

Oman boosts tourism by constructing six more regional airports

In the 2008 budget, Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki, minister of national economy and deputy chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council, announced plans for construction of six more regional airports in Oman in Sohar, Al Duqm, Ras Al Hadd, Adam, Haima and Shaleem.

These airports are expected to give a boost to the tourism infrastructure and bolster the oil and gas industries.

The country currently has two airports, the Muscat International and the Salalah International. Macki said that out of the \$348 million allocated for ports sector, \$288 million has been earmarked for consultancy studies, designing of new terminals and runways of the Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport.

The tenders for the new runway of the Muscat International Airport will be invited in the first half of 2008 and a tender for new terminal buildings will be invited before the year end.

Wihaad Al Harthy, marketing manager of Oman Airports Management Company (OAMC), which is managing the Muscat and Salalah Airports, revealed that the first phase of expansion of Muscat International Airport will be completed by the end of the decade.

Upon completion the airport's handling capacity will rise to 12 million passengers annually, from the present four million.

Wihaad disclosed that additional aircraft parking stands were constructed last year, while further work continues on a pier adjacent to the current terminal featuring eight additional boarding gates with a seating lounge for 1,500 passengers.

Similarly, the development of Salalah Airport envisages an expansion of capacity to one million passengers by 2011.

The expansion of Muscat International Airport will constitute one of the largest infrastructure projects to be undertaken by the government in terms of its value and size.

A new passenger terminal, a second runway, control tower, a new VVIP building and a cargo terminal to handle 200,000 tons of cargo are some of the plans for the new airport.

Also on the anvil is a second passenger terminal, blending modern airport design elements and Omani traditional motifs with all modern amenities, to come up between two runways.

by Vishwas Paul