

Aviation looking for Bright Future in Covid19 Era

It is almost two years since COVID19 has spread its wings across the world and Aviation sector has also come under the umbrella of this pandemic. We had been talking about unanticipated tremendous growth of aviation industry in India and our target was to be number one in the world as far as passenger traffic in domestic is concerned. For the international passenger traffic we aspired to be number three in the world but all our dreams have shattered due to this unexpected catastrophe.

The airlines have placed orders for acquiring aircrafts and if we talk about total intake it was running in thousands. There was so much potential for employment on the face of growth in aviation sector. This story is known to everybody. India is not an exception because the situation is the same in almost all countries including US, UK, Europe, China and Middle East etc. We could have some movement in the area of transportation of cargo but it is also affected since corona has restricted the movement of people due to lockdown and industry slowdown.

Adverse effects of Corona Crisis

Aviation Industry is having interdependence on hospitality and tourism industry. The corona crisis has made their operations standstill which has adversely affected the airline business. Look at the scenario where you find more than hundred A380 wide body aircrafts of Emirates Airlines at Dubai Airport stranded due to this pandemic. It all became a question of survival because we can't afford

complete closure of all airports of the world, Therefore, like in many other sectors the aviation industry also worked out the plan of “Work From Home”, especially for Airport Operators and other agencies depending upon their nature of work. This Work From Home scenario is a difficult task in aviation because it doesn’t work for movement of aircrafts. The concept of WFH only facilitates the people who have sedentary jobs.

The lockdown situation gave rise to layoff of the employees and lot of aviation personnel including pilots and air hostesses are forced to be at home. Look at the pathetic condition of a pilot who has to go to flying schools in order to keep his license and rating live. The ground handling staff is facing the situation, “No work, No pay”.

Another serious implication came in the form of frustration among young students who were aspiring career in aviation sector. There had been mushrooming of management institutes across the country charging fees in lakhs awarding degree diploma in the field of aviation. Lakhs of students joined with the hope that on the face of growth the employment opportunities will be enormous.

I am forced to explain above adverse affects of this pandemic before touching upon the positive aspects because if something comes as natural calamity or unavoidable situation which is beyond the control of human being. We still have to think about positivity because *what we meet in life is fixed but how we meet is not fixed, it's in our hands*. Let us enlarge the framework of Work From Home to the concept of **Work From Anywhere** because every house cannot afford to have a working station for all working family

members, you can't expect every house to dedicate separate room for individual members with a laptop and Wi-Fi facility.

Positive Aspects of Forced Working Scenario

When I am talking about Aviation sector, this pandemic has in fact accelerated the process of introducing artificial intelligence in various segments of the aviation field. We already planned e-commerce, e-offices, robotics, and biometric way of passenger facilitation, remote control aircrafts and Air traffic control. The planning has been to have minimal human error with the introduction of artificial intelligence. The information communication technology (ICT) was already introduced in our National Education Policy right from the year 2010, but its implementation has been very slow. This pandemic has forced, rather compelled not only the aviation sector but all other sectors to switch over to the modern technological advance practices with the less human resource.

Today the aviation personnel in different disciplines are having an important task to be performed while work from home in the form of making plans so as to evolve innovative practices keeping in view of aviation business whether it is in the field of aircraft maintenance, airport operations, flying or other important fields like cargo movements etc.

The WFH in the long run give rise to some psychological and emotional influence as evident from the findings of the study which speaks in the following terms:

- Relations with family members improved since the lockdown. Engagement with nature increased for most and so did concern for personal health.
- The household environment made work safer for most people, but led to greater office workload, with 60% reporting difficulty in striking a balance with household chores.
- Work-From-Home had brought them to learn new ways of digital way of working.
- Globally, these new experiences at work and in personal life have raised anxiety levels since the lockdown. The worry was financial in nature and loneliness too was an important factor.

Change is Universal Phenomena

Change is the only word in the dictionary known to mankind which is permanent in nature. In the words of Benjamin Franklin, *“Change is the only constant in life. One’s ability to adopt those changes will determine your success in life.”* Moreover we must accept and appreciate that adaptability is the sign of intelligence.

We all know that slowly things are improving and with vaccination and other precautionary measures we are trying to overcome the ill effects of corona. Though lakhs of lives we lost because of this dangerous incurable disease. The long term lockdown has been relaxed and airlines have started the movement in the domestic sector to the tune of 30% on important routes where there is demand.

The international sector movements are there by lateral agreements between countries with code sharing, to the tune of 15%.

Say for example we were having around 1400 landings and takeoffs undertaken by the Air Traffic Control at Delhi International Airport with 3 runways in operation but today we have only 300 to 400 movements.

Although the situation is slowly improving in India and other countries as well. The airlines have started calling their pilots and air crew members in batches by educating with a standard operating procedure (SOP) to be followed with physical distancing. *Why I am saying physical distancing because I do not buy the jargon of social distancing since man is a social animal and we can't live without having social contacts.* Here the requirement is physical distancing. Today if we go to the Airport as a passenger or as working Aviation personnel, our movements are restricted but it is a positive sign that we are moving in the most disciplined manner taking all precautionary measures to avoid Covid19 infection.

Every Dark Cloud has a silver lining

This corona crisis is not going to be over as I can foresee, on the face of threat of third and fourth wave and new cases coming up every day in different countries across the world. The movements started and we hope to have at least 50% normalcy in the coming six months. These are the days of the survival of the fittest and we must accept that there will be drastic curtailment in the employment in aviation sector like in other sectors but believe me that this curtailment will not be at the cost of efficiency and smooth functioning. Today every Aviation personnel need to develop his own Unique Selling Proposition (USP) so that the employer may find him/her indispensable.

The airport operators and airlines are not totally dependent on Aeronautical Revenue; there are new ways and means to generate revenue by way of non aeronautical methods such as marketing for advertisements, inside and on the body of aircrafts, on the aerobridges, Agreement with food and beverages, parking contracts, linking with air tickets. The airlines and other agencies can use social media network. There are so many new ways where Aviation industry can spread its wings like, spa, beauty parlour, fast food restaurants and other entertainment activities.

Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) is virgin area to be ventured

In our country we don't have the MRO facilities for the aircraft and millions of dollars are spent for this purpose abroad. Although our country has got the required infrastructure and expertise to venture in this lucrative revenue earning activity. There is great amount of import of aircraft parts, machinery and tools required for MRO. We can always work on indigenization so that in times to come we may be catering the MRO requirements not only for our country but also for other neighbouring countries of South Asia. The employment opportunities for the youth aspiring to join aviation industry will be enormous.

Growth is Inevitable

Notwithstanding various dimensions of pandemic debated here, let us appreciate that in the Indian context in accordance with National Aviation Policy 2016, we are looking for around 150 more domestic airports in the country under the aegis of Regional

Connectivity Scheme. So far around 15 airports have already started operations and another 35 are in the pipeline. We have capacity and available infrastructure in the form of Airstrips. We can look for 600 airports in the country because these Airstrips were in existence right from the days of First World War.

We are talking about no frill airports having lot of potential for employment and revenue. The new players will come with their new ideas and innovation with low cost carriers to crystallize the concept of **UDAAN** (*Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik*) and *Hawai Chappal*, *Hawai Safar* into reality. Inauguration of South Asia's biggest Jewar International Airport with a plan of 6 runways is on the anvil which is going to be the best airport in the sense that the Zurich Aviation Authorities are making it, which has got the expertise of making best airports in Europe and other countries.

To summarize I must say that Healthy body keeps the Healthy mind and this corona crisis needs to be taken as a part of life and it should not sit on our heads affecting us mentally or physically. We must look for a bright future in aviation industry. These words I am saying because of great amount of conviction on the strength of my hardcore experience of nearly four decades as an Aviation expert in India and abroad.

Prof. (Dr.) Dewakar Goel
Chairman, Aero Academy of Aviation Science and Management
IATA (Switzerland) and ICAO (Montreal), Qualified Instructor
Former Executive Director, Airports Authority of India
Former Director Indian Aviation Academy, Govt. of India