

Face scans, robot baggage handlers - airports of future

AFP, Singapore

Passengers' baggage is collected by robots, they relax in a luxurious waiting area complete with an indoor garden before getting a face scan and swiftly passing through security and immigration -- this could be the airport of the future.

It's a vision that planners hope will become reality as new technology is rolled out, transforming the exhausting experience of getting stuck in lengthy queues in ageing, overcrowded terminals into something far more pleasant.

The Asia-Pacific has been leading the way but faces fierce competition from the Middle East as major hubs compete to attract the growing number of long-haul travellers who can choose how to route their journey.

The regions "are the two leading pockets of technology growth because they are really competing to be the global hubs for air trans-

portation," Seth Young, director of the Centre for Aviation Studies at Ohio State University, told AFP.

"If I'm going to fly from New York to Bangalore, do I transfer through Abu Dhabi or Dubai or do I transfer through Hong Kong? That's a huge, huge market."

But the changes also represent major challenges that could upend decades-old business models at major airports, with analysts warning operators may face a hit to their revenues to the tune of billions of dollars.

Facial scanning in particular is generating a lot of buzz. Changi in the affluent city-state of Singapore, regarded as among the world's best airports, is set to roll out this biometric technology at a new terminal to open later this year.

Passengers will have their faces scanned when they first check in and at subsequent stages, theoretically allowing them to go through the whole boarding

process quickly without encountering another human. Australia announced in July an investment of Aus\$22.5 million (\$17.5 million) to introduce face recognition technology at all the country's international airports, while Dubai Airport is also trialling it.

Robots are appearing at some major hubs, including at Seoul's Incheon airport, where they carry out tasks including cleaning and carrying luggage, while Changi's new terminal will have robotic cleaners complete with butlers' uniforms. Self-service check-in and printing of boarding passes is already common, with many people printing their passes at home or at airport kiosks, and some hubs are now introducing self-service baggage drop points.

The service, which allows passengers to print and tag their baggage and then send it off on the conveyor belt, is available at airports including Australian hubs,

Hong Kong, London Heathrow and Amsterdam's Schiphol.

Airports are also trying to overhaul their image as dreary places that must be endured in order to get from A to B, to somewhere travellers can enjoy spending time.

Changi is building a new terminal complex called Jewel, a 10-storey development filled with shops and restaurants whose centrepiece will be a 40-metre (130-foot) indoor waterfall surrounded by an indoor garden.

The complex will make the airport look more like a shopping mall than a traditional hub, and is aimed at cashing in on transiting passengers. "They are looking at retail, non-aeronautical profits," said Shukor Yusof, an aviation analyst from Endau Analytics.

But while hubs in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East surge ahead, airports in the United States and Europe are being left behind.

"Europe and the US were the

leading aviation markets for the last 75 to 100 years, and it's very difficult to revolutionise your infrastructure when you are on a foundation that is 75 years old," said Young of the Centre for Aviation Studies.

He added it was also a matter of "political will", as emerging economies see building cutting-edge airports as a way of raising their status globally. Some US and European airports are nevertheless trying to up their game.

New York's ageing airports have long been criticised as old-fashioned, cramped and dirty but JFK, the main international hub serving the city, hopes to shed its dire reputation with a proposed \$10 billion redevelopment.

Amsterdam's Schiphol is aiming to become the world's leading digital airport by 2019, and has been testing hand luggage scanners that allow passengers to keep liquids and laptops in their bags. It is also looking at biometric technology.

France, Germany to propose new tax on internet giants

AFP, Paris

France and Germany plan to issue a new proposal to tax internet giants so that they pay a "fair contribution" in every country where they earn money, French finance minister Bruno Le Maire said Sunday.

"We will unveil a new plan along with our German partners at the next finance ministers' meeting in Tallinn in mid-September" for taxing technology giants including Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon, Le Maire said in a Facebook Live chat. "We propose taking the revenues of these large companies as a reference point, and use this to determine a tax level so that these companies pay what they should to the treasuries of every country where they make money," he said.

He acknowledged, however, that similar proposals had already been made at an EU level as well as for the OECD group of developed economies, without success.

"For now, these talks have stalled," Le Maire said. The internet companies have come under fire in Europe for using complex fiscal arrangements to declare profits in countries with the lowest tax rates, even when they are earned elsewhere in the bloc.

Le Maire's comments come after Google recently escaped a 1.115 billion euro (\$1.33 billion) tax bill sought by the French treasury, after a court ruled that the US company's Irish subsidiary was not taxable in France.

French President Emmanuel Macron promised to get tough on US internet giants during his election campaign, seeing their low tax rates as a source of resentment about globalisation and as unfair for European companies.



Erslaan Ahmed, regional general manager of Habib Bank, Bangladesh, and Morshed Alam Chaklader, CEO of Total Air Services Ltd, an authorised general sales agent of Air Asia, attend an agreement signing ceremony at the former's country office in Dhaka. Debit card holders of the bank will enjoy a special discount on each ticket of Air Asia.

British Airways calls on UK to tackle long airport queues

REUTERS, Edinburgh

British Airways (BA) has called on UK border authorities to address "serious inefficiencies" causing long delays at airport immigration controls ahead of Britain's exit from the European Union.

BA said difficulties processing passengers after a new electronic gate system was introduced last year were causing long waits in queues, sometimes of more than an hour. During the busy holiday period this was made more frustrating by immigration gates being closed, the airline said.

"With Brexit just round the corner, more than ever, the UK needs to show

that it's an easy place to travel to," it said in a statement. BA said it supported the interior ministry's efforts to step up security, after a series of militant attacks earlier this year, but that more needed to be done.

"It is a dreadful welcome for visitors to the UK to be faced with a packed immigration hall and the prospect of a frustrating delay to the start of their holiday or business trip. It adds insult to injury when you're stuck in a queue but can see numerous gates which just aren't being used."

An interior ministry spokesman quoted by The Telegraph and other media accused BA of exaggerating.

"This significantly misrepresents

the experience of the vast majority of passengers arriving at Heathrow this summer," he was quoted as saying.

"More than 99 percent of British and European passengers arriving at Heathrow are dealt with within 25 minutes. For passengers from outside the European Economic Area, 87 percent of passengers have been dealt with within 45 minutes," he said.

Earlier this month, BA, owned by International Consolidated Airlines said Britain's airports could see passenger numbers plunge by as much as 40 percent unless the government strikes an interim aviation deal with the EU by October 2018, according to an industry report seen by Reuters.

ADP spending off to a decent start

FROM PAGE B1

For instance, in the first month of fiscal 2013-14, ADP spending was Tk 1,239 crore, which came down to Tk 1,238 crore in fiscal 2014-15 and Tk 714 crore the year after.

From that perspective, the ADP implementation snapped out of a declining trend this fiscal year.

Of the total outlay, the government's own resource was Tk 95,515 crore, about 0.30 percent of which was spent in the first month. A year earlier, 0.11 percent of the government's own fund was used.

On the other hand, the project aid implementation rate stood at 0.93 percent, which was 1.49 percent during the same period a year earlier. Some 15 large ministries and divisions got 80.83 percent of the allocation this year.

But only four of them -- road transport division, energy and mineral resources division, power division and agriculture ministry -- spent higher than the average.

The road transport division spent 2.18 percent of its total allocation for the year,

energy and mineral resources division 2.76 percent, power division 1.07 percent and agriculture ministry 0.91 percent.

The local government division spent 0.22 percent, primary and mass education ministry 0.15 percent, bridges division 0.12 percent, railways ministry 0.10 percent, shipping ministry 0.34 percent, and information and communication technology division 0.08 percent.

Besides, a number of the important ministries that got high allocations showed low performance.

The health ministry spent only Tk 36 lakh, secondary and higher education division Tk 6 lakh, and the housing and public works ministry Tk 20 lakh.

Among the 55 ministries and divisions, 22 could not spend a single taka in the first month of fiscal 2017-18.

The science and technology ministry, which has the huge Rooppur nuclear power project in implementation, could not spend a single taka in July. The water resources ministry's performance was similarly dismal.

Fiscal stimulus in downturns is safe even when debt is high: researchers

REUTERS, San Francisco

Government spending in a recession can boost a country's economy without permanently bloating its public debt, even if the debt is already quite large, researchers told an influential group of central bankers in Jackson, Wyoming, on Saturday.

"Expansionary fiscal policies adopted when the economy is weak may not only stimulate output but also reduce debt-to-GDP ratios," University of California, Berkeley, professors Alan Auerbach and Yuriy Gorodnichenko said in a paper presented at the Kansas City Federal Reserve's annual economic symposium.

Eid economy heating up

FROM PAGE B1

"This plays a vital role in the growth of the livestock sector," Hussain said. Animal farming accounts for 1.60 percent of Bangladesh's nearly \$250 billion economy. The sub-sector of agriculture grew 3.32 percent last fiscal year, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

"Eid has a significant impact on poverty reduction because of redistribution of income. We also see increased flow of cash transfer from urban to rural areas during this festival as farmers get money from selling reared cattle."

However, farmers do not get the full benefit because of extortion on the way.

"It reduces the redistributive gain," Hussain said, while calling for improving governance and reducing the engagement of middlemen in the supply chain.

Cattle traders, hide merchants and tanners said the number of animals slaughtered during Eid-ul-Azha is increasing every year thanks to a rise in purchasing power brought on by more than 6 percent annual economic growth.

Delwar Hossain, chairman of the Bangladesh Hide & Skin Merchants Association, is expecting a spike in the number of cattle slaughter this year from the last.

One of the reasons being the national

election that is scheduled for 2018: potential candidates may spend more in their constituency to impress their electorate by feeding them well this festival.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the number of cattle slaughtering will rise this year in line with the increase in purchasing capacity.

Md Shaheen Ahamed, chairman of the Bangladesh Tanners Association, said the number of cattle slaughtering will decline this year because of a fall in the purchasing capacity of many people because of the ongoing flood up north.

This sentiment is reflected in the customer turnout so far in the Gabtoli cattle market, the biggest in the country. "It is not encouraging," said Mohammad Amzad Hossain, general secretary of Gabtoli (Dhaka) Cattle Traders Cooperative Ltd.

It is the same scenario over at Kawran Bazar, where Yusuf managed to sell only two machetes until yesterday evening, which is far below his expectation.

He too is afraid that flood might affect his selling prospects this year.

"I am still hopeful. The main sales take place in the last two days before Eid."

Cleaner production can cut energy use by 25pc: DCCI

FROM PAGE B1

The "resource efficient cleaner production (RECP)" initiative is a proven approach in many Asian and European countries in achieving industrial efficiency, said Hakim.

RECP is a strategy in tune with sustainable development for processes, products and services to increase efficiency and reduce both costs and risks to humans and the environment.

It makes use of modern machinery and tools to make the optimum and productive use of natural resources, prevent generation of waste and emission, improve management and use of chemicals, and

minimise risks.

Metabuild Bangladesh Project Manager ASM Asaduzzaman Patwary said energy security and efficiency were critical challenges for Bangladesh.

Industrialisation in Bangladesh cannot progress and facilitate the expected economic growth without uninterrupted energy supply in the future, he said.

Considering its limited energy resource, Bangladesh can adopt the RECP initiative, which is a holistic approach to enhance environmental performance of industrial enterprises by reducing wastages of resources at the source, he added.

Govt to bring all industries under central welfare fund: Hasina

FROM PAGE B1

She urged the apex bodies of the garment and knitting sectors to complete the work on preparing a database of the workers to ensure easy disbursement of financial support from the fund.

State Minister for Labour and Employment Md Mojibul Haque Chunnun and BGMEA President Siddiqur Rahman also spoke.

President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Mohiuddin Ahmed, PM's Principal Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser and acting secretary of the Labour Ministry Afroza Khan were also present.

The prime minister hoped that the owners of the garment industries would continue their stride for the welfare of the workers and give them a share of their annual profits as the workers are the main instrument to keep their industries operational.



Ilias Kanchan, brand ambassador of Walton, opens Walton's exclusive distributor showroom, Ahsania Traders, at Launch Ghat in Patuakhali on Saturday.

Trump renews threat to scrap Nafta going into next round of talks

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump renewed his threat to scrap Nafta and ripped on trading partners Canada and Mexico in a tweet early on Sunday, days before the three countries were scheduled to hold a second round of negotiations on rewriting the 23-year-old agreement.

"We are in the Nafta (worst trade deal ever made) renegotiation process with Mexico & Canada. Both being very difficult, may have to terminate?" he wrote.

Trump, a Republican, promised during his campaign to overhaul or eliminate the North American Free Trade Agreement, which he cast as killing jobs and exacerbating the U.S. deficit, and to adopt a more protectionist stance for trade generally.

The first five-day round of talks between the three countries concluded last Sunday, with all sides committing to follow an accelerated process in revamping the agreement, which was originally signed by former President Bill Clinton, a Democrat whose wife, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, ran against Trump in the 2016 election.

Going into the five-day round of negotiations starting Sept. 1 in Mexico, Trump has kept the heat turned up.

Both Mexico and Canada have dismissed his musing in a Tuesday speech that "we'll end up probably terminating NAFTA at some point" as a negotiating tactic.

HSBC arranges \$46m for Viyellatex

FROM PAGE B1

"It also demonstrates the strength of HSBC's international network and global banking capabilities," he said.

Hasanat said Viyellatex Group was proud to receive this international financing package from HSBC.

The spinning mill has already been constructed and commercial production will begin after Eid-ul-Azha, he said.

Containing 92,000 spindles, the spinning mill will produce 50 tonnes of yarn per day to meet the growing demand in the local market, said Hasanat.

"This sort of structured financing will support the country's garment exporters to undertake quality capex (capital expenditure) decisions as well as achieve great mileage in international debt market," he added.

Intraco to set up 30MW solar power plant

FROM PAGE B1

State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid, Secretary to the Power Division Ahmad Kaikaus and BPDB Chairman Khaled Mahmood were present.

Intraco Group has businesses involving power, energy, hotel and tourism, properties, insurance, amusement park, oil tanker and telecommunication.