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By 2007, 35 new non-metro airports: Patel*- By Our Special Correspondent*

Mumbai, Oct. 21: By 2007, work would be underway for 35 brand new non-metro airports and global technical and financial advisors for which have already been appointed, said Mr Praful Patel, Union minister for civil aviation, while addressing a seminar entitled "Civil Aviation Key to Infrastructure Development," organised by the Indian Merchant's Chambers on Friday.

Mr Patel said that in the next five years, civil aviation will attract the highest investment across all industries, with investments upwards of one lakh crores.

He also said that these airports would be developed in the basis of a cluster model where it will be mandated that all clusters would be a mix of profitable and non-profitable airports and each cluster will have at least one or two strong airports within it. Foreign investors would also be invited to develop the city-sites development aspects.

He also added that the government will be open to attracting foreign investment for the development of these new airports.

Discussing the ongoing bidding process for the airports in Mumbai and Delhi, and in a visible attempt to placate the Left party, Mr Patel said, "We all here at the IMC, are not the only people deciding the future of the country, so believe in the fact that Dr Manmohan Singh, Dr Montek Singh and me, have kept the interest of the workers in mind and seen to it that the bidding process is extremely stringent with strict penalties imposed on offenders. By 2010, Mumbai and Delhi will have world class airports."

Commenting on the issue of constant comparison with the airports in Singapore and Dubai, he said, "We are a vast and magnificent country that is not only entrusted of showcasing one airport like Singapore and Dubai, but are looking at developing close to 80 airports. The overall investments would be 10 times higher than what Singapore and Dubai would manage. Our priorities lie in developing airports in Bhubaneswar, Shillong, Dimapur and Nagpur."

Speaking on building links on aviation and agriculture, he said, "Everyone assumes that civil aviation is only about passenger traffic, but in a country like ours, excellent linkages can be forged with agriculture, especially in terms of exporting large quantities of perishable cargo."

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