reach a peak capacity of 140 million passengers per year in about a decade.

NIA also sees growth in the logistics business in NCR and has, in its first phase, an 87-acre cargo hub that is being developed by AISATS. There are plans to build an aircraft repair, maintenance and overhaul (MRO) facility over 40 acres as well.

"Overall growth of the Indian economy, of air traffic in the country and aircraft orders of airlines here shows Delhi needs a second airport like many large cities around the world. Our T1 will have a capacity of handling 3 crore (30 million) passengers per year. We're now constructing less than half of that. It's been designed in such a way that we

hour flights and business class flying more expensive.

The security check-in experience at NIA, however, will not be any different. Yes, you will still need to take your electronic devices out and keep them in a tray. Govt is yet to notify specifications for body scanners — that allow passengers to skip pat-down frisking — and 3D CT X ray scanners, which can scan personal electronic devices and liquids in cabin bags. So, the security setup at NIA will have the tech currently used at other Indian airports. NIA has provisions to install CTX and body scanners whenever they are allowed. The airport has, however, been designed in a way that the baggage screening lanes, according to Schnellmann, will be "very long, allowing enough space for passengers approaching the lane to pick a tray and to unpack their luggage."

The airport will have two lounges. "We've been engaging with airlines and all other partners to try and make passenger experience as smooth and hassle-free as possible. The tagline that we're working with is, 'Indian warmth and hospitality, coupled with Swiss efficiency'. We will make our passengers feel welcome by creating an experience that draws on the rich architectural heritage of the region — a haveli-style courtyard in the security hold area. We'll deploy a lot of tech that isn't so visible but will drive passenger experience in the background," he added.

NIA will be different in another way — it will have a VIP terminal. "The VIP terminal is situated in the western precinct of the airport campus near the west airside gate. It will feature a ceremonial lounge along with security and immigration facilities to process departures and arrivals," said an NIA official.