

English rendering of PM's address at the Plenary Session of World Air Transport Summit at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi

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My colleagues at the Centre, Ram Mohan Naidu ji and Murlidhar Mohol ji, Chairman of the IATA Board of Governors Peter Elbers ji, Director General of IATA Willie Walsh ji, Managing Director of IndiGo Rahul Bhatia ji, all other dignitaries, ladies and gentlemen!

I welcome all the guests to Bharat for the 81st Annual General Meeting of IATA and the World Air Transport Summit. It is an honour to have you here. This event is taking place in Bharat after four decades. In these four decades, much has changed in Bharat. Today's Bharat is filled with greater self-confidence than ever before. We are not only a vast market in the global aviation ecosystem, but also a symbol of policy leadership, innovation, and inclusive development. Today, Bharat is emerging as a leader in global space-aviation convergence. You are all well aware of the historic rise of Bharat's civil aviation sector over the past decade.

Friends,

This summit and this dialogue are not just about aviation — they are also a medium to advance our shared agenda of global cooperation, climate commitments, and equitable growth. The discussions taking place at this summit will give new direction to global aviation. I am confident that we will be able to tap into the infinite possibilities of this sector and utilize them more effectively.

Friends,

Today, we cover distances of hundreds of kilometres and intercontinental journeys in just a few hours. But the dreams of the 21st-century world and our infinite imaginations have not stopped. Today, the speed of innovation and technological upgradation is faster than ever before. And as our speed has increased, we have turned distant destinations into part of our destiny. We now stand at a point where our travel plans are not limited to the cities of the Earth. Humanity is now dreaming of commercializing space flights and interplanetary travel — of opening these frontiers to civil aviation. While it is true that this may still take time, it clearly indicates that the aviation sector is poised to become a centre of major transformation and innovation in the times ahead. Bharat is fully prepared for all these possibilities. I say this on the basis of three strong pillars that Bharat possesses: Firstly, Bharat has the market — and this market is not just a group of consumers; it reflects the aspirations of a dynamic and ambitious society of Bharat. Secondly, we have the demography and talent for technology and innovation — our youth are the new-age innovators, who are driving breakthroughs in fields like artificial intelligence, robotics, and clean energy. Thirdly, we have an open and supportive policy ecosystem for industry. With the strength of these three capabilities, we must work together to take Bharat's aviation sector to new heights.

Friends,

In recent years, Bharat has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in the field of civil aviation. Today, Bharat is the third-largest domestic aviation market in the world. The success of our UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) scheme is a golden chapter in Indian civil aviation. Under this scheme, more than 15 million passengers have availed affordable air travel, and many citizens were able to fly for the very first time. Our airlines are consistently achieving double-digit growth. Together, Indian and foreign airlines operate flights for nearly 240 million passengers annually — more than the total population of most countries in the world. And by 2030, this number is expected to reach 500 million passengers. Today, 3.5 million metric tonnes of cargo are transported by air in Bharat, and by the end of this decade, that figure is projected to rise to 10

million metric tonnes.

Friends,

These are not just numbers — they are a glimpse into the potential of a New Bharat. And Bharat is working on a futuristic roadmap to fully maximize this potential. We are investing in world-class airport infrastructure. As Naidu ji mentioned, Bharat had 74 operational airports until 2014. Today, that number has increased to 162. Indian carriers have placed orders for over 2,000 new aircraft. And this is just the beginning. Bharat's aviation sector is standing at a take-off point from where it is ready to soar to great heights. And this journey will not just cross geographical boundaries, but will also lead the world towards sustainability, green mobility, and equitable access.

Friends,

Today, the handling capacity of our airports has reached 500 million passengers annually. Bharat is now among the select few countries in the world that are setting new standards in user experience through technology. We are equally focused on safety, efficiency, and sustainability. We are moving towards sustainable aviation fuels, investing in green technologies, reducing our carbon footprint, and ensuring both progress and protection of the planet.

Friends,

To our international guests here, I would especially encourage you to learn about the Digi Yatra App. Digi Yatra is an example of digital innovation in aviation. Using facial verification technology, it provides a complete seamless travel solution — from airport entry to the boarding gate. There is no need to carry paper documents or show any ID. I believe innovations like these, born from Bharat's experience in delivering quality services to such a large population, can benefit many other countries as well. This is a secure and smart solution, and it can serve as a model and inspiration for the Global South.

Friends,

One of the major reasons behind the rapidly expanding aviation sector in Bharat is our commitment to consistent reforms. We are taking every possible step to make Bharat a global manufacturing hub. In this year's Budget, we have announced Mission Manufacturing. Earlier this year, as Naidu ji mentioned, we passed the Protection of Interest in Aircraft Objects Bill in the Indian Parliament. This has given legal force to the Cape Town Convention in Bharat. As a result, a new opportunity has opened up for global aircraft leasing companies to operate in Bharat. Many of you are already aware of the incentives being provided in GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City). These incentives have made Bharat an attractive destination for aircraft leasing.

Friends,

The new Indian Aircraft Act is aligning our aviation laws with global best practices. This means Bharat's aviation laws are now simpler, the regulations are more business-friendly, and the tax structure is streamlined. Therefore, this is an excellent opportunity for the world's leading aviation companies to invest in Bharat.

Friends,

Growth in the aviation sector means new flights, new jobs, and new opportunities. The aviation sector is creating new avenues for pilots, crew members, engineers, and ground staff. Another sunrise sector is emerging — MRO, i.e., Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul. Our new MRO policies have accelerated efforts to make Bharat a global hub for aircraft maintenance. In 2014, there were 96 MRO facilities in Bharat. Today, that number has increased to 154. Reforms like 100% FDI under the automatic route, GST reduction, and tax rationalization have given the MRO sector new momentum. Now, our target is to make Bharat a \$4 billion MRO hub by 2030.

Friends,

We want the world to see Bharat not just as an aviation market, but as a value-chain leader. From design to delivery, Bharat is becoming an integral part of the global aviation supply chain. Our direction is right, our speed is right, and that gives us the confidence to keep progressing rapidly. I urge all aviation companies:

Along with Make in India, also focus on Design in India.

Friends,

One more strong pillar of Bharat's aviation sector is its inclusive model. Today, over 15% of pilots in Bharat are women — this is three times the global average. Across the world, the average participation of women in cabin crew roles is around 70%, while Bharat's figure stands at 86%. The number of female engineers in Bharat's MRO sector is also surpassing the global average.

Friends,

Another key component of the aviation sector today is drone technology. Bharat is using drone technology not just for technological advancement, but also as a tool for financial and social inclusion. Through drones, we are empowering women's Self-Help Groups. This has led to increased participation of women in agriculture, delivery services, and other essential areas.

Friends,

We have always placed safety as the top priority in aviation. Bharat has aligned its regulations with ICAO's global standards. Recently, ICAO's safety audit appreciated our efforts. The adoption of the Delhi Declaration at the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference is a testament to Bharat's strong commitment. Bharat has always supported Open Skies and global connectivity. We uphold the principles of the Chicago Convention. Let us work together to create a future where air travel is accessible, affordable, and secure for everyone. I am confident that all of you will come up with new solutions to take the aviation sector to even greater heights. I extend my best wishes to all of you.

Thank you very much.

MJPS/VJ/VK

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