

The Aviator - M. Thaigarajan- & Paramount Airways Foray into Northeast

Media has termed him - the hero of hard times. At a time when the Indian aviation industry was bleeding, when the industry majors with the much hyped low-cost, no frills tags finding it hard to survive with their market plans, a young airline with the world's youngest CEO in aviation sector at its helms, not only survived but went on to expand its market share and venture in new routes. The man who made it possible for Paramount Airways - its founder **M.Thaiagarajan** spoke exclusively to our News Editor **Ratnadip Choudhury** on his success in difficult times and also about his new initiative to connect northeast to southern India.

Here are few excerpts.



Paramount Airways founder M. Thaigarajan

TNT: Paramount Airways has set its own benchmark in the Indian aviation industry with its unparalleled business strategies. How do you describe your airline's success at a time when the aviation industry has been bleeding badly?

MT: Paramount Airways hit the right chord with its innovative offering and strong business model. The business model of the airline clearly recognizes the need of the business traveller. We choose to be different right from the selection of our aircraft. We are the first carrier to introduce new genera-

tion e-jets in the Indian market with the emphasis on personal comfort and sophistication. Our business model aids in maintaining operational efficiency.

TNT: Tagged as the only profit making airline in India in 2008, do you feel you have been able to justify your tagline - 'A world of difference' - to your costumers?

MT: Definitely yes (with a big smile), we have striven hard to bring about a change in air travel in India. We have a market leadership of 27 percent in our Southern India Operations. We believe

in cost effective service excellence. You should not have to pay through your teeth for a quality in-flight experience. You don't have to compromise on anything with Paramount. Our e-jets allow us to operate more flights in the same sector. We are the only airline to record an increase in the number of passengers as compared to last year. With people reducing expense on air travel, we have seen many business class travellers shifting loyalties to us as we are offering the same experience at economy fares.

TNT: In the aviation industry every

airline claims to be 'different', how do you differentiate your services to the other market players?

MT: Our aircraft has spacious galleys that provide adequate room for passengers. The window and aisle seats are ergonomically designed for greater comfort. We serve sumptuous gourmet food on board, from hot soup to south Indian filter coffee that has come to epitomize fine dining in the sky. For a flight of seventy passengers we have a ratio of four cabin crew to cater to our passengers on board - one of the highest in the country.

TNT: You are also the youngest CEO of any airline company in the world. What inspired you to start Paramount Airways, apart from the fact that you are a pilot yourself?

MT: The aviation bug bit me at a very young age and I was always fascinated by planes and always longed to operate one (Laughs). I wanted the Indian traveller to be spoilt for choice. I was determined to bring the joy back into flying, to create an experience that would be memorable, one that people would cherish but wouldn't have to pay a steep price for. I wanted the passenger to have more value for money. Paramount Airways was created to address the need for cost-effective service excellence.

TNT: Paramount Airways is days away from starting its operations in eastern and northeastern India. What made you to spread your wings to the eastern fringes?

MT: On the invitation, of Honorable West Bengal chief minister, Sri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee we decided to alter our plans and start operations earlier than planned. The eastern and northeastern sector is sparsely connected. Kolkata will be our gateway to Northeast India. In line with the company's national plans our footprints were extended to the north and NE region.

TNT: You have decided to connect the Northeast (Agartala and Guwahati) to Kolkata and Chennai. How hopeful are you with these new routes and how helpful would these new routes be in overcoming the communication

The seat factor of the domestic airlines in the month of March, 2009

- Paramount Airways - 81.9%,
- Air India (Domestic) - 57.0%,
- Jet Airways - 60.6%,
- JetLite - 64.3%,
- Kingfisher Airlines - 60.9%,
- Spice Jet - 67.5%,
- Go Air - 61.0%
- IndiGo - 70.0%.

Source - PIB release

bottleneck of Northeast India?

MT: People flying from Kolkata and the Northeast will find it more convenient to access - Madurai, Coimbatore, Cochin, Trivandrum, Tiruchirapalli, Bangalore and Hyderabad. We will be looking at connecting our southern India operations to the northeast with a point-to-point fare. With daily operations this will offer increased convenience and allow passengers to travel seamlessly along this sector.

TNT: Aviation has a symbiotic relationship with the tourism sector. The Northeast is fast coming up as a tourist destination. Would the tourism boom in the region help your strategies to link the region to rest of the nation? Do you have plans to further link more places in Northeast India?

MT: Tourism and Aviation have always shared a constructive relationship. By offering connectivity to the untapped beauty of this region it would definitely open up to the rest of the nation. The government is also promoting Tea Tourism and river cruises along this line which have immense potential. The regions myriad offerings from the rich heritage of handicrafts, handloom and tribal artefacts to adventure, religious and rural tourism would throw open many opportunities.



Soon spreading wings to Northeast