INSIGNIA OF A DREAM
Cochin International Airport is the first airport in the country built with public-private participation. First is always special. I am extremely privileged to have assumed the chairmanship of Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL) for two terms. It is indeed an honour and a responsibility that I cherish much.

Right from CIAL’s formative days, I have stood by this project. It was primarily due to the realization that in a state like Kerala, which has a sizeable population of expatriates, an airport of international standards had much significance. It would be immensely helpful for the growth and prosperity of the State, and also aid in nurturing inter-cultural exchange by boosting tourism.

At one point in time, when the entire project was about to come to a standstill owing to financial crisis, Government of Kerala took a bold decision to part-fund the project. This was a decision that gave a second life to the project. Thereafter, understandably, there was no looking back for CIAL.

As the chairman of CIAL, I am glad to note that the airport has been consistently paying dividend to its stakeholders. As of now, CIAL has paid a dividend to the tune of 132% of the equity capital to the shareholders. As the chairman of CIAL, I am certainly very pleased to present before you this document that vividly depicts the making of Cochin International airport.

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Chronicling history is always a challenging task. In doing so, one has to constantly confront several perceptions. There may be stories that have not been embraced in its true warmth. Like success, failures too play their own role in the process of making history. Taking these facts into account, we have attempted to narrate a real story - The story of a great team who translated a dream into reality. It’s also the story of a visionary leader Mr. V.J. Kurian who led from the front and that of a rare political zest demonstrated by administrators like late Mr. K. Karunakaran. Again, it is also the story of a land and of its people who had unswerving faith in the project which was once regarded as a non-starter.

The Cochin International Airport has crossed the milestone of one and half decades of existence in the history of Indian aviation. Certainly, this is not a tell-tale account of all those 15 years; instead it’s an attempt to unfold the illustrious story of a team which managed to mount unimaginable challenges during the project period. As such, the narrative part would come to an end in 1999, the year when the airport was commissioned.

We used umpteen numbers of raw materials ranging from official records, newspaper clippings to personal interviews for sapping the essence of the past and get it told in the limited folios. There may be omissions. There are possibilities of further more detailing. But give us the dispensation of human errors. But with my blue pencil, I have tried to adhere to some journalistic decorum.

The style adopted is that of narration rather than cataloguing and utmost care has been taken to ensure the sacredness of facts and figures. The efforts put by Mr. Sunil Naliyath, a columnist and a well-known translator, with his contribution as an art and graphics designer and Mr. Dominic Fernandez, Manager, CIAL, with his support in enriching the content were decisive.

And now, this is the time to have a retrospection of an era and persistent efforts undertaken by a team of people who realized the dream of not just an airport, but people’s airport.

P.S. Jayan
A testament to the commitment and conviction of a traditional yet urbane convergence of the past and the future, Cochin International Airport is today’s illustration of efficient connectivity and endless opportunities. CIAL is also the story of the rise and flight of one man’s dream and confidence, which found fuel and faith from a strong team that believed, supported and powered this to the skies.
It was a dream - relentlessly chased, diligently executed and passionately managed. Till then, it was an endeavour that was quite unheard of in the Indian corporate world. To state its budget allocation as shoe-string would only end up as an exclamation. But still, the venture unveiled a leadership that was never seen before. It portrayed a commitment that was never experienced. Eventually the dream blossomed into a stunning reality. An airport came into existence from scratch. Call it Cochin International Airport - an insignia of a dream!

The saga of building the first airport in the country with the participation of common public is genuinely inspiring. The story of the path it traversed, hurdles it overcame and the hopes it fulfilled has now become a model for others to emulate. The legacy of Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL), the company that operates the airport at Kochi, has now become inspirational for all those who are looking for an inclusive and sustainable development model.

For all its glory, Cochin International Airport Ltd is indebted to its dedicated team who built the airport brick by brick. They proved the unhappy myths wrong, diffused constant conflicts and surpassed the stumbling blocks with renewed vigour. However, all through the spiky journey, they were driven by the fact that they were being subjected to a process that would act as a catalyst for change. Each one of them believed in himself and reposed his faith in the team leader Mr. V.J. Kurian.

The entire team under his stewardship always dreamed. They worked in tandem, were stimulated by an efficient leadership, and always triumphed over the hurdles one by one. They sweated it out, toiled and worked hard under the scorching sun and over the barren field. But many were of the belief that building an airport with people's participation was like building a castle in the air. There was opposition from almost every corner and scepticism was suspended in the air. Acquisition of 1,253 acres of land from 3,824 owners was the biggest challenge. Three temples and two churches were to be demolished. There was public outcry for shelving the project. The team held 41 rounds of discussions. They could convince the people that they would be the major beneficiaries of the project. A unique rehabilitation package was designed, which later became a case study for several internationally acclaimed institutions, including the World Bank.

CIAL always stood by the common people who lost their land. It made every effort to enhance their standards of living. All the 822 persons who lost their houses have been provided with an employment at the airport. CIAL is a big family today. More than 5,000 people are now under its wings. So far, CIAL has repaid 152 per cent of the investment of each shareholder in the company.

Today, Cochin International Airport is not just an airport. It is a symbol of hope. It is a sense of pride for the common man in this part of the country. It’s also a chronicle of building an airport from nothing. There were several hundreds of individuals who toiled and sweated it out to make this dream take wings. It’s their collective efforts that gave CIAL a solid foundation and further, a superb take-off and later, it’s stunning, runaway success!

Let’s begin with the leaders who converged the concept, the passion, the effort and the tools to a gleaming triumph, the Cochin International Airport.
A PROPHETIC VISION

Cochin in Kochi, God’s Own Country was all colour, modernity, God’s Own Country was all...
FUELLING A DREAM

Every successful project is guided by a visionary and a remarkable leader. Mr. E. K. Nayanar, Kerala’s longest serving Chief Minister played this role to perfection; he was a blend of strength and sensitivity, a man of decisions and discipline. With his strong sense of passion in implementing things and the knack of dealing with complexities, Mr. Nayanar bolstered the project from its early years.

When in 1996, Mr. E. K. Nayanar was sworn in as the new chief minister of Kerala, the airport project was reeling under acute financial crisis. Unfazed by the continuous challenges that had engulfed the CIAL dream from its inception, Mr. Nayanar contemplated the situation positively. The overall mood, though, remained negative. There were widespread concerns about the technical and financial feasibility of the project, land acquisition issues, and reports of more than 400 legal cases filed against the project. He convened a meeting with senior officials in the Government. Though some of them advised to wrap up the project, citing impracticability, a meeting with Mr. Kurian inculcated in him a strong sense of faith. From then on, Mr. Nayanar displayed an almost stubborn optimism, and soon announced the State Government’s support for the CIAL project. It was a huge victory for team CIAL and the construction picked up momentum.

Handholding the project firmly, Mr. Nayanar’s constructive support helped ‘Team CIAL’ in two ways; one, it provided the political backing and thereby ensured the continuity of the project implementation, and secondly, it radiated a message of consensus, thereby alleviating opposition from all quarters. A feat only a man with immense credibility and mass support could achieve!

Excitement peaked when finally, on 25th May, 1999, the much awaited dream took wings as Mr. K. R. Narayanan, then President of India, dedicated Cochin International Airport to the nation. Mr. Nayanar chaired the inaugural function.

The Guiding Force

When the excitement was building and work progressing, Cochin city was preparing to host passengers from around the world. The good time came to a pause, post 1995; a period of political turmoil unleashed in Kerala and the dream of an international airport seemed hard to take off. Mr. K. Karunakaran stepped down as Chief Minister, and uncertainty reigned in the CIAL camp regarding the project’s future.

But encouragement came in from Mr. A. K. Antony, the new Chief Minister. He gave instructions to all profit-making public sector undertakings (PSUs) to invest in CIAL. Ultimately, with persuasion from CIAL and through Mr. A. K. Antony’s efforts, direct investment from the government became a reality with the government approving 26% share in the equity capital of CIAL. The HUDCO loan (facilitated by Mr. K. Karunakaran) came through, and the first instalment of Rs. 25 crore was sanctioned on 31st March, 1995. The team breathed easy again, and work continued. In April 1996, the first contribution of Rs. one crore came in from the Government of Kerala for equity participation.

Earlier in 1994, Mr. A. K. Antony played a crucial role in getting approval for the airport from the Ministry of Defence, when he was the Cabinet Minister for Civil Supplies in the Central Government. This was a major breakthrough, especially after Mr. Kurian and his team had held several discussions regarding objections raised by the Indian Navy, without success.

Mr. A. K. Antony’s third term as Kerala’s Chief Minister (May 2001-August 2004) also witnessed CIAL declaring dividends for the first time in 2003-04. During this period, CIAL also devised a master plan on long term strategies that could be adopted to make the airport internationally competitive.
Mr. V. J. Kurian's role in the development of Cochin International Airport was something exhaustive and innovative. His vision of an airport with people's participation and a low profile when someone attacked him was quite articulate whenever he had a point to prove and kept a low profile when someone attacked him. He was quite articulate whenever he had a point to prove and kept a low profile when someone attacked him. He was never an easy journey to make, the airport project was witnessed its biggest diversification and modernisation for his third term as managing director, CIAL started witnessing its biggest diversification and modernisation for his third term as managing director, CIAL started. When Mr. Kurian returned to CIAL in 2011, he was always concentrated on taking the project to another level. It was his way of shaping his crisis. 

Create and success will meet you at the end of the road, and so it did! On 25th May, 1999, the nation’s first commercial airport with a vision to take a flight of faith to attain a larger goal, Kurian’s insight and leadership revived the company and brought it back on track; it declared a dividend for the first time. Kurian’s almost parental touch on the company and brought it back on track; it declared a dividend for the first time. Kurian’s almost parental touch. Never an easy journey to make, the airport project was witnessed its biggest diversification and modernisation for his third term as managing director, CIAL started witnessing its biggest diversification and modernisation for his third term as managing director, CIAL started.
What makes a businessman different from others is his ability to think ahead, identify opportunities, and support promising proposals. CIAL owes a big thanks to many such renowned business leaders who saw the potential in this project and extended wholehearted support all throughout. While innumerable leaders and politicians supported the idea of an international airport in Cochin, there were a few who remained steadfast to their commitment to the project from start to finish. Team CIAL is grateful to these industrialists and businessmen for their firm backing, and moreover for showing faith in the project. Every journey becomes easier when you have the right company to walk along. Mr. Yusuffali, managing director of EMKE Group, who undisputedly popularised Kerala in the Middle East business scenario, is somebody who can certainly be called the global face of Cochin International Airport. Mr. Yusuffali has been a part of the project from the early 1990s when the donor scheme was in place, with Chief Minister K. Karunakaran and one of his best ministers looking from the front. In October 1993, Mr. Jacob along with Mr. Kurian, started a fund raising campaign among the non-resident Keralites. Mr. T. M. Jacob held meetings with influential NRKs to raise contributions towards this ambitious project. Mr. M.A. Yusuffali, Mr. K.V. Prakash, Dr. M.K. Ebrahim Jafarey, M.V.S. Sebastian, Mr. Pandikkar and Mr. K.J. Joseph together formed Cochin International Aviation Development Forum in the Middle East and collected Rs. 4.47 crore. The anticipated amount of Rs. 200 crore was still a long way, but the more Created a wave of optimism among NRKs. An international airport was viewed as a thing of pride by many, and soon more supporters jumped in. This eventually led up to an investor base of 18,000 stakeholders from around 30 countries. When the Kochi International Airport Society (KIAS) was registered in 1993, Jacob became one of the signatories to the memorandum of association and the bye-law. With the incorporation of Cochin International Airport Limited in March 1994, Mr. Jacob became one of the first directors, a post he deserved and held until 1996.
announced to call collection from NRIs in the Middle East. He enthusiastically forward to support the project. As chairman of the UAE chapter of Cochin International Airport Development Forum, Mr. Jacob headed and contributed fund raising activities on the Middle East. His state was an entrepreneur par excellence and his accent as a successful businessman reflected seriously and ensures his presence at every decision making meeting of the airport. He is credited for having attended 100 of the director board meetings held so far.

Mr. E. M. Babu, managing director of Major Bakuza Trading Est, Dubai, UAE, has been a role model and supporter of CIAL right from its inception. Mr. Babu contributed Rs. 50 lakhs in the initial years, and also interacted extensively with the NRI population in enlightening them about the project. He has been a director on the board since June 1998.

The contributions of Mr. P. Mohammed Ali (founder, Galfar Group, Oman, and one of the founder directors of CIAL) and Mr. N.V. George, MD, Geo Electricals Trading, were also being stretched to the limits. One fine morning, Mr. George walked into CIAL office at Marine Drive for a friendly chat with the managing director, Mr. V. J. Kurian and it did not take long for the devoted businessman in Mr. George to realize the potential of the project and pitch in with substantial investment. Mr. N.V. George associated with CIAL during 1997-98 when the construction of the airport was progressing at a break neck speed. That was a time when the finances of the company were also being stretched to the limits. One fine morning, Mr. George walked into CIAL office at Marine Drive for a friendly chat with the managing director, Mr. V. J. Kurian and it did not take long for the devoted businessman in Mr. George to realize the potential of the project and pitch in with substantial investment. Mr. N.V. George associated with CIAL during 1997-98 when the construction of the airport was progressing at a breakneck speed. That was a time when the finances of the company were also being stretched to the limits. One fine morning, Mr. George walked into CIAL office at Marine Drive for a friendly chat with the managing director, Mr. V. J. Kurian and it did not take long for the devoted businessman in Mr. George to realize the potential of the project and pitch in with substantial investment.

The airport, as of now, has been completed and has been opened for commercial operations in 2006. The airport, with its state of the art facilities, has been ordained to be one of the most thriving sagas of Indian subcontinent, this unpretentious endeavour has been a great contributing factor, in encouraging CIAL to venture into new areas of development.
Kochi, the city known by the sobriquet; the queen of Arabian Sea, is the largest urban agglomeration in Kerala. It is also the commercial capital of the state. As one of the most traversed tourist destinations and a much sought after centre for trade and export activities, the city has maintained cultural and trade relations with two of the world’s right from the medieval period. Despite its picturesque landscape and vibrant cultural legacy, a fine confluence of ancient civilization and modern outlook will best describe the chronicle of Kochi. In 1970s the city was rapidly moving to achieve the status of a national metropolis. The public especially the business community was demanding better transport facilities including direct connectivity to major cities. With the exodus of Malayalis to Middle East countries in the 1980s, there arose a demand for an improvement in existing facilities as bigger airlines were willing to include Kochi in their route map. The naval airport at Willingdon Island, the only airstrip in Kochi, was plagued with several confinities like a short runway, prohibition on night flying, and no international flights. Its existing runway was inadequate for operation of bigger aircrafts. Also the geographic location posed major challenges for airport expansion and reclamation of land was not possible to extend the runway. Moreover, with Indian Airlines deciding to upgrade their aircrafts to Airbus 320, the airport became more outdated and was on the verge of falling off the aviation map. Indian Navy, the owner of the airport was content with the existing levels and standard of performance, which were more than sufficient for their military operations. It was under those circumstances that Mr. K. V. Thomas, then Member of Parliament, wrote to the Ministry of Aviation wherein he highlighted the need to extend the runway. Responding to this urgent request as well as several other representations from the Cochin industry and business community, Mr. Madhav Rao Scindia, who was then Union Minister for Civil Aviation convened a meeting during 1991. The main objective of this meeting was to assess the feasibility of expanding the runway of the naval airport, which was estimated by National Airport Authority (NAA- Now Airport Authority of India) at Rs 72 crores. Mr. V. J. Kurian, then District Collector of Ernakulam, represented the Government of Kerala in the meeting. During the meeting, NAA categorically refused the proposal of investing in an airport owned by Indian Navy. The Navy also reiterated their stand that they would not carry out a plan to enhance civilian operation facilities. The reluctance of the National Airport Authority, owner and operator of all Civil Airports in the country, to make further investment in an airport owned by the Indian Navy gave way to the need for an alternative location for construction of a new airport.
The onus of finding a suitable location for the new airport fell on Mr. V. J. Kurian, who was the District Collector of Ernakulam. After shortlisting a few locations like Cherthala, Edakkattuvayal, Thengap, Maradu and Kalakkavoor, all of which were in the periphery of Kochi, he finally zeroed in on Nedumbassery which was a placid village near Angamaly. Nedumbassery was finalised for its easy access to rail and road connectivity, both of which were in close proximity to the proposed site. The NAA approved the new location in August 1992, but stayed away from investing in the new airport owing to financial constraints. They, however, promised to extend necessary technical assistance.

Nedumbassery, then, one of Ernakulam district’s most remote and underdeveloped villages, suddenly became a geopolitical hotspot for the media. As the land was dotted with paddy fields, coconut trees, homesteads and about 33 brick-kiln factories, it was a huge task on hand. Controversies erupted almost instantly, and gathered more momentum as political interests came to play. Mr. Kurian and his team, however, marched steadfastly forward. Rather than using copybook management tactics, they relied on their pragmatic brilliance.
If you thought flying a plane was tough, be warned that getting a space ready to fly the plane is tougher and riskier. With no guiding lights and danger alerts, team CIAA navigated its way forward, evading political potholes, dodging legal hitches and manoeuvring through financial crises. Constantly clearing hurdles, both visible and invisible, the ‘task force’ led by Mr. V. J. Kurian seemed to face no mountain high enough. Soon after the project was mooted, the primary obstacle of identifying a location was deftly dealt with. This, however, was only the beginning of a rough flight; the hunt for adequate funding seemed a bigger challenge. As the NAA had already expressed their unwillingness to invest in the project, the mobilization of funds appeared to be one of the biggest concerns for those who ventured out to realize this dream from scratch. At this stage, the Government of Kerala was also reluctant to make any financial commitments, which left Mr. Kurian and team spending much of their energy trying to raise the estimated Rs.200 crores. The negative campaigns, public and political protests only further hampered their efforts.

**STORY OF FLIGHTS & FAITH**

Images of initial site condition
Jose Maliakal, an NRI from Germany. To begin with, a Society was formed in July 1993; Kochi International Airport Society (KIAS) for the project and forming a society to make a consolidated move followed suit in rather quick succession. Appointing Mr. Kurian as the Special Officer of the project and forming a society to make a consolidated move followed suit in rather quick succession.

The essence of Mr. Kurian’s plan for raising funds was to mobilise funds with a nominal amount of Rs. 20,000/- as its initial take up the challenge of mobilising funds for the pioneering project. A meeting was convened by then Minister for Civil Aviation, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, during which a decision was taken to go ahead for airport construction through public-private participation. Mr. V. J. Kurian and Mr. B. Radhakrishna Pillai, who was then Minister, represented the Government of Kerala along with Mr. V. Thomas. On 30th March, 1993, ministry of civil aviation gave the green-up signal for airport project for the international airport proposed at Nedumbassery. As soon as the Central Govt. agreed to the proposal, the Government of Kerala issued an airport order (G.O. No.42/PE/RT, dated 19.3.1993) and gave approval for the airportdummy. The essence of Mr. Kurian’s plan for raising funds was to mobilise funds with a nominal amount of Rs. 20,000/- as its initial take up the challenge of mobilising funds for the pioneering project. A meeting was convened by then Minister for Civil Aviation, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, during which a decision was taken to go ahead for airport construction through public-private participation. Mr. V. J. Kurian and Mr. B. Radhakrishna Pillai, who was then Minister, represented the Government of Kerala along with Mr. V. Thomas. On 30th March, 1993, ministry of civil aviation gave the green-up signal for airport project for the international airport proposed at Nedumbassery. As soon as the Central Govt. agreed to the proposal, the Government of Kerala issued an airport order (G.O. No.42/PE/RT, dated 19.3.1993) and gave approval for the airport project. Hence, the story of a civil servant who fought against all odds to set up a green field international airport that was deemed impossible became a true story with a new life developing in Kerala.

Mr. Kurian designed and mooted two schemes to raise funds. One was a donor scheme and the other an interest-free loan scheme. The objective of the donor scheme was to collect Rs. 25 crores as donations from individuals, organisations and bodies that would be used for construction of the airport. The donor would also be entitled to certain facilities like a waiver of the entry fee, special lounge access in the airport, separate security counters, and more; once the airport was functional. It was expected that Rs. 5,000 could be collected as interest free loan from four lakh non-resident Indians, i.e., about 2% of the expatriates—who would willingly contribute to a cause that would bring them closer to their home and native land. They would be eligible to some special privileges too. Of Rs. 5,000, which was proposed to be raised from each individual, Rs.250 was to be utilised for purchasing a Kissan Vikas Patra (a Govt. of India Scheme) which would get doubled in five and half years and could be returned to investors. The amount invested in Kissan Vikas Patra would have been sufficient enough to pay back the loan without interest as the end of five and half year. The maths and budgeting was done perfectly; if just 4 lakh people provided a loan of Rs 50.25, the society would get Rs 205 crores in cash and would have spent Rs 120 crores for the purchase of Kissan Vikas Patra. As per the Govt of India scheme, 75% of the funds invested in Kissan Vikas Patra could be avoided as loan, from the Govt. of India, by the State Government. This amount of Rs. 75 crores was expected to be handled over to the society, which would be repaid when the income accrues from the project, and sale of excess land due to capital appreciation resulting from the commissioning of the airport. Thus, it was envisaged that the society would be able to mobilise Rs. 200 crores (Rs.120 crores from donors + Rs.75 crores from loan and Rs.25 crores from donors) without much difficulties.

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Mr. Kurian designed and mooted two schemes to raise funds. One was a donor scheme and the other an interest-free loan scheme. The objective of the donor scheme was to collect Rs. 25 crores as donations from individuals, organisations and bodies that would be used for construction of the airport. The donor would also be entitled to certain facilities like a waiver of the entry fee, special lounge access in the airport, separate security counters, and more; once the airport was functional. It was expected that Rs. 5,000 could be collected as interest free loan from four lakh non-resident Indians, i.e., about 2% of the expatriates—who would willingly contribute to a cause that would bring them closer to their home and native land. They would be eligible to some special privileges too. Of Rs. 5,000, which was proposed to be raised from each individual, Rs.250 was to be utilised for purchasing a Kissan Vikas Patra (a Govt. of India Scheme) which would get doubled in five and half years and could be returned to investors. The amount invested in Kissan Vikas Patra would have been sufficient enough to pay back the loan without interest as the end of five and half year. The maths and budgeting was done perfectly; if just 4 lakh people provided a loan of Rs 50.25, the society would get Rs 205 crores in cash and would have spent Rs 120 crores for the purchase of Kissan Vikas Patra. As per the Govt of India scheme, 75% of the funds invested in Kissan Vikas Patra could be avoided as loan, from the Govt. of India, by the State Government. This amount of Rs. 75 crores was expected to be handled over to the society, which would be repaid when the income accrues from the project, and sale of excess land due to capital appreciation resulting from the commissioning of the airport. Thus, it was envisaged that the society would be able to mobilise Rs. 200 crores (Rs.120 crores from donors + Rs.75 crores from loan and Rs.25 crores from donors) without much difficulties.

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Innovations and experiments have always been part of the airport project. When the novel funding scheme was introduced and accepted by the Government, Mr. Kurian deciphered a modus operandi for reaching out to the people. On 15th August 1993, a half page advertisement appeared in all prominent newspapers; the cost of which was sponsored by banks (who would be the beneficiaries of the project; again an innovation!). That was perhaps the beginning of another model in Kerala; the crowd funding. The newspaper advertisement was diligently prepared. It connoted with the celebration of 50 years of Independence, as at that time, the airport was scheduled for opening on 15th August 1997. A separate brochure in same line was also made ready to circulate among the potential share holders (see the copy of the brochure in pages 34 & 35).

Mr. Kurian visited non-resident Keralites in the Middle East and Europe. Committees were formed in various countries to support and finance the project. Mr. M.A. Yusuffali (managing director, EMKE Group) was nominated as the chairman of the committee in the Middle East. Mr. K.V. Prakash (originally from Kochi and settled in Abu Dhabi) was the chief co-ordinator. A section of the business community and NRKs took up the fund-raising project. Their foresight helped KIAS gain an initial momentum and there were 16 people who contributed Rs. 10 lakhs or more. Apart from individuals, larger institutions like Indian Oil, Bharath Petroleum, Malayala Manorama and Spices Board contributed to the donor scheme. This, however, was not sufficient even though the whole concept looked very ingenious. The bitter reality was that only Rs 4.47 crores could be collected against an anticipated 200 crores (303 donors responded and offered Rs. 2.15 crores for the airport development while 2828 people subscribed to the interest-free loan scheme; through which Rs 2.32 crores was collected).
The fundraiser plan had looked impeccably accurate on paper, but in reality the donor and loan schemes failed to garner the expected response. It was novel and innovative, but the very fact seemed to have instilled a lack of confidence in people, and hence received a lukewarm response. This was a huge setback for the project, which was already caught in uproars. Detractors ruled the scene and critics campaigned for abandoning the project. The team, however, went ahead brainstorming and strategy mapping, without surrendering to the conspiracy of the situation. The tried and tested methods did not excite Mr. Kurian, and he spent hours studying possibilities that could be successful. This was a phase of absolute low and the threat of abandoning the project loomed large. But Kurian believed ‘if you can dream it, you can do it’, and this spirit kept him going. He had readied a new plan—financial remodelling by floating a company. He elaborated on the funding proposal and how it would work in salvaging the project from its present crisis. According to this, a public limited company had to be formed which would enable the project to pool funds through equity shares from public investors and also from the State Government and other public institutions. The concept of institutional lending was also mooted for the project. Once the initial concerns were addressed, people saw potential in the proposal and this turned out to be a lifesaver for the airport project.
As the response to the funding propounded by KIAS fell below expectations, the governing body of KIAS on 10th January, 1994, decided to incorporate a public limited company with an authorized capital of Rs 90 crores that consisted of 9 crore equity shares of Rs 10 each. The land acquired by the society would be leased out to the proposed company for the construction and maintenance of the airport. KIAS, being a charitable society, had several limitations for raising funds. The proposed company would have to take on methods of institutional funding which would not only raise equity investment from the Government of Kerala, institutions, high net-worth individuals, and public investors, but also have a base for debt leveraging through institutional lenders. Prominent personalities like Mr. K. M. Mathew of Malayala Manorama, Mr. Venugopal C.Govind, managing partner of Varma & Varma, and Mr. Sivadasan, company secretary, played a major role in convincing Mr. K. Karunakaran to float a public limited company. Thus, on 30th March 1994, Cochin International Airport Ltd. (CIAL) was registered. It was decided to raise Rs 90 crores through public equity. The Kochi International Airport Society (represented by Mr. V.J. Kurian), Cochin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ernakulam Chamber of Commerce as well as entrepreneurs like Mr. R. Madhavan Nayar, Mr. C. V. Jacob and Mr. P Govinda Rao were the promoters of the company. Mr. K. Karunakaran, being the Chief Minister, became the founder chairman, and Mr. V. J. Kurian, the founder managing director. Then ministers, Mr. T. M. Jacob and Mr. T.H. Mustafa, Prof. K.V. Thomas, Member of Parliament from Ernakulam, Mr. R. Ramachandran Nair, IAS, Chief Secretary, District Collector, Ernakulam, Mr. C.V. Jacob, Mr. R. Madhavan Nayar, Mr. P. Mohamed Ali and Dr. P.A. Thilakarajan were also founder board members of CIAL. The amount collected through both loan and donation schemes were converted to shares. The benefits declared by KIAS for the providers of the loan and for the donors were also made applicable. All service providers were requested to take part in the financing of the project against various schemes (see box in page 38). Though there were many individuals who wholeheartedly welcomed the idea of an international airport centred at Kochi and had contributed without even an eye of suspicion or doubt, the initial institutional response was lukewarm. However, the project received a shot in the arm, when Mr. Kurian was able to convince Mr. K. K. Bhargava, then CMD of HUDCO, about the feasibility of the project and HUDCO surfaced on the scene by sanctioning a term loan of Rs. 98 crores in February 1995. This not only acted as a catalyst but also turned out to be an eye opener for both individuals and institutions. It was the determination of Mr. K. Karunakaran to provide a government guarantee for the repayment of loan that persuaded HUDCO to sanction such an enormous amount. Meanwhile, all efforts were made to ensure there was adequate subscription to the private placement of shares. Mr. A. K. Antony, who was sworn in as the next Chief Minister of Kerala, made a bold move, and invested one crore—the first equity investment of the Government of Kerala in CIAL. This was released in April 1996.
During the construction stage, it was decided to commence international operations when the first phase of the project is ready to operation, and accordingly a number of features were added to the terminal being constructed to enable it to be of world class airport infrastructure.

The construction cost, thus, went up substantially. To meet these added expenses, Federal Bank gave CIAL a term loan of Rs. 24.69 crores and State Bank of Travancore in turn provided a term loan of Rs. 25 crores. This, subsequently HUDCO raised the total loan to Rs. 138 crores. This, thus, was converted to equity shares.

He also invested in CIAL’s share capital.

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Aquisition of land was a huge challenge for CIAL. It is also one of the most complex and tedious processes the state has ever witnessed. The agnure of the evictees, lack of funds, political opposition and litigations; challenges before the team were aplenty. The 4 (1) notification for land acquisition had already been released in 1993. The process was launched with the help of Rs. 10 crores sanctioned by the Federal Bank, and three special Thasildars were appointed. An area of 1253 acres of land was required for the project, which belonged to 3824 land owners, and there were 822 households. A substantial number of people vehemently opposed land acquisition with the active support of local political leaders cutting across party lines. People were apprehensive that they would be denied adequate compensation for their land. The land acquisition involved removal and relocation of several hundreds of homes, fields, brick-kiln factories, realignment of waterways and redirection of numerous roads, modifying of places of worship and even more. The Chengalthodu, which is a creek connected to River Periyar, had to be completely realigned. Numerous public pathways spread over a number of villages like Habthet Road, Kanuru–Yamunarkara Road, Kallamkottam Road, Nageshupillayam Road and the like also gave way for the airport. Three temples and two churches were relocated.

To make matters worse, adequate funds were not available to compensate evictees. Public outcry for shelving the project was at its peak, and these were testing times for Mr. Kurian and his land acquisition team headed by Ms. I. C. Anna, a retired Deputy Collector who were ably assisted by Mr. Balakrishnan and Mr. Raman Nair. As the land acquisition progressed, the site office of CIAL was shifted to Nedumbassery. Space for this purpose was let out by Mr. P. Y. Varghese who was then a member of the Nedumbassery Panchayath.

The acquisition team somehow needed to convince land owners of the importance of the project and the benefits it would bring to the people of the area. The Chengalthodu, which is a creek connected to River Periyar, had to be completely realigned. Numerous public pathways spread over a number of villages like Habthet Road, Kanuru–Yamunarkara Road, Kallamkottam Road, Nageshupillayam Road and the like also gave way for the airport. Three temples and two churches were relocated.

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it would bring them. Almost 41 rounds of negotiations were held with land owners with the active participation of political leaders. Mr. Mohammad Ali (MLA, Aluva), Mr. P. J. Joy (MLA, Angamaly), Mr. P. Y. Varghese (MLA, Thrippunithura), also Chairman of Angamaly Municipality, later became Minister and director of CIAL; Mr. P. K. Ittoop (MLA, Angamaly), Mr. M. L. Johny (President, Sreemoolanagaram Angamaly Municipality), Mr. Unni Menon (President, Kanjoor Panchayat), and Mr. Kannappan (President, Vazhakkulam Panchayat) took great initiatives to resolve land acquisition issues. After a certain period, Mr. S. Samaj (MLA, Vadakalakara), who later became Minister and director of CIAL, also became a supporter of the project. Mr. A. P. Varkey, then District Secretary of CPI(M) also extended a helping hand.

There were times when the negotiations that started early in the morning went on until early morning the next day. Frequent discussions were made to convince the evictees that all their demands would be addressed with empathy. Mr. V. J. Kurian often represented CIAL in these negotiations. CIAL showed a generous approach in fixing the land value for negotiated settlements. For brick pits, while at the time of negotiation there was a market value of Rs. 120/cent, Rs. 150/cent were paid. For dry land, having road access, with an approximate market value of Rs. 125/cent, Rs. 200/cent were paid in addition. For dry land having direct road access, with a market value of Rs. 100/cent were paid. When further land was taken for terminal, which at that time had a market value of Rs 8000, was escalated upto Rs. 12,000.

Accordingly, 719 house owners out of 822 for those who had rented houses would be given 8 rounds of developed land (free of cost). They were also given Rs. 2,00,000 each in shifting charges. The land owners who came for negotiation were granted a much higher rate than the market rate (see next chapter for details). Rs. 50,000 was also paid in lieu of six cents of land for those who did not claim during negotiation.

The land to be acquired was split into 13 different categories to settle the compensation issues. It ranged from brick pits to land plots with PWD road frontage. KIAS showed a generous approach in fixing the land value for negotiated settlements. For brick pits, while at the time of negotiation there was a market value of Rs. 120/cent, Rs. 150/cent were paid. For dry land, having road access, with an approximate market value of Rs. 125/cent, Rs. 200/cent were paid in addition. For dry land having direct road access, with a market value of Rs. 100/cent were paid. When further land was taken for terminal, which at that time had a market value of Rs 8000, was escalated upto Rs. 12,000.

The provisos tabled before the landowners reflected the benevolence of the company. It had a touch of compassion and a gesture of goodwill. According to this, owners, who had garnered the status of permanent tenants, would be given 8 rounds of developed land (free of cost). They were also given Rs. 2,00,000 each in shifting charges. The land owners who came for negotiation were granted a much higher rate than the market rate (see next chapter for details). Rs. 50,000 was also paid in lieu of six cents of land, for those who did not claim during negotiation.

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The CIAL dream had set sail, a small team was set up, support came in, the location identified. The next big step was to earn possession of the land. A huge population of Nedumbassery and surrounding areas had to be moved to a new address, a new home. Goodbyes are never easy, and it was no different for these people. While they did appreciate the progress the airport would bring to the state and to their native place, letting go of the homes and spaces required effort. The CIAL team holds in high regard the support and cooperation shown by these people, who dedicated their personal properties for a larger public gain.

As politicians, architects and engineers brainstormed and created processes, negotiated deals and facilitated funds and equipment, it was a moment of emotions and heart aches for the people of Nedumbassery. Many of them had initially harboured serious concerns about the project and had even refused to relinquish their properties more of an emotional outburst than a planned protest. But the persuasion skills of Mr. V. J. Kurian and his team as well as the genuineness of the rehabilitation package won people over. CIAL has, since then, always held their safety and security as its prime responsibility.

While things did end on a happily-ever-after note, the entire process of land acquisition was a complex task. CIAL sensed the risk factor and so made an offer that was hard to resist; an acquisition rate which was much above the then market rate. But that wasn’t tempting enough and team CIAL had to get up close

Evictees were compensated with developed property jobs and money
Rehabilitated area was provided with all civic amenities.
Over 500 taxi permits were issued for evictees.
Schemes to improve the living standards of evictees.
All the 822 evictees who lost houses were given jobs at airport

UNIQUE REHABILITATION
The art of winning hearts...
and personal with the people. They held several rounds of talks with them, educated them about the project, tried to alleviate their anxiety and fear factor, and ensured their safety. The rates, too, were escalated. While there were still some people who went in for litigation, most others agreed to the renewed offer and were given a sum of land free of cost as part of the rehabilitation package.

There were around 3824 land holdings to be acquired for the airport at the start of the project. More than two thirds of the landholders agreed to the rate fixed by CIAL. 1003 owners had approached courts for a better settlement package. They had a collective holding of approximately 420 acres. The court disposed of all the cases. While the lower court granted 90% over the rate fixed by land acquisition officer, on appeal, the High Court reduced it to 45%.

Therefore, those who came for negotiated settlement with CIAL got much better deal than those who tried litigation.

All the families who lost their homes and came forward to negotiated settlement were given 6-cent plots equipped with all necessary infrastructures or Rs. 50,000. In addition, each household was given Rs 20,000 as grant for demolition of houses and to move to a new location. Evictees were also permitted to take away all useful material from their demolished houses, even though compensation was paid for the same. The settlement at enhanced rates was titled ‘Goodwill’ as the landowners were offering their land under negotiation.

The rehabilitation package floated for evictees was CIAL’s message to the people, to society and to the community as large that “we care.” This is also a true story of altruism that is regarded as one of the best testimonies of its kind in the history of entrepreneurship in India. No surprise that the rehabilitation package extended by CIAL today, stands out as an exceptional case study across the world.

Mr. V. J. Kurian strongly believed that progress attained fullfilment only when it reflected in the lives of all involved—be it the supporters, investors or the common man, who gave up even their homes to realise this dream. He ensured them the best compensation, both in terms of money and quality of life. His concern for the evictees was genuine and the association continued for several years, even after the acquisition process was over. He often said “evicting them was like uprooting a well-grown tree. I tried my best to ensure that they were rooted elsewhere in a happier and better environment.”

Things did briefly take an ugly turn when adequate funds were not available to pay compensation to the evictees. However, things soon reverted in favor of the project as political leaders, both prominent and local activists, unanimously approved their support to the project, curbing across all political leaning. This move worked favorably and provided sufficient mileage for the initial kickoff. The evacuation process and consequent settlement were huge challenges that CIAL carried out with precision.

With so many people involved and with such a huge amount of compensation on offer, the land acquisition of Cochin International Airport, perhaps, could be termed the biggest ever process of its kind in Kerala. This unique rehabilitation package later became a case study for the World Bank.
New home, a new life!

Team CIAL had bigger and more long-term plans for these people and their families. The rehabilitation package included not just the allotment of land but also numerous other benefits as well. As the airport’s commercial operations took flight, several hundreds of job opportunities were thrown open to the local population. Several hundreds of them could earn a permanent source of income. Of the displaced, 150 individuals were absorbed as direct employees of CIAL. The prepaid taxi scheme for airport passengers was originally designed to be operated exclusively by the evictees. Over 550 were given taxi permits, and hundreds of others were accommodated in various aviation activities including ground handling and cargo handling. The placements at CIAL was done in a very fair and transparent manner. A relaxation in the eligibility criteria was given to evictees and was absorbed for unskilled jobs at CIAL. Relaxation in age was granted for evictees for the selection process of skilled jobs. Cargo loaders, drivers, sweepers and other attendants were selected from the neighbourhood. Many of the evictees also found jobs as external cargo loaders, for loading and unloading jobs with export and import agencies.

Thus, by August 2014, all evictees were offered livelihood benefits through direct employment in CIAL or its various subsidiary divisions, shops and other facilities at the airport. Over 1500 employment opportunities were made available to the evictees in the airport project either directly or indirectly as well as through other agencies operating at the airport.

CIAL also went beyond the prescribed welfare measures and associated itself with a range of social outreach and welfare programmes in and around Nedumbassery. They generously funded for various public amenities like roads, drainage, drinking water, street lighting and also for maintaining and renovating public utilities like schools and primary health centres.

The diversion of Chengalthodu, construction of Avinamcode road that connects Neyyimadu and Akapparambu, and a peripheral road connecting Neyyimadu and Kanjiru were also funded and executed by CIAL. The area which was allotted to the displaced families as part of the rehabilitation package is now known as Airport Colony.

Today, those who had vehemently protested against the airport project and objected to the takeover of their land have turned out to be strong ambassadors of the airport. For many, who have been absorbed by the airport, CIAL is like an ancestral home. It’s been a long and happy relationship, and people know they can turn up at CIAL’s administrative block with invitations for their family occasions like weddings or birthday ceremonies. It is more than a commercial association, and evokes many emotional ties for the people. Bonds beyond business stay longer, grow stronger!
Well begun is half done, it’s said. But in the case of CIAL, it worked in the reverse. What got off to a rather difficult and bumpy start, saw things move favourably once the civil works got rolling. On 15th November 1995, the project received the much awaited clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests as well as sanction from the Aviation Ministry.

Statutory approvals from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India, Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Airport Authority of India (AAI) and Government of Kerala among others, came its way. During a span of five years, while the airport was in its various stages of construction, CIAL had to deal with several ministers from both centres and state, numerous bureaucrats, chairman of AAI and other officials—which were deftly and diplomatically handled by Mr. V.J. Kurian. Thoughtful actions and smart decisions helped CIAL streamline its liaison with everyone involved, and avoid unwanted delays in implementing the project.

THE GREEN SIGNAL

The green signal was received for the rehabilitation colony. The plots were developed and facilitated infrastructure amenities and public utilities for the evictees.
The formative days of CIAL threw in a different challenge each day; a lot of time was spent dealing with issues related to infrastructure development. Being a pioneering attempt, CIAL had no reference projects to emulate; the team was mostly on its own, deriving ways to handle hurdles and overcome pressures. The place where the runway today stands initially had three 110 KV high tension electrical lines running across, erected by Kerala State Electricity Board. This was a potential hazard to airport operations. These needed to be moved at least 10,000 feet away from the end of the runway. Removal of these without causing power outage was a huge challenge. Finally, after several negotiations, and spending huge amount of money, the electrical lines were shifted to a new place thereby clearing the way for the airport runway.

With the conscious decision to go ahead with the International Airport project, hurdles seem to be cleared almost as quickly as they came up. Along with the shifting of the high-voltage electrical lines, Chengal Thode, a small creek and three irrigation canals flowing through the area of the proposed runway needed to be realigned. These canals were the lifelines of local habitat and, quite understandably, the team faced severe opposition from the people.

The CIAL team dealt with this challenge as it did others, giving people the assurance that a canal diversion would not affect their lives, as sufficient alternate irrigation systems would be implemented. Several rounds of discussion were held at different levels to find a solution for the matter. Ultimately, the Chengal Thode was realigned, making way for the runway.
The journey of CIAL was marked with not just conflicts and controversies, but also interesting anecdotes and stories. One such is the tale of the Miracle Tree. Once the land was claimed, the entire stretch of the proposed airside was cleared up for construction of the runway, taxi track and drains, barring a lone mammoth tree. It stood at almost the centre of the stretch demarcated for the runway. Branching out and spreading shade, the tree remained the only rest spot in the otherwise barren area. As the only touch of green and comfort spot for a whole barren field, the tree was maintained to provide shelter and shade. However, with only a single tree standing tall, it soon led to hearsay tales of the tree and its divine powers. While work progressed, the tree watched over and stood witness to every stage of construction. However, soon the lone tree became a topic of discussion, with people spreading tales about the tree’s divine and magical powers. It was elevated to a holy status and people objected to its removal. Workers too fell for the superstitions and feared to cut it. Things worsened as a prominent newspaper brought out a front-page report about the ‘miracle tree’ of Nedumbassery. People from different parts of the state thronged to see the tree and worship it. There were demands that the place be treated as a shrine.

It turned out to be more of an ‘obstacle tree’ for CIAL with the construction of the runway reaching a near-standstill. The Team CIAL had to find a way out of this situation. This time, nature stepped in to help! The famed Kerala monsoon had just begun; heavy downpour was wreaking havoc across the state. On one such stormy night, by using earth moving equipments, the so-called miracle tree was pushed down to the ground. People believed it fell to nature’s fury, expressed their regret and moved on. With the obstacle out of its way, work on the runway continued peacefully. Finally, when the whole process of land acquisition was over, CIAL was in possession of sufficient land. Today, it is this land that gives CIAL wings to expand and diversify to other projects.

While it seemed, at this point in time, there was no obstacle insurmountable for CIAL, from the high-tension line to canal realignment, there came the issue of relocating temples and churches. As is with most things religious in India, this touched a highly sensitive nerve in the community surrounding the proposed airport. However, as came to be the norm in Team CIAL, this was also dealt with skilfully and diplomatically with unfailing confidence. Keezhperiyaram Temple and Pathi Aaradhanalayam were shifted. The trimming of a banyan tree at the Aravikkulam Ayyappan temple and reducing the height of the holy cross at the Little Flower Church at Thrissurakara were testimonials of solidarity expressed by the locals that cut through religious sentiments.

The vast expanse of land earmarked for the international airport included cultivable land, parts of inhabited villages and places of worship. Thus, if any place of worship had to be shifted to a new place, it had to be done with the absolute consent of the people of the region. With the war and perfection that Team CIAL came to be known for, people of the region were convinced and priests of both churches and temples agreed with the relocation plan. Soon after, following several rounds of discussion by Mr. Kurian with religious authorities, both the churches and temples were relocated to nearby areas with the wholehearted support of the people.

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A product is as good as the team that builds it. This was perfect in the case of CIAL. Helmed by an honest, vigorous and highly motivated team, the triumph of CIAL was the result of sheer hard work and the single-minded dedication of the team that turned around the fortunes of CIAL.

CIAL could scale the ladder of success in no time, thanks to the visionary zest and unmatchable leadership displayed by its founder managing director, Mr. V. J. Kurian. While an enthusiastic in-house team worked together all odds, they were ably aided by a group of consultants who toiled relentlessly to translate the dream of an international airport into a reality.

The team: 
- N.U. Bhaskara Rao, who joined as a project manager, led the team through turbulent times and later became the first Airport Director of CIAL.
- Abraham Joseph who joined as a project engineer played an instrumental role in the construction of runways, taxiways and all basic civil activities.
- A.C. K. Nair, executive engineer from National Airport Authority (NAA) joined as depot head to lead the electrical division and has been serving as the airport director since 2004.
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Usual epithets apart, Cochin International Airport could be termed as a definite milestone in the economic and entrepreneurial development map of Kerala. It articulates and underlines the fact that the prescription for success in any endeavour may not necessarily be scripted with the pooling of funds alone, but more out of conviction and commitment to reach the specified goal. Though small in number, ‘Team CIAL’ worked in sync in chasing their dream. Both literally and figuratively, ‘Team CIAL’ worked against all odds, they may not necessarily be scripted with the pooling of funds alone, but more out of conviction and commitment to reach the specified goal. Though small in number, ‘Team CIAL’ worked in sync in chasing their dream. Both literally and figuratively, ‘Team CIAL’ worked against all odds, they toiled relentlessly to translate the dream of an international airport into a reality. 

Leadership displayed by its founder managing director, Mr. V. J. Kurian. While an enthusiastic in-house team worked together all odds, they were ably aided by a group of consultants who toiled relentlessly to translate the dream of an international airport into a reality.
Some of the members of TEAM CIAL on the inaugural day joined as ass. executive engineer now serves as deputy general manager (Electrical), P. Tony who joined as asst. executive engineer now serves as asst. general manager (Electrical), Lenny Sebastian who joined as ass. executive manager now serves as deputy general manager (Finance), P.J. Kachher joined as ass. engineer and now serves as deputy general manager (Cargo), C. Dinesh Kumar joined as ass. engineer and now serves as asst. general manager (Operations), T.I. Bini who joined as ass. engineer now serves as asst. general manager (Civil), Jessy Paul who joined as ass. engineer now serves as senior manager (Civil), Rajendran T joined as ass. engineer now serves as senior manager (Electrical), Gopinathan worked as site engineer, M.K. Abdul Zalam joined as ass. engineer now serves as senior manager (Electrical), P. Mohanan, Saji P.I., Josey E.V., Sreekala P.K., Gary Paul, Indires P.K., Lahia K., Rave M., Joseph S., Shyju Paul, Sajan L.R., Jackson D., P. Mohanan, Ajayakaran S., George D.K., Manoj V.K., Babu I., John T.V., Avarachan T.T., Anilkumar, A.D. Mathew, R.L. Babu, and Rahel Sabore also worked with the land acquisition team.


The professional team was also assisted by the following persons in various capacities.


During 1997, the civil works of Terminals and other crucial structures like the Air Traffic Control Tower began. On 16th January 1997, the foundation stone for the international terminal was laid by M.V. J. Kurian. The terminal building construction contract was awarded to M/s M. R. Builders Private Ltd., Bangalore.

The National Airport Authority (NAA) team, led by N. U. Bhaskara Rao, was passionately involved in all aspects of design and construction. They guided and motivated the KITCO team who were designing an airport terminal for the first time. Bhaskar Rao was responsible for the overall airport planning. A. M. Shabeer and A.C.K. Nair, who were both executive engineers on deputation from NAA, led the civil and electrical engineering teams. Shabeer headed the planning and development for the terminal buildings, fire station and cargo building. He was assisted by T. R. Gopalakrishna and assistant engineers Rau T. I., Jose Paul, Mr. Rajendran T., Sajin Zacharia, T. P. Usha Devi and Kodandakumar. Gangadevi and Shiby formed the support staff at the project site. A.C.K. Nair headed the electrical engineering team and oversaw ground lighting system, the power supply distribution system and electrical works of terminal and auxiliary buildings. The diversion of
EHT lines belonging to the KERB that crossed the runway was a major challenge, and he was ably assisted by C.V. Ajit Kumar, P.J. Tony, Abdul Zalam, Arvind Kumar Pai, Tomy Davis (engineers) and Binu K. K. The highly complicated IT and telecommunication network was safe in the hands of Sunder Raman, while Ganesan handled all the mechanical and HVAC jobs. On completion of the deputation period, Bhaskar Rao, Sunder Raman and Ganesan returned to their parent organization. A.C.K. Nair and A.M. Shabeer joined CIAL in responsible positions, later assuming key roles as ED-Operations and ED-Engineering. A.C.K Nair became Airport Director in 2004.

Under V. J. Kurian’s watchful eye, the airport design and its construction began to unfold. He held frequent sessions with his team to review its progress, never missing words when it came to tough decision making. His main focus was timely completion of the project, and for this, he ensured that work always moved on in an unobstructed manner.

Initially the total project cost was pegged at Rs 288.616 crores. And at the time of inauguration, in 1999, the total constructed cost stood at Rs 303 crores. The construction of the Air Traffic Control tower and technical block was awarded to HSCL constructions. The foundation stone for the ATC tower was laid on 5th June 1997, by Mr. V. J. Kurian. The 52m block had a total area of 5040 sq.m and was constructed at a cost of Rs. 3.93 crores. A utility building with 2047 sq.m was built for Rs. 1.22 crores and the cargo substation was built at a cost of Rs. 28.57 lakhs.
1. P.V. Jayakrishnan and V.J. Kurian at ATC construction site
2. Terminal construction in progress - 1997
3. ATC construction in progress - 1998
5. DGCA officials inspect ATC construction progress. N.U.B. Rao, A.M. Shabeer and Ganesan are also seen - 1998

1. Aerobridge installation - 1999
2. Terminal building - 1997
4. DVOR building - 1999
The very spinal cord of any airport is its runway. And, for Cochin International Airport, it was that spinal cord that came into being even while land acquisition was still underway. It was V. J. Kurian’s sole decision not to wait for the completion of land acquisition to go for the tender for the 3400-metre long runway, which was then, the second longest runway in the country, after New Delhi. CIAL invited tenders for the construction of the runway in 1994. The tenders were opened in February 1995. The contract for constructing the runway was awarded to KMC Constructions Ltd. at a cost of Rs. 71.97 crores. While awarding the contract, CIAL had only less than 20% of the required land for the runway to be constructed.

A fairly daunting task, CIAL attempted both construction of the runway as well as acquisition of the required land simultaneously. The whole area was waterlogged and marshy with the soil remaining slushy throughout the year. To top it all, only a part of the land where the runway was meant to be built remained in CIAL’s fold. Col. V. V. Nambudiri joined the team as chief engineer at this point. The project engineer for the runway construction was Abraham Joseph, who was ably assisted by Kalyanasundaram, K.P. Thankachan and Paul J. Kocheril. Project management consultancy was given to the EMA-Natpac consortium, led by Rajagopal and H.S. Bhatia. CIAL is also indebted to C.V.Nair, chief engineer of AAI, for his invaluable contribution.

The special category of bitumen required for runway construction was to be obtained from Chennai in large quantities. This was in short supply and further transportation related issues delayed the entire procurement process. Therefore, arrangements were made for sourcing the same from Cochin Refineries, which assisted in the timely procurement of the required bitumen for the runway.

Layered Runway Construction

A consolidated layer of good lateritic soil & murram was followed by 93,110 CUM of granular sub base (GSB), over which 59,044 CUM of wet mix macadam (WMM) was laid. After this, 18,414 CUM of dense bituminous macadam (DBM) formed the next layer, 14,971 CUM of semi dense asphaltic concrete (SDAC) was the penultimate layer with 10,483 CUM forming the topmost layer of dense asphaltic concrete (DAC). Creation of taxiway and taxi links were also on similar lines, but a full-length taxi track was cut down to a shorter one, due to financial constraints and immediate operational requirement.

As of today, the 3400-metre long, 45-metre wide, Code 4E Runway with Boeing-747-400 as critical aircraft, stands as one of the most remarkable highlights of CIAL. This apart, it boasts of a full-length Code E parallel taxi track, one rapid exit taxiway and associated taxi links. The other infrastructure for aircraft operations include 5 contact stands, 11 remote stands to cater to both wide and narrow-bodied aircraft, and 4 stands for General Aviation aircraft. CAT-1 Instrument Landing System, CAT-1 Runway and Approach Lighting Systems, Surveillance RADAR ASAR/MSSR, fully equipped Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting services maintaining Category-9 operational readiness, 5 contact stands, 11 remote stands for both narrow- and wide-bodied aircraft, and 4 stands for General Aviation aircraft. The terrain challenges

The land for the proposed runway consisted of huge pits dug for mining of clay for the production of bricks, marshy/dusky areas and paddy fields. Chengal Thode, three different canals and at least three big ponds (including a huge one known as Poonkulam), were hindering the runway construction. The first task was to dry up the entire area by removing slush and levelling the pits. The terrain being weak and of inadequate strength for supporting the runway, CIAL consulted IIT Chennai for necessary soil stabilization works. IIT, after conducting detailed soil analysis, suggested methods for strengthening of sub-soil, which were meticulously followed by CIAL.

In 1999, when the runway was completed, this stood as the second longest in the country after Delhi International Airport. While the construction of the runway without having sufficient land in possession and lack of funds was a huge risk, Mr. Kurian felt this was the only way to lead the project to a point of ‘no return’. As of today, the 45-meter-wide, 45-meter-wide, Code 4E Runway with Boeing-747-400 as critical aircraft, stands as one of the most remarkable highlights of CIAL.
Runway Specification

Runway orientation: 27-09
Runway length: 3400 m
Runway width: 45 m
Runway end safety area: 240 x 90; both sides
Shoulders: 75 m
Taxi way width: 23 m
Taxi Shoulders: 105 m
Base strips: 300 m
Dist. between taxiway and runway CL: 192 m
Peripheral Road: 10.5 Km

Major Contractors involved in project execution

Runway & Apron: KMC Constructions Ltd.
Air Traffic Control Tower: HSCL Constructions Ltd.
Terminal Building: MK Builders Pvt. Ltd.
11 KV Substation: Andrew Yule and Co., Calcutta
Baggage Conveyors: Gannon Dunkerley & Co.
False Ceiling: Gannon Dunkerley & Co.
Fire Alarm & Fire Fighting: Kamal Jain Associates
Interior Furnishing: Payyappally Woods
Aerobridges: Shenzhen CIMC Tianda
Flight Information System: Philips India Ltd.
Tandem Metallic Chairs: Godrej & Boyce Mfg. Co. Ltd.
Trolleys: Posh Decor
Internal Electrification: HPC Electrav Pvt. Ltd.
Escalators: Otis
Car Park: M K Builders Pvt. Ltd.
High Mast Lightning: Rosenthal Austria
Airfield Crash Fire Tenders: Reunion Engineering
X-ray Baggage Inspection System: E & G Astrophysics, USA
A perfect blend of urbanity and tradition, the architecture of Cochin International Airport stands out as a marvel in minimalism and functionality. It is one of the best things to have happened to the airport project. The appeal and impact of the airport terminal is such that, it has come to be identified as one of the architectural landmarks of Kerala, thus drawing significant attention worldwide.

One of the important elements that determines and enhances the architectural uniqueness of any edifice is its natural setting. Kochi airport is no different. The aesthetics of CIAL is defined by its unique Kerala temple architecture with the tone and texture of the terminals’ roof tiles radiating traditional warmth and charm.

The story line of building an airport terminal with traditional Kerala architecture exemplifies Team CIAL’s brilliant brand positioning and pragmatism. A modern airport with best passenger amenities was the dream of the CIAL team. Keeping this in mind, tenders were invited to select consultants for providing the design and master plan. In December 1995, the tender for consultancy services was awarded to M/S. Hellmuth Obata & Kassabuam Inc. (HOK), USA. HOK came up with a high-end but regular design satisfying contemporary architecture for an airport, costing around Rs 400 crore. However, CIAL at that time was working around an estimate of Rs 200 crore. The project, once more, seemed to hit a dead end.

V.J. Kurian’s persistent hunt for a design consultant who would work on shoestring budget landed him at KITCO, a government-owned engineering consultancy organisation, who had no previous experience in designing an airport. Prompted by the confidence that Mr. Kurian had in them, they took up the challenge. N. U. B. Rao was given the task of heading the project execution team and also for dealing with KITCO. After contemplating many models, Kurian and his team turned to Kerala temple architectures for which KITCO assigned Jeff Antony, an architect, to provide a draft design. The design, which was originally a mere outline without a detailed plan, took everyone by surprise. A state-of-the-art, fully functional terminal with all passenger amenities at an affordable cost was finalised for the project. The KITCO team led by Ds-P.A. Ramaswamy, managing director, with M.I. Varghese, executive director; Cyriac Davies, senior consultant; Jose Thomas P, Senior consultant, Jose Thomas P, Senior consultant; Alex T.J, consultant, and G. Shelly, consultant worked in tandem with team CIAL to make the design functional. The design was finally accepted, and CIAL engaged KITCO as the design and project management consultants.

While the low-cost design for the terminal was created out of necessity and affordability, there was severe scepticism when traditional temple architecture was adopted for the terminal buildings. Interestingly, later, the same aspect turned out to be one of the most appreciated features of cochin international airport. Today, unlike most other airports in India, CIAL terminals command exclusivity owing to its distinctive architectural splendour. The charm and aesthetic appeal derived from local flavour has made the terminals as one of the most photographed airports in the country.
By 1999, the Cochin International Airport had acquired a definitive shape. One of the longest runways in the country, with a critical aircraft capacity of a Boeing 747-400 and a 1000m long taxi track, an apron for 3 wide-body and 5 narrow-body aircrafts and CAT I system of lighting was ready for receiving metal birds. The ATC terminal, with its sophisticated communication and navigation equipment and facilities, was also operational. An International terminal of 1.25 lakh sqft area in 2 floors along with 20 check-in counters, escalators and X-ray baggage inspections system as well as the domestic terminal of 1 lakh sqft area with 10 check-in counters and similar amenities were completed.

However, there remained few issues like the objections raised by the Director General of Civil Aviation regarding inadequate visibility while landing, and environmental issues for the location of the DVOR building (Doppler very high frequency omnidirectional radio range— a navigation system for aircraft) in the forest land at Thattekkad. There were also protests from a section of people against the closure of the Navy Airport at Willingdon Island. However, ‘Team CIAL’ stood its ground. Two things kept them going—the convincing stewardship of Mr. V.J. Kurian and the unstinted support provided by the Government of Kerala.

**THE PROJECT GETS READY**

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**THE PROJECT GETS READY**
In the second week of May 1999, an Indian Navy helicopter landed in the airport (airport). On 15th May 1999, a Dornier aircraft, the calibration flight of Airport Authority of India, piloted by Capt. Garg, landed on the runway, which was the first aircraft to touch Cochin International Airport. Ultimately, on the 25th of May 1999, Cochin International Airport was dedicated to the nation by the Hon’ble President of India, Mr. K. R. Narayanan. A host of dignitaries including Mr. Sukhdev Singh Kang, Hon’ble Governor of Kerala, Mr. E. K. Nayanar, Hon’ble Chief Minister of Kerala, and Mr. Ananth Kumar, Hon’ble Union Minister of Civil Aviation and Mr. K. Karunakaran were witness to that historic moment. With that, an altogether new chapter was scripted in the history of not just civil aviation but also on the overall infrastructure development front in our country.
The president's remark

As CIAAL is having a dream run with the coveted status of a charming prince of the Queen of Arabian Sea, the roads that Mr. Kurian has traversed are umpteen. The hurdles that he has surpassed are aplenty. The obstacles that he wiped away are innumerable. And as he touched his dream, brought and presented it before the world, unveiled the light at the end of the tunnel, there was standing ovation even from those cynics who looked at the project in its initial days with loads of apprehension. His efforts were lauded by the enthused crowd who gathered on the inaugural day. During his speech, the President of India congratulated Mr. Kurian for completing the country's first commercial airport under Public Private Participation.
Be it a corporate body or an individual, some firsts in life will always remain etched in their memory. Nothing can match the occasion when one attempts at recollecting those rare, maiden moments in one’s life. And for CIAL, the day when the maiden flight took to the air from its runway, it was the fulfillment of a long cherished dream.

The credit for having operated the first flight to and from Cochin International Airport goes to Air India, the national carrier. Without a single hitch…without a steep turn…Air India’s flight from Dhahran (now Dammam) to Cochin, AI 916 named “Cauvery” landed at the heart of Cochin international airport at 10.55 a.m. on 10th June 1999, with 203 passengers and 16 crew members on board. Seconds after, it docked to international terminal aero bridge smoothly.

AAI’s guidance, navigation services, MET department’s meteorological services, immigration, customs, ground handling, fuelling, security and even the pre-paid taxi services worked in tandem as if, they were doing the same thing for years now.

Among the welcoming dignitaries and exuberant crowd, one man, Mr. V. J. Kurian stood with composure. Six years of toils, agony and hardships might have flashed through his mind. He was a contented man; thanking each and every one, proponents and detractors alike, and most importantly, the God Almighty, for all his achievements.

Out in the premises the festivities started. The surroundings were decked with festoons, flags and buntings. The unusually large crowd of people...
occupied all available places, buildings, roofs, tree tops and even close to taxi way to see the first plane landing in ‘their own airport’. The drizzle and statewide hartal had virtually no impact and did not dampen their enthusiasm. They waved their hands, greeted each other and welcomed the huge metal bird with ineffable joy.

It was an emotional moment for many others too. After a long period of toil, pain, anxiety and hardships, a dream was coming true. Amidst exuberant outbursts from a jubilant crowd, the first passenger Mr. Abdul Raoof, a native of Aluva deplaned. He was received at the aerobridge and presented with flowers, sweets and a gold sovereign. Mr. V.J. Kurian, the architect of the dream project and Mariamma Kurian, his wife and the entire team CIAL welcomed the passengers and crew as if they were their family guests. The day also witnessed the first flight taking off from the airport. Mr. Alex Mathew, a resident of Padamukal near Kochi was the first passenger to check in at 9.45 a.m for the Air India return flight to Dhahran. One of the passengers was Mr. Thomas Karumathy, a native of Keezharpurayam Kara, who lost his house and land for the airport and was happy because he could go to the Gulf from his native place instead of going through Trivandrum.

At 1.40 p.m. the departure of the AI 916 took off from India’s path breaking airports, the Cochin International Airport with 103 passengers onboard. And thus came into being, the first green field airport in the country under a unique Public-Private Partnership (PPP). It had several first-of-its-kind epithets to its credit. Perhaps, it’s the first airport to have come up in the country with a shoe-string budget of approximately Rs 300 crores. And, the project which initially took off with a minimal amount of Rs 20,000, over the years, has turned out to be flourishing centre of aviation and business activity, thereby becoming a role model of sorts.

The landing of Boeing 747 Jumbo on 21st June, 1999 was another landmark. The first time a jumbo was landing in the state. The Air India 747 ‘Mahendra Varman’ on the Mumbai-Kochi-Abu Dhabi-Dubai sector landed at Cochin International Airport at 3.20 pm with 410 passengers and 22 tonne cargo. The jumbo landing had set aside all the apprehensions and speculations about the airport’s capacity. And above all, it paved the way for another journey; a journey to better hopes and bigger dreams...

Discarding the security arrangements made by the officials the common people flocked at the apron to watch the take off of the first flight – Courtesy: Malayala Manorama

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Tumultuous welcome from people of Kerala who celebrated 10th June 1999 as Travel Utsav. At 1.40 pm, the departure of AI916 from Cochin to Dehran marked first commercial take off from India's path breaker airport; Cochin International Airport.
which were proved wrong even in the initial years of operations. During its first phase, the airport company had roped in foreign airlines by offering them flexible tariff packages and it was through several such moves that CIAL could turn around its fortunes from a meagre 17 flights per day during its first year of operations to 31 at the end of five years. The descriptive study truly endorses the inimitable project that, in its own way, re wrote the aviation history in the Indian subcontinent.

The third study was undertaken by Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode (IIM-K) under the caption ‘V. J. Kurian and the CIAL Saga – Kurian’s Success on Cochin International Airport Ltd’ also hails the daring administrative skill and diplomatic dexterity of Mr V. J. Kurian, the founder managing director of CIAL. The study was undertaken by Dr P. Rameshan and Dr S. Jeyavelu. During the course of their study, they stress the fact that the role of Mr. Kurian in the airport project was something extraordinary and also expresses their doubt whether anybody else could have completed the project at all, and, even if it was possible, whether they could have matched, even remotely, the cost and time frames that Mr. Kurian had achieved.

They also reiterate that Mr. V. J. Kurian was full of ideas, often totally novel, and he knew how to implement them with perfect teamwork. The story of CIAL is one of determination, persistence, leadership, financial discipline, and the ability to operationalise ideas and plans under difficult conditions.

All the above studies substantiated the character and contours of Cochin International Airport and its leadership in an objective manner.

THE CASE STUDIES

The inspiring story of Cochin International Airport, over the years, has become a role model of entrepreneurship in India. And, in the process, it has come to be identified as ‘CIAL Model’. Today, CIAL is a subject matter of reference for budding entrepreneurs, students and faculties of business management, and also for motivational speakers and corporate trainers. Thus, it has also paved way for a number of studies on its progress. The studies, carried out by various institutions of international repute, have analytically explored many of its facets in an objective manner. Notably, over a period of past one decade alone, noteworthy studies were carried out by Harvard University, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode. These studies were focused on different aspects concerning the airport.

The Kennedy School of Government under Harvard University in its study titled ‘Cochin International Airport – The Gateway to God’s Own Country’ observed that CIAL was seen as a potential model not just in India, but in other parts of the world as well. It also underscored the fact that the airport has accelerated the tourism potential of Kerala in a big way and vividly narrates the hardships and challenges faced by the airport authorities in raising funds and equity for the project and observed that the company had accomplished nothing less than a miracle, given the many obstacles it faced during the initial years.

Another study that was done by the famed Indian Institute of Management – Ahmedabad (IIMA), and aptly titled as ‘Governance Issues in Airport Development – Learning from Cochin International Airport Ltd’ also peeps into the initial struggles that ‘Team CIAL’ had to confront in the making of the airport. The study was carried out by Biju Varkkey and G. Raghuvaran and, unlike the earlier one, narrates the story of its unique design in raising funds for the project. The elaborate study highlights some of the significant turning points that CIAL could achieve in its march towards becoming an undisputed leader in aviation sector in India.

The perils of land acquisition, the short-dated period of fund raising and the hurdles of rehabilitation were the key areas to which the study had given special attention to. The study vividly narrates the various strategies undertaken by CIAL before scripting its success story and has classified their observations under various captions such as land compensation, financial resource mobilization, revenue model, rehabilitation and resettlement, risk mitigation and staffing. The study also points out the various strategies that CIAL had adopted when the venture was at its crucial stage. At one point the authors expressed their concerns about the financial viability of the airport, which were proved wrong even in the initial years of operation.

During its first phase, the airport company had roped in foreign airlines by offering them flexible tariff packages and it was through several such moves that CIAL could turn around its fortunes from a meagre 17 flights per day during its first year of operations to 31 at the end of five years. The descriptive study truly endorses the inimitable project that, in its own way, re wrote the aviation history in the Indian subcontinent.

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They also reiterate that Mr. V. J. Kurian was full of ideas, often totally novel, and he knew how to implement them with perfect teamwork. The story of CIAL is one of determination, persistence, leadership, financial discipline, and the ability to operationalise ideas and plans under difficult conditions. All the above studies substantiated the character and contours of Cochin International Airport and its leadership in an objective manner.
Cochin International Airport is the first green field airport in the country built with public-private partnership. Planned and constructed from scratch, the airport has been acclaimed for setting a novel concept in infrastructure development. The astounding public participation, relentless support from NRIs and an effective leadership have made CIAL, the company that built and operates the airport, an international brand. The company showcases a sustainable business model which always adheres to people, community and culture. CIAL, the brand name becomes a generic noun now which has been connoted and referred as a model for inclusive growth and innovative infrastructure developments.

Ever since commercial operations started on 10th June 1999, CIAL has grown rapidly, becoming the 4th largest International Airport in India, in terms of international passenger traffic in just four years. It handled 5.4 million passengers in 2013-14 with an average of 1100 aircraft movements per week. The company has been paying dividend unfailingly from 2003-04 and its dividend pay-out has touched 112% in 2013-14. In the same financial year, it posted a record profit (after tax) of Rs.124.42 crores which was up by 11.48% than that of last year. CIAL has now spread out a decade-long, multi-crore management programme through which it targets to achieve revenue of Rs 3,000 crores by 2023. As part of CIAL’s effort to provide world-class service to passengers in a cost effective manner, it has now embarked on an ambitious project of building a new international terminal at a cost of Rs 1000 crores which is expected to be completed by March 2016. The airport is all set to become power neutral by the end of 2015 through the 12 MWp solar power plant, the work of which is progressing. It is envisaged that the project would make the airport’s first in the world to be fully powered by solar energy.

CIAL MODE...
Add-on Services

1. Domestic departure
2. Cafeteria - international departure
3, 4. International departure shops
5. Facilities at the domestic departure lounge
1. Roof top garden - International departure
2. Viewers gallery
3. International arrival
The Connectivity

1. The busy airport
2. Inside ATC Tower
3. ATC Tower

Aircrafts waiting for boarding-view from ATC Tower
Bomb Detection & Disposal Equipments

1. The Remote mobile investigator
2. Threat containment vessel
3. V.J. Kurian inspecting the performance of RMI

Dog Squad
Plane Spotting
1. CIAL Golf Club

2. Shots of golf course
1. CIAL trade fair & convention center
2 & 3. Inside convention centre
1. Cochin International aviation services ltd.
2. Hangar
3. Arial view of CIASL
Panels are being laid out near cargo complex for the 12 MWp Solar PV plant which would make the airport the first in the world fully powered by Solar Energy.
1. Solar panels over the top of CIASL building
2. Solar panels deployed in the field
3. Solar panels over the top of CIASL academy
CIAL Board of Directors - 2014

Oommen Chandy, chairman
K.M. Mani, Minister
M.A. Yusuffali
P.K. Kunhalikkutty, Minister
C.V. Jacob
K. Babu, Minister
E.M. Babu
Bharath Bhushan IAS, Chief Secretary
N.V. George
V.J. Kurian IAS, managing director
Mohammad Ali

Five kilometre road from Athani junction to Airport developed and maintained by CIAL.
1. Lay out of new International terminal
2. V.J. Kurian, MD, CIAL briefs Chief Minister, Ommen Chandy about the features new International Terminal

New International Terminal
CIAL launched a new logo and brand identity on 17th November 2014. The Public Relations and Corporate Communication department spearheaded the initiative to devise and execute a new brand image for the company.

CIAL’s brand identity is derived from the palm leaf – the ola and its utilisation as decoration through the thoranam. The coconut palm is endemic to Kerala and is a symbol of celebration and prosperity, progress and renewal. The palm leaf’s use as decorations is far and wide in the state. The colours and textures reflect the ola in its natural state. The logo depicts it in a designed manner – in a take-off mode representing the field of aviation as well as the ascendance of the community around CIAL.

Nature, Culture and Community being the three tenets around which CIAL is planning to represent itself, the brand identity has been designed to reflect the same. It depicts the rootedness of the organisation in society (community), the celebratory and welcoming nature of its culture (culture) and the green-ness of its aspirations (nature). The activities of the organisation also indicate this, including the generation of its own renewable energy and its aim to become power neutral.

The new logo of Cochin International Airport Limited
The Trailblazing Brand