

HSIA T3 opening after one year, unusual construction cost increase under scrutiny

- A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : The long-awaited Third Terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital will be opening after a year. However, the much-needed terminal's excessive construction cost of BDT 25,000 crore, which has unusually gone way above the initially estimated expense of BDT 7000 crore, will surely be investigated in the coming days.

AF Hassan Arif, Adviser to Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, said this while addressing a roundtable discussion on "HSIA's 3rd Terminal: Opportunities and Challenges", organized by Aviation and Tourism Journalists Forum of Bangladesh (ATJFB) at Le Meridien Dhaka on December 2.

Speaking as the chief guest, the Adviser informed, the iconic Third Terminal of Dhaka Airport is not meant to be a sightseeing spot, rather a

functional infrastructure that will effectively fulfill the much-anticipated demands of the passengers as well as the stakeholders.

For this purpose, the Adviser claimed, he has urged the Civil Aviation and Airport authorities as well as the ground handler Biman Bangladesh Airlines to carry out proper research and development accordingly.

Also, in an effort to expedite cargo operations that currently suffer due to continuous scanner breakdowns at the existing terminal, AF Hassan Arif mentioned, discussions are underway with the Chief Adviser with the aim of solving this long-pending issue.

On the other hand, to stay true to the goal of ensuring international standard facilities and services at the new terminal, a Japanese company will be operating the Third Terminal for the next 15 years, stressed Md Monjur Kabir Bhuiyan, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), speaking as the special guest.

The Japanese company will have to meet the KPIs set by CAAB. Otherwise, the latter will take necessary action, he further claimed.

Moreover, due to constant scanner breakdowns, inadequate facilities at HSIA's cargo village, high airport charges, and negligence of sole ground handler Biman towards its said duties, neighbouring countries are taking over our fair share of the air cargo transport market, claimed the participants at the roundtable discussion.

To cover the limitations of the existing cargo terminal of HSIA, the Civil Aviation Authority is preparing other airports of the country accordingly, according to its Chairman.

To this effect, from January 1, 2025, Sylhet Airport will be fully ready to transport air cargo. Preparations for this purpose are complete, with two EDS machines in place at the airport, he further expressed.



Stakeholders of aviation and travel industry at roundtable discussion

Works to make Chattogram Airport export ready will also begin soon, claimed CAAB Chairman.

Complaints against ground handler Biman

According to the issues raised by the participants at the roundtable discussion, it seemed that doubts on ensuring proper service at the Third Terminal still remained, as Biman Bangladesh Airlines again has been given the sole responsibility of ground handling even after failing in the role till now at the existing terminal.

Foreign airline representatives at the discussion raised several complaints about Biman's ground handling services. It is the responsibility of ground handler to provide adequate staffing for check-

in counters, baggage services, cargo handling, and other related tasks at the airport. However, Biman faces difficulties providing enough staff due to a shortage of workers.

As a result, several foreign airlines have been forced to hire their own ground handling staff at additional cost. For instance, Air Arabia has recruited over 30 staff members at the airport, while Indigo and Singapore Airlines have hired 25 and 60 personnel, respectively.

Meaning, Biman is failing to deliver timely ground handling services despite collecting charges, claimed foreign airline representatives.

Delays in baggage delivery have resulted in flight delays, while passengers have expressed frustration with delayed baggage handling, tarnishing the reputation of various airlines, they added.

Therefore, the participants urged to end the long-existing ground handling monopoly of Biman, and appoint a number of international and national ground handlers to make the service competitive at the coming terminal.

About the matter, Adviser Hassan Arif explained, Biman has been given the responsibility for two years initially. Meaning, there is room to change the ground handling agent if the airline fails to prove its capacity.

Mofizur Rahman, Managing Director of NOVOAIR, and Secretary General of Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh, presented the keynote paper, while Tanzim Anwar, President of Aviation and Tourism Journalists Forum of Bangladesh chaired the event.

Abu Sayeed Mehboob Khan, Member-Operations and Planning, CAAB, and Hayat-Ud-Dowla Khan, Director-Customer Service, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, delivered two presentations-one on Third Terminal of HSIA and another on Biman's ground handling capacity for the Third Terminal respectively.

Among others, Saiful Hoque, Country Manager, Sabre Bangladesh; Muhammed Kamrul Islam, Executive Director of HSIA; Kazi Wahidul Alam, Editor of The Bangladesh Monitor; Imran Asif, CEO of Air Astra; Dilara Hossain, Chairman of AOC; Suhed Ahmed Chowdhury, Cargo Manager, Qatar Airways; and Constantinos Gavriel, General Manager of

Le Meridien Dhaka also spoke on the occasion.