

## **Biman in Italian skies after nine years**

- A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : Biman Bangladesh Airlines resumed direct flight operations on Dhaka-Rome route early hours on March 27 after nine years in an effort to serve a large number of Bangladeshi expatriates residing in Italy.

The maiden flight on Dhaka-Rome route departed Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital at 3:30 am with 177 Economy Class and 23 Business Class passengers.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Faruk Khan inaugurated the maiden flight virtually through a ceremony held at Dhaka airport.

Speaking on the occasion, Faruk Khan, Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, said, Biman has undertaken a plan to expand its routes in line with the government's vision to turn Bangladesh into an aviation hub.

He mentioned, Biman's route expansion effort to different cities in Europe is a reflection of the government's commitment to the expatriate

Bangladeshis.

Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Civil Aviation and Tourism Sajjadul Hasan also spoke on the occasion as the guest of honour while Biman's Managing Director and CEO Shafiul Azim chaired the event.

Addressing the event, Shafiul Azim, Managing Director and CEO, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, said, the decision of resuming Dhaka-Rome flights was thoroughly assessed from a commercial standpoint as Bangladeshi expatriates in Rome have increased sevenfold since 2009.

"As per our market analysis, the Dhaka-Rome route will be as popular as our London, Toronto and Narita routes," said the Managing Director and CEO.

Biman's Chief also informed, Biman has inked an interline agreement with ITA Airways, the flag carrier of Italy, to offer passengers onward connections beyond Rome to Italy's Venice, Genoa, Milan and many other destinations.

Azim further expressed, the direct flight from Rome to Dhaka will not only serve passengers on Dhaka-Rome route but also passengers from other cities like Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Singapore.

The airline is also planning to use Rome as a stopover to Biman's Dhaka-Toronto flight, informed Azim, as currently the state-owned carrier is having to use Istanbul for refueling purposes.

"As we have set up our station in Rome, it will be cost effective if we use Rome instead of Istanbul for refueling our Toronto flight," Azim claimed.



Parliamentary Standing Committee on Civil Aviation and Tourism Chairman Sajjadul Hasan, MoCAT Secretary Md Mokammel Hossain, Biman Board Chairman Mostafa Kamal Uddin, Biman MD and CEO Shafiul Azim, CAAB Chairman M Mafidur Rahman and Italian Ambassador to BD Antonio Alessandro seen, among others, cutting a ribbon to inaugurate the maiden flight on Dhaka-Rome route at HSIA on March 27

Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary M Mokammel Hossain, Biman's Board of Directors Chairman Mostafa Kamal Uddin, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh Chairman AVM M Mafidur Rahman and Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh Antonio Alessandro also addressed the ceremony as special guests.

Biman is currently operating a brand new state-of-the-art Boeing 787 Dreamliner on Dhaka-Rome route with 247 Economy Class and 24 Business Class passenger capacity.

Earlier, Biman began operating flights from Dhaka to Rome on April 2, 1981, however, stopped on April 6, 2015.

Warm welcome by expatriates in Italy

Bangladeshi Ambassador to Italy Md Monirul Islam welcomed the passengers of the maiden flight on Dhaka-Rome route through a ribbon and cake cutting ceremony at Rome Airport on March 27.

Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Civil Aviation and Tourism Sajjadul Hasan, Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Md Mokammel Hossain, Aeroporti di Roma Chief Aviation Officer Ivan Bassato, Distal Italia (GSA of Biman in Italy) VP Commercial Francesco Veneziano and Biman's Managing Director and CEO Shafiul Azim spoke on the occasion.

The speakers expressed their hopes to carry many Bangladeshi expatriates, business travellers and tourists to Bangladesh from Rome and other European parts through this flight.

Around 250,000 Bangladeshis live in Italy. Coupled with the non-resident Bangladeshis living in other European destinations, Biman wishes to tap this huge NRB passenger segment with its first direct flight between Bangladesh and Europe, following Brexit.

Even though, NRBs are the main focus among the passenger segments Biman wants to tap, the airline wishes to promote Bangladesh among Italians too as a must-visit destination.

The Bangladeshi high delegation further informed that currently there is no direct flight between Rome and Bangkok. Thus, Biman seeks to carry passengers from Rome to Bangkok via Dhaka as well.

The maiden return flight left Rome Airport at 10:15 am on March 27 with 247 Economy Class and seven Business Class passengers.

Huge queue of passenger was witnessed checking-in to fly to Dhaka on Biman since early morning at Rome Airport. Bangladeshi expatriates seemed excited to fly directly back home on the flag carrier. They

rejoiced the resumption of direct flights on the route and thanked Biman authority for the initiative.