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Title: Need to withdraw increase in user development fee for outgoing passengers from Thiruvananthapuram airport, Kerala.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR (THIRUVANANTHAPURAM): The sudden and unilateral decision by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) to increase the 'User Development Fee' for outgoing passengers from Thiruvananthapuram airport is matter of serious concern which needs to be reconsidered urgently as it poses a great risk to the airport's growth and function.

Most of the passengers who use Thiruvananthapuram airport are low wage earners who work in the Gulf to provide vital income back home. In addition to this, it is a fact that neither of the two other major international airports in Kerala, namely Kochi Nedumbassery and Kozhikode Airports, charge such a fee. The proposed increase from rupees 575 to rupees 950 would mean that a family of three or more would find more economical to drive to Kochi airport and fly from there than fly from the airport that was built for them at great expense to the tax payer. This is needlessly counter-productive if the objective of the exercise is to facilitate the development of Thiruvananthapuram Airport.

Thiruvananthapuram airport has been functioning profitably for over 27 years, during this time the AAI has been very slow, if not complacent, in developing the airport. It is only in recent times that basic provisions have been provided with minimal upgrades that stand far below the comparative upgrades provided to the other airports in the region.

Most importantly, the international airport in Thiruvananthapuram is a major employer in the local economy from casual workers to full time staff with hundreds of families dependent on the airport's smooth functioning. I, therefore, raise this issue as a matter of the utmost urgency seeking the immediate reconsideration of the proposed increase of the User Development Fee.