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GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION
TOPIC: BILATERAL RELATION

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Remodelling the UAE-India aviation partnership

- **India's rapidly expanding aviation sector**
 - India's aviation market is growing at a fast pace, driven by increasing passenger demand and rising international travel.
 - India is already the third-largest domestic aviation market in the world, and this position is further strengthening with growing infrastructure and opportunities.
 - To accommodate this growth, various government initiatives like the UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) scheme are aimed at enhancing air connectivity, especially in underserved regions of the country.
 - India's growing aviation ambitions are being reflected in the development of new airports, such as the Navi Mumbai International Airport.
- **Strengthening aviation cooperation with the UAE**
 - The UAE is an important partner for India in the aviation sector, and deepening bilateral aviation cooperation can help reduce airfares, expand travel options, and improve connectivity.
 - By collaborating more closely, both countries can boost economic and trade relations through enhanced flight connectivity and lower operational costs for airlines.
 - This cooperation will also contribute to sustainable growth in the aviation industry, benefiting both Indian and UAE economies.
- **The UAE's role in India's aviation sector**
 - The UAE is one of India's closest strategic partners and a major hub for Indian outbound travelers.
 - In 2023, over 4.5 million Indian tourists visited the UAE, making it the top outbound market for India.
 - Indian carriers operate more than 600 flights per week to the UAE, while UAE-based carriers operate more than 500 flights to India, facilitating robust passenger movement between the two countries.
 - Despite this high volume of flights, the demand for travel is much higher than the available flight capacity, resulting in high ticket prices and limited travel options.



- **Challenges in existing bilateral air service agreements**
 - The current air service agreements between India and the UAE restrict UAE carriers to serving only 15 Indian cities, limiting access to key growth hubs.
 - Prominent cities in India, such as Surat, Indore, and Visakhapatnam, lack direct air links to the UAE, which hampers business and leisure travel between these destinations.
 - Similarly, Indian carriers face challenges in expanding their operations to major UAE hubs like Dubai, creating an imbalance in the distribution of flight services.
 - This limited capacity and access result in increased ticket prices and fewer flight options, hindering easy travel for people across both countries.
- **Need for a modernized aviation strategy**
 - With India's growing number of passport holders and increasing travel demand, there is a need for a more progressive and modernized aviation policy.
 - Restrictive policies, if not addressed, could lead to further increases in airfare costs and a reduction in travel choices for passengers.
 - A stronger, more expansive aviation strategy that aligns with agreements like the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) can provide significant economic benefits, driving mutual growth for India and the UAE.
 - Such strategies could stimulate more investments in the aviation sector and improve both regional and international connectivity, thus benefiting broader economic and social development.
- **Opportunities for UAE-India collaboration in aviation**
 - The UAE is ready to support India's expanding aviation sector through investments and partnerships, helping India develop world-class aviation infrastructure.
 - Collaborative initiatives may include training Indian pilots, establishing aviation maintenance facilities, and boosting tourism between both countries.
 - UAE's involvement in India's UDAN scheme will improve air connectivity in smaller cities, enhancing regional integration and fostering inclusive growth.
 - Such partnerships will not only promote mutual economic benefits but also strengthen the overall aviation infrastructure, making it more efficient and sustainable.
- **Promoting cooperation over competition**
 - The future of India-UAE aviation relations lies in strengthening cooperation rather than fostering competition. This can lead to the creation of a shared aviation ecosystem that benefits both nations.



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- Indian cities, with improved connectivity and infrastructure, have the potential to become major global travel hubs, similar to the UAE's Dubai and Abu Dhabi.
- Expanding connectivity between India and the UAE will promote inclusive, sustainable economic growth, benefiting not just the two countries but also fostering stronger regional cooperation.
- Enhanced aviation cooperation aligns with the broader India-UAE strategic partnership, opening up doors for mutual growth, development, and prosperity.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/remodelling-the-uae-india-aviation-partnership/article69291164.ece>

