

## HSIA to get second runway

A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) has initiated steps to improve efficiency and dependability of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA)-the gateway to Bangladesh -by building another runway, among others.

This was disclosed by Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, Chairman of CAAB while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor, at his office recently.

The CAAB is carrying out the expansion works of HSIA in two phases. The first phase includes the establishment of the Third Terminal with 12 boarding bridges. In the second phase, additional 14 boarding bridges will be established, said the CAAB Chairman.

At the same time, the existing first and second terminal will go through renovation works. "All the three terminals together will allow HSIA to handle over 20 million passengers" - the first and second terminal eight million, while the third terminal 12 million, AVM Mafidur Rahman said.

To prevent any type of dislocation at the time of renovation of first and second terminals, CAAB is currently in negotiation with JAICA to complete the structure of the 14 boarding bridges at third terminal earlier, CAAB Chairman informed.

**Parallel runway**

The second phase of expansion at HSIA further includes establishing a new runway, CAAB Chairman said.

Since it is difficult to operate with only one runway, and there is no scope to build a

full second runway, CAAB has decided to construct a parallel runway in between the existing runway and the taxi way. However, the new one will be a dependent runway meaning multiple aircraft cannot take off or land at the same time. One can take off while the other lands.

"Once done, if one runway gets blocked for some unforeseen reason, another can remain open. So, operations won't completely grind to a halt," Rahman said.

But work for the new runway is not going to start within couple of years from now. The consultancy and planning for the project will begin after completion of the third terminal and renovation of the first and second terminals, AVM Mafidur Rahman informed.

No price hike

The CAAB chief shared one interesting and unusual information that the third terminal project could be one of the few projects where the cost instead of increasing with time, it will decrease.

The chairman mentioned they were able to save BDT 700 crore so far. This was a result of not availing the SSP screw-pile technology which failed in the metro rail project, allowing CAAB to have the confidence to start doing the additional works right now without any additional money.

Importance of air

connectivity

AVM Mafidur Rahman disclosed, all the development plan is aimed at enhancing air connectivity with Bangladesh.

It may be noted that air transport has been understood as a competitive advantage for many countries becoming essential for the enhancement of their socio-economic development.

The impacts of air transport on the economy arise both directly, via activity in the aviation sector; and indirectly, via increased spending and wider economic benefits associated with improved access to resources, markets, technology and economic mass.

Economic activity, in turn, supports and generates demand for air transport. Despite its potential importance, the reciprocal nature of the causal relationship between air transport and economic performance has remained somewhat understudied.

The purpose

The primary purpose of developing air connectivity between the East and the West, is to make Bangladesh a regional air hub by taking advantage of country's geographical location, he said and added that the location is ideal and air connectivity will be used mainly for expansion of economic activities.

In the coming years, AVM Mafidur Rahman said, the civil aviation in the country, will go through massive development as desired by the government. The developments will include increase in the number of international airports and upgradation and expansion works of all other airports in the country.

Talking about development of aviation facilities of the country, AVM Mafidur Rahman said, one major initiative is to increase the number of international airports in the country. The country already has three international airports - in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet.

Now Cox's Bazar airport is also underway to become international. Once done, there will be many direct international flights to Cox's Bazar and that will greatly help decentralisation of international air traffic, the CAAB Chief said. The full operation of three other international airports- Chattogram, Sylhet and Cox's Bazar-will help minimise the load of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA), the gateway to

Bangladesh by air. Currently the load on HSIA is way heavier than two others.

#### Upgradation of airports

**Chattogram Airport:** In line with development of air connectivity, Chattogram Shah Amanat International Airport, the second largest in the country, is also being extended - for handling more passenger and cargo. The expansion work was scheduled to start earlier, but due to the pandemic, the work got delayed.

**Sylhet Airport:** CAAB has already completed the runway expansion work of Osmani International Airport in Sylhet. The third largest international airport of the country can now receive all types of aircraft including B-777 and B-787. Refueling facility of aircraft has also been established. Now terminal expansion work is underway and expected to complete by 2023.

**Cox's Bazar Airport:** To elevate Cox's Bazar airport into fourth international airport, runway extension to desired length is going to start soon. This will allow any aircraft from B-777 to B-787 to land and take off from the airport.

The purpose of turning Cox's Bazar airport into an international one is to support development of tourism and other economic activities in the region.

"When we will have further developments in infrastructure and facilities such as an international airport, the major load of tourism movement will head to the South," mentioned Rahman, adding, "this is how we have prepared the aviation master plan and are acting accordingly".

**Saidpur Airport:** Saidpur Airport, on the other hand, is being developed to improve air connectivity between Bangladesh and India, Nepal and Bhutan.

Saidpur airport runway will also have a runway expansion of 10,000 feet allowing any type of aircraft to land and take off, the Chairman mentioned.

Since land communication is improving, air connectivity will further bolster the trade between Bangladesh and these countries. As a result, the northern area of the country will witness further economic expansion, CAAB chief said.

**Other airports:** Other airports of the country are also getting a face lift and facilities for efficient handling of passenger and air cargo services. These airports are expected to provide feeder services when regional air hub is established.

#### Night operation at airports

Earlier, the State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism announced that Cox's Bazar airport will be operating 24/7 from February and soon the other airports will follow. For that purpose, the Chairman said that CAAB is bringing Instrument Landing System (ILS) to Cox's Bazar Airport.

ILS is a system that works by sending radio waves downrange from the runway end, with aircraft that intercept it using the radio waves to guide them onto the runway. It is required to operate night operations at airports, because otherwise in poor visibility, it will be risky to land an aircraft at night, claimed Rahman.

Saidpur, Jashore and Rajshahi Airports will also receive ILS for night operations, he added.

#### No monopoly in ground handling

Aircraft ground handling defines the servicing of an aircraft while it is on the ground and parked at a terminal gate of an airport. Ground-handling jobs cover functions like passenger check in, aircraft handling, fueling, cleaning, mooring, baggage handling and boarding/deplaning passengers.

Unfortunately, the quality of ground services at all airports including Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA)-the main gateway to Bangladesh by air-and two other international airports of the country continue to be poor. The situation is causing numerous problems and sufferings to all users-airlines and passengers alike.

This far, Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited - the national flag carrier - enjoyed monopoly in respect of providing ground handling services. But Biman failed to extend satisfactory services.

So, CAAB has decided to make another significant change in the country's aviation sector-the ground handling at airports. From now on, CAAB will appoint ground handlers for the third terminal at HSIA as well as the newly expanded airports through open tender.

Biman will no longer be the sole bidder since they failed to give satisfactory results, said Rahman. So, the appointment for ground handling from now will be based on competitive offer in an effort to ensure the best service to the passengers, the CAAB Chairman informed.

Dubai based dnata is already preparing a proposal for ground handling at Chattogram Airport, he disclosed.

#### Supporting infrastructure

AVM Mafidur Rahman underscored the importance of building supporting infrastructure like land connectivity and economic infrastructure, along with airport developments. Airport alone would not be able to provide convenience to the passengers if further road connectivity does not get better, he commented.

"Today we cannot seem to go ahead with Khan Jahan Ali Airport in Bagerhat because there is not much economic activity taking place over there. So, companies which invest currently do not find it commercially viable," he said.

So, Rahman put emphasis on two key requirements - economic drive and connectivity. "Both complement each other. The economic drive pushes toward connectivity development while the latter also strengthens the former," he said.

#### Future prospects

The chief of country's civil aviation foresees good future prospect of civil aviation. He believes that "once Bangladesh gets the vaccines, the country and the aviation sector will rapidly recover".

"Within two years, we will go back to our previous state," AVM Rahman said and added "Not only that, in fact air-based activities will further increase".

He informed that British Airways and carriers from Iran and Iraq have already applied to CAAB to operate flights to and from Bangladesh and expressed the hope many more airlines will come in the coming days.