

Paramount Airways to expand in East, NE

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Coimbatore-based Paramount Airways, is planning to spread wings to the East and North-East after starting three destinations in western India this year.

While the earlier plan was to connect Kolkata and the other North-Eastern destinations with its southern hub Chennai towards the end of 2010, the plan could be altered to start two-three daily flights to Kolkata from June 2009 after Paramount managing director, M Thiagarajan met West Bengal chief minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, today.

The all-business class airline would start direct flights between other southern destinations and Kolkata subsequently depending on passenger demand. Initially, it would start operating flights following a hub-and-spoke model with Chennai as the transit for other southern cities. The airline charges fares that are around 7-10 per cent higher than an economy class fare of other airlines, offering business class facilities, in turn, to its customers.

Paramount Airways is the market leader in the southern region with a share of 26 per cent, Thiagarajan pointed out. Referring to his meeting with Bhattacharjee today, he said, "The minister has also emphasised on opportunities of launching operations in new and upcoming airports in the state like Durgapur and Cooch Behar. We are considering these options. He has assured us that he might allow state government officials to fly private airlines in the process." The all new Cooch Behar airstrip is yet to be operational.

The company is also eyeing Kolkata as a gateway for launch-



M Thiagarajan at the meet
SUBRATA MAJUMDER

ing operations in the North Eastern airports like Dibrugarh, Silchar among others besides connecting north Indian destinations like Varanasi. "The airline plans to cover all major cities in the western region by 2009 and start operations in the north and north-eastern regions from 2010 onwards", Thiagarajan said. Having presence in most major cities in the south since its inception in 2005, Paramount has recently launched operations in the western region in Goa, Pune and Ahmedabad.

It will be adding three Embraer 170/190 family series aircraft to its existing basket of five aircrafts by March this year. Paramount plans to own 11 aircrafts by the year end and take the number up to 20 by end-2010. It is also considering buying 10 aircrafts, either Boeing-787 or Airbus-350, for launching international operations in 2011. "Initially, we plan to operate 3-5 hour duration flights to the Far East and West Asia from cities in South India," Thiagarajan informed. The Embraers would cost around \$55-60 million while the Airbus or the Boeing are estimated to cost around \$200 million each.