

57,000 "to be Evicted" for Jewar Airport-Aerotropolis off Delhi, 20 villages to be Uprooted: UK Avocacy Group

The airport-Cum-aerotropolis Site At Jewar

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The Government of India's recent "in principle" clearance to the international airport at Jewar, off Delhi, 16 years after the idea was first floated, is one of the several aerotropolis projects proposed across the world, which have been cited by a top campaign organization as points of concern for massive evictions, affecting environment and livelihood.

The international campaign body, Global Anti-Aerotropolis Movement (GAAM), based in UK, has taken strong exception to the to develop a Greenfield airport to be developed near Delhi, at Jewar, saying, the proposed site of the second international Delhi airport would turn into a full-scale aerotropolis, covering 100 square kilometres, leading to the displacement of 57,000 people.

The case of Jewar was first discussed at the International Tribunal on Evictions (ITE) held in Venice on September 28-29, where the main focus was on tourism in order to mark the UN's International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Five eviction cases were examined, including the Jewar Airport.

To be rather a large airport, handling 30-50 million commuters per year through a total of four runways, covering an area of 3000 to 10,000 hectares (30-100 km²), the presentation at Venice by Swathi Seshadri said, the eviction issue has been brought to light by "agricultural labour unions and organisations", but adding, so far no legal action has been taken in the matter.

"This airport will have a significant human impact. In the first phase, nine villages are proposed to be moved, which, according to the chairperson of the development authority in charge of the airport, would require the shifting of 3000 rural homes. The full project, however, would require the displacement of 20 villages", the presentation said.

"The construction of this airport itself would be a large enough threat, considering the amount of people whose lives will be affected", the presentation said, adding, "The airport is only one piece in the transformation of the entire region of 'Greater Noida' into a hyperurbanised conglomerate – partly an industrial belt, partly an extension of Delhi, and partly an aerotropolis."

Aerotropolis projects are not new settlements for people. They are a new urban form enabling explosive growth in aviation dependent tourism and trade. They vary in scale and sectoral focus, but a catch-all definition is airport-centric urban development.

Clustered around an existing or new airport, commercial development is integrated with air services. Airport passengers are funnelled through shopping malls, hotels, entertainment complexes and cultural venues.

Manufacturing, assembly, logistics and warehousing facilities are linked with the airport's cargo operations. A fully-fledged aerotropolis might also include office blocks, residential premises, recreational green space and agriculture. Spatial planning and surface transportation networks support the airport as the central node of the aerotropolis.

The proposed aerotropolis at Jewar, said the presentation at Venice, would mean accelerated acquisition of "vast tracts of land both in the land allotted for the airport and the surrounding land", even as providing "much easier accessibility to the industrial belt for foreign investors" leading to quicker "pace of industrial development".

GAAM cites a 2015 report, 'Airports in India', prepared by the Equitable Tourism Options (Equations), saying, in all construct 200 new airports have been proposed over the next two decades, when most of India's established airports operate at a loss.

"Vast amounts of public expenditure on airport infrastructure would benefit only a small wealthy minority, in a country where 22 per cent of the population live below the poverty line", GAAM insists.

"The Bhogapuram airport project has seen massive protests by farmers", GAAM says, adding, "Airports in Sikkim and Aranmula have been stalled by community protests. There has also been vigorous opposition to privatization of Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai airports. Chennai Airport is thought to have 2,000 acres of land which the private operator can lease for facilities like five-star hotels."

Along with Jewar, says GAAM, major airports, proposed as aerotropolis projects across the globe, include the one in Maldives, which has led to destruction of mangroves; in Indonesia, where displacement for New Yogyakarta International Airport (NYIA) in Kulon Progo continues; in South Korea, where the struggle, on Jeju island has been sustained for over two years; and in Barbuda, where in the aftermath of a devastating hurricane, bulldozing of land for a new airport began without consulting residents.