



AVIATION BOOM

It's no surprise that India, the world's most populous country, has a booming aviation market. It is the third-biggest domestic aviation market, second only to America and China, and is projected to be the third-largest overall by 2026, according to IATA. This has directly impacted how ground handling operations have evolved in recent years and led to a buoyant GSE market.

The aviation industry has transformed since it was liberalised in the 1990s, allowing greater competition for private airlines, along with government initiatives to expand airport infrastructure, economic growth (estimates are around 7% for the 2023/24 fiscal year ending in March) and the rise of the middle classes with increased disposal income, it continues to develop at a phenomenal pace. Furthermore, the Air India Group ordering 470 aircraft last year, worth \$70 billion and IndiGo purchasing 500 A320s – the largest aircraft order in commercial aviation history – have further ignited the industry.

“Initiatives by the aviation ministry with the Regional Connectivity Scheme (UDAN) to improve regional connectivity, consolidation of Air India under the TATA

India is the aviation market to watch as it is set to become the third-largest by 2026.

flagship and private carriers have led to growth in the industry, with airports promoting the use of electric equipment and providing new opportunities for GSE manufacturers, including Asara Equipment,” said Baljit Narayanan, Business Development, at Asara Equipment.

With improved connectivity to Tier 2 and 3 cities, Narayanan says it is predicting strong demand for its towable and electrical equipment, with 15% targeted turnover growth for FY 2024.

Asara Equipment is one of the oldest GSE manufacturers with more than 28 years in the business with two manufacturing facilities in Ahmednagar near Pune, the auto-capital of India, for towable equipment and in Bangalore, the high-tech city where Asara Equipment manufactures electric equipment. Altogether Asara Equipment has more than 10,000 pieces of equipment operating at over 80 airports in India. Electric baggage tugs are its number one

selling equipment with 90% market share, and towable electric passenger stairs with inching drive systems, beltloaders and passenger ramps among its other best-selling products.

India's largest ground handling, AI Airport Service, formerly known as Air India Air Transport Services, has already placed a significant order for Asara Equipment's tow and baggage tugs.

“We're also grateful for the continued support from our customers like Indigo, AISATS, BWFS and Çelebi Aviation for trusting our product for their operations. We've supplied li-ion battery powered electric baggage tugs to Çelebi. We will be introducing 35t electric tugs to replace our diesel equipment and also in 2024 will be launching our electric chassis for multiple GSE use applications,” he said.

Handler perspective

In line with the growing aviation sector, Goldair Handling has experienced unprecedented growth and transformation since the early 2010s. It is one of the key European handlers operating in this space alongside AI Airport Service, AISATS, Çelebi

Aviation, Bird Group, Menzies Aviation, NAS, and IndoThai to name a few.

“As India’s aviation market continues to soar to new heights, the ground handling sector plays a pivotal role in supporting this growth. This is a result of the market opening policies that the government and AAI have served consistently over the past years, and the tendering of ground handling services contracts accessible to both international and national players. The process is ongoing and the authorities use the experience gained so far to improve service conditions to all airports, to enhance competition and to establish a modern, international and thriving aviation market,” said Alexandros Fourlas, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Goldair Handling.

While the aviation market’s performance looks positive, Fourlas says there are still challenges for international players to navigate.

He explained: “The country’s business environment and its regulatory framework are quite demanding and often present unexpected complexities, which must be navigated carefully. Identifying, selecting and building the right business partners and professional experts teams are crucial ingredients for a successful market strategy and they require time and valuable resources. Competition and an accessible market in many of the country’s airports often lead to pricing pressures, challenging companies to maintain service quality while managing costs. And maintaining a skilled, well-trained and dependable workforce of the right size is quite crucial for delivering high-quality ground handling services in the current growing environment.

“On the other hand, the future of India’s ground handling market seems rather promising in the long run, driven by several factors: air travel and tourism demand is on the rise and they call for dependable ground handling services of high quality. Infrastructure of new and existing airports is being continuously expanded and modernised, presenting new opportunities for ground handling service providers. Technology advancements and their adoption and integration to airport operations lead to improved efficiency, enhanced service quality and a mindset of continuous improvement. Dynamic expansion of airline fleets and connections presents very significant challenges and opportunities to build strong and long lasting partnerships which will benefit all stakeholders and support the country’s aviation industry,” said Fourlas.

Goldair Handling has two joint venture companies operating at Bagdogra



International Airport and at Maharana Pratap Airport, Udaipur, which provide services on the basis of concession contracts awarded through public tenders.

In other developments, Goldair Handling has won a ground handling contract from MIHAN airport authority for Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport in Nagpur, a significant step towards expanding its international footprint.

“This is a dynamic airport, strategically located in the centre of India and with very attractive development plans. For this purpose we have established a new subsidiary, Goldair Handling India (Nagpur) Private Limited, with a plan to commence operations within the first half of 2024,” he said.

Best station

AISATS Delhi offers all the latest innovative solutions while not losing that human touch when providing services to passengers at Delhi Airport, India’s largest airport.

With the deployment of its multi-use Ground Radar Software, turnaround times have become more streamlined and efficient. It can use flight data to predict a flight’s ETA and target off-block time, enhancing passenger experience as well as monitor and analyse GSE and staff allocation in real time. The software also has automated billing and rostering capabilities to help avoid SLA penalties.

Other successful initiatives that have been rolled out at the station include the Centralised Load Control, solar-powered

boarding ramps, iBoarding and the Mishandled Baggage Call Centre, which have further expedited aircraft turnarounds and improved passenger handling services – and most importantly, being the first handler in the world to deploy Aerowash, a robotic dry wash aircraft exterior cleaning system at the airport.

It’s no wonder then that AISATS Delhi ended up winning Best Station at the Pride of Ground Handling Awards last year.

“We felt really honoured to receive this award, it’s really gratifying. We talk about how ground handling is very important for airport and airline operations, but often it gets neglected or it’s never really given its due, so we are aware of how important ground handling is for aviation, how important time management is, how important it is to make sure that safety is at the heart of our concern for the passengers and the crew, and the airline and the airport,” said Sanjay Gupta, CEO of AISATS

AISATS – a joint venture company between Air India and SATS – which is already present at Bangalore, Hyderabad, Trivandrum, Mangalore and Ranchi airports, is looking next to expand to Noida Airport about 40 miles from Delhi where they are going to be building a multimodal cargo hub.

“We are excited about that, which we expect to be ready by the end of 2024 or early 2025. We’ve also won a contract to build an air cargo logistics park at Bangalore, which will be completed shortly after,” he said.

This whole customer-centric ethos of the company can be aptly shown by their two recent ‘Namaskar’ and ‘Take-off with a smile’ campaigns.

The Namaskar campaign is centred on placing customer service executives at all of the airport touch points.

“Even when there is technology or social distancing, there is a person close by and somehow that seems reassuring for passengers,” said Gupta.

“Our Take-off with a smile campaign has had such an amazing response, from people on social media and passengers, even the airline managers coming and telling us, ‘Our crew see you’re waving to them as they’re taxiing down and they seem to like it’. It’s really taken us by surprise that something that small, seems to have this sort of impact.” **ghi**



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Alexandros Fourlas, Goldair Handling