

International air transport business collapses for local airlines

- Ahmed Tanvir Shams

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Dhaka : Due to almost zero visa issuance by India, Thailand, Dubai, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, for Bangladeshis, at present, international air transport business has collapsed, and local airlines are reeling the most from the impact, claimed industry officials.

According to them, tourist, medical, and work visas to these particular destinations as well as umrah visa to Saudi Arabia-all of which have always been major destination markets for Bangladeshi travelers-are currently either closed or limited for us.

Even Malaysia and Singapore are deporting travelers with Bangladeshi passports, said airline representatives.

However, travel slump to the Middle East has come as the biggest strike to the airlines, with labor and umrah movement completely halted.

Over this crisis, 40 per cent of the flights to the Middle East went empty till Eid al-Fitr, and currently the returning flights are coming vacant post-Eid al-Fitr, resulting in a 30 per cent drop in air traffic to the Middle East, sighed industry stakeholders.

During Ramadan-the biggest season for umrah-the country's air transport industry lost substantial amount of business, when the government of Saudi Arabia announced the umrah pilgrim quota for Bangladesh was full, leading to a halt in pilgrimage.

Due to no air traffic movement, plenty of flight seats are available currently in the inventories of the airlines, particularly to the Middle East, which has resulted in a drop in airfare, claimed airline officials.

Furthermore, the airline representatives informed, this year there is little to no rush of expatriate workers or non-residential Bangladeshis visiting Bangladesh.

For instance, during Eid al-Fitr, usually, the industry welcomes plenty of returnee traffic from Kuala Lumpur to Dhaka. However, this year, it did not.

Likewise, in every year, the airlines enjoy full passenger load factors in returning flights to Dhaka from all destinations they operate in during Eid. However, this year, the scenario had gone through a complete flip.

Same goes for returnee traffic from Singapore, there was none, said industry officials.

Stakeholders noted, travelers are refraining from visiting Bangladesh-a possible reason could be the current risky law and order situation in the country-or perhaps, travelers fear they would be stuck in Bangladesh, if travel bans are enforced by the governments of the respective countries they would come from before they even get the opportunity to return.

During such a big season like Eid al-Fitr, airlines usually introduce additional frequencies to cater to the increased demand. However, this year, there was no additional flights, owing to the grave travel slump, explained airline officials.

In such dire straits, airlines are suffering to meet operational costs, as little to no movement has resulted in a massive drop in airfare over empty seats in the inventory, sighed airline officials.

The future is gimmer, according to the stakeholders. If the situation prevails, they believe there will not be any alternative to reducing flights, till they actually cease operations and shutdown, like nine other airlines before them, while the market is taken over by regional international airlines.