

Monitor recognises CAAB, airlines

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Md Mahbub Ali, State Minister, MoCAT delivering his speech



M Mafidur Rahman, Chairman, CAAB speaking at the event



M Mafidur Rahman, Chairman, CAAB



Md Abdullah Al Mamun, MD of US-Bangla



Mofizur Rahman, MD of NOVOAIR



Bakshi Mohd Tayab, Commercial Manager, Qatar Airways



Mohamed Alhammedi, Country Manager BD, Emirates



Mobin Rashid, Country Manager BD, Air Arabia



Dhaka: The global airlines and aviation are one of the worst affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. With countries closing their borders and shutting down airports, airlines and aviation suffered the most.

The situation resulted in thousands of travellers stranded in different parts of the world. These people needed to be brought back home. Some essential goods including medicines also needed to be shipped.

Braving highly negative situation, some airlines-both domestic and foreign-as well as aviation authorities came forward with services and policies to meet the emergency needs of the distressed people.

The Bangladesh Monitor decided to recognise these "Friend in Need" for services rendered to ease sufferings of distressed people.

At a function on February 24 at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, six airlines, including both local and foreign, have been honoured with "Friend in Need" recognition for their firm commitment to Bangladesh and its people during the most challenging period of the devastating coronavirus pandemic.

Welcoming the guests, Kazi Wahidul Alam, Editor of The Bangladesh Monitor said, "Passenger air transportation came to almost complete halt following the outbreak of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, causing an unprecedented suffering to hundreds of thousands of stranded air travellers in Bangladesh and across the globe. But following the government's decision to open Bangladesh's sky, a handful

of airlines demonstrated their firm commitment to Bangladesh and its people, by resuming their passenger services to and from the country within the shortest possible time."

"Now it is our turn to express our thanks and gratitude to those airlines who promptly responded to the need of the time and stood beside Bangla-desh and its people," he added.

Wahidul Alam said that following the outbreak of the unprecedented pandemic, the Bangladesh government temporarily embargoed on operations of all scheduled domestic and international flights on March 22, 2020.

However, after thorough review of the situation, the government within the shortest possible time decided to open the sky, paving the way for the resumption of passenger air transportation.

He said presently over 25 local and foreign airlines are operating regular flights to and from Bangladesh while few others are waiting for the necessary permission from the concerned authorities.

The friends in need

The six airlines which received the recognition are Biman Bangladesh Airlines, NOVOAIR, US-Bangla Airlines, Qatar Airways, Emirates and Air Arabia.

The Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry as well as the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh were also recognised for their prudent and prompt initiatives in guiding the Bangladesh aviation sector sail through the struggle that followed the pandemic to a new normal era.

Md Mahbub Ali, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism was present on the occasion as the Chief Guest and handed over the Crest of Honour to the airlines and CAAB.

Speaking on the occasion, Mahbub Ali said that the country's civil aviation could not have recovered this far following the pandemic without the clear vision of the ministry. The commitment towards the civil aviation's progress stayed intact even amid such global adversity. The ministry continued to facilitate civil aviation and tourism of the country, he added.

As a result, Mahbub said, several developments have been taking place across all airports and tourism sectors of the country to further combat the corona crisis and come out better than ever before. And by supporting CAAB in every prompt action, the ministry was able to keep aviation industry afloat and start recovering from the corona crisis. To ease the worries of the airline stakeholders, the government facilitated them with waivers of aeronautical charges till September last year.

CAAB Chairman

Air Vice Marshall M Mafidur Rahman, Chairman of CAAB expressed he was proud that his organisation was successful to lead the industry sail through the corona crisis with the support of the ministry. Bangladesh was able to handle the health crisis that followed the pandemic excellently and thus the country was able to reopen civil aviation way before many others in the world.

He said that the Civil Aviation Authority played a vital role in proper time. CAAB foresaw such a crisis and prepared the airports and airline officials prior to the outbreak. They facilitated the airlines and the passengers to survive through this difficult time. Lastly, they ensured that every bit of health guideline is maintained by all concerned at all airports and inflight.

MD of US-Bangla

Md Abdullah Al Mamun, Managing Director of US-Bangla, speaking on the occasion, said, "Without the support from the ministry and CAAB, we could not have come so far. With their help, during the pandemic, we brought 7000 Bangladeshis

back home who were stranded in different parts of the world, from Paris to Vietnam."

"We lost two officials during this crisis. And, thus, we were the first to establish a private lab for corona testing."

"We also made our flight to Guangzhou dedicated. With every cargo flight, US-Bangla could have earned USD 10,000-15,000. But we did not. We transported medical equipment for completely free."

"We flew over 100 charter flights. We gave complimentary passage to about 1,000 passengers. We even carried several dead bodies back to the country for free so that their families can bury them."

Addressing MoCAT, Mamun suggested, "If you want to develop the country's economy, you must develop aviation. There's no alternative to that. Hence, you must lend your hand of support to the private airlines of the country. Today the value of the market stands at BDT 20 thousand crore and foreign carriers are taking lion share of that away from us. US-Bangla and Regent are the only two local airlines that operate to international destinations. With it, we bring BDT 3000 crore foreign remittance every year to the country and provide employment opportunities to thousands. And yet, we receive so little support from the government."

Mamun informed, "US-Bangla received BDT 1 crore stimulus from China's government. It even received stimulus from Singapore's Government. But our own country only provided us with BDT 50 lac as stimulus. I know the government did their best to support us. But we need a bit more support."

Demanding hanger for private airlines, Mamun said, "All of the private carriers of the country are increasing their fleet size. But it is sad that we don't have a hanger. We won't be able to add more aircraft to the fleet without having a hanger."

MD, NOVOAIR

Mofizur Rahman, Managing Director, NOVOAIR, said, "During the corona crisis, many airlines in the world left the skies. But thanks to Almighty and the government, none of the airlines of the country had to shut down even amid turmoil."

He mentioned that NOVOAIR took to the skies again from June 1, 2020 and has operated over 4081 scheduled passenger flights till now carrying more than 3,81,283 passengers. The airline operated four international charter flights, three from Kolkata, one from Guwahati to Dhaka, helping to bring back stranded Bangladeshis in the country. To recognise the efforts of the frontline health workers during this crisis, the airline provided them with over 150 complimentary return tickets.

The Managing Director further mentioned, "The ministry supported us by waiving off all the landing, parking and navigational charges till September last year. They also waived off 20 per cent of the housing charges. Even though the finance ministry was resilient about it, the civil aviation ministry and CAAB pursued this to get us the support we badly needed to survive. The amount might be very small, but this gesture of supporting the aviation industry will surely go a long way."

Rahman said, "Our domestic industry is almost back to pre-pandemic levels. Though, we still have some restrictions left, for instance we are having to keep some of the seats vacant in a flight. But this is important at the moment to ensure the safety of the passengers. We have no choice but to continue this till the situation improves."

"The losses we endured during the crisis will take many years to recover, given that we don't face any unprecedented obstacles any further. Therefore, we need to continuous support from the government, not in terms of finance but in policy (customs and bank), to soar high and dominate the skies,' the NOVOAIR Chief added.

Commercial Manager, Qatar Airways

Bakshi Mohd Tayab, Commercial Manager, Qatar Airways Bangladesh, speaking on the occasion, informed, "Qatar Airways has successfully operated 17 repatriation charter flights with the slogan - We will get you home. We have carried over 4,600 passengers stranded in Bangladesh and abroad to US, Canada and Europe. We were one of the first few airlines to assist in repatriation during the pandemic."

"On June 15, 2020, Qatar Airways resumed its services to Dhaka. Since then, we have operated over 600 flights and carried about 1,30,000 passengers, mainly from US, Canada and Europe to Bangladesh."

"We would like to thank the ministry and CAAB for taking prompt actions to assist us in carrying passengers from home and abroad seamlessly," he said.

"Qatar Airways currently operates to more than 130 destinations worldwide. Recently it became the first global airline in the world to achieve the prestigious five-star Covid-19 airline safety rating by Skytrax."

Country Manager, Emirates

Mohamed Alhammadi, Country Manager of Emirates in Bangladesh said, "In Bangladesh, we played a crucial role helping stranded passengers come back to Dhaka while keeping cargo connectivity open carrying essential items including medical supplies. We were also one of the first to resume passenger services to Dhaka."

Al-Hammadi said, "At present we operate 15 weekly flights to more than 90 destinations via Dubai. We are one the first airline in the world to offer multi risk travel insurance to the passengers."

He also informed that from March 1, 2021, Emirates is going to introduce for the first time the state-of-the art premium offering onboard First Class on the Dubai-Dhaka route.

Country Manager, Air Arabia

Mobin Rashid, Country Manager, Air Arabia, said, "Air Arabia resumed services to Bangladesh from July 4. Till now we operated 400 flights and carried around 50 thousand passengers from UAE and Bangladesh. Even amid the corona crisis, we are happy to introduce our new airline partner Air Arabia Abu Dhabi."

Rashid added, "We have successfully launched all destinations in Bangladesh - Dhaka and Chattogram, four weekly from Dhaka and two weekly from Chattogram. And we operated 10 repatriation flights to and from during this corona period. We thank the ministry and CAAB for the safe and seamless air operations they ensured. Air Arabia recorded AED 24 billion profit in the last quarter of the corona period."