

2023: year of air travel prosperity in Bangladesh

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Dhaka : Currently, to and from Dhaka Airport, on average, 30,000 air passengers per day are travelling on international flights while the domestic air passenger number is 7,000-8,000 per day. Altogether, 37,000-38,000 passengers are flying to and from Dhaka Airport every day. During the festival seasons, the number even rises further. This data shows how air travel has grown in 2023 compared to 2022 and the growth will continue further in 2024.

Group Captain Muhammed Kamrul Islam, Executive Director, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport said this while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at his office in the capital's airport premise.

In 2023 (till 1st week of December), the total international flight number was over 48,000 compared to 45,000 in 2022. International passenger number was 88,48,047 in 2023 compared to 78,28,212 in 2022, as per the data provided by the Executive Director of Dhaka Airport.

Not only that, even export and import cargo tonnage has increased this year compared to last year. As per the Executive Director's data, the number of export cargo in 2023 was 2,09,782 tonnes. In 2022, the number was only 1,73,379 tonnes.

On the other hand, the number of import cargo in 2023 was 1,33,861 tonnes compared to 39,636 tonnes in 2022. In total, the number of cargo weight (including both import and export cargo) stood at 3,43,643 tonnes in 2023 compared to 2,13,755 tonnes in 2022.

The figures reflect the growth of air travel to/from/in Bangladesh. Also, the growth is a result of the country's economic progress, people's affordability, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism's support to the sector and Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh's development efforts in aviation, mentioned Kamrul Islam.

In the post-pandemic times, the number of international and domestic flights, air passengers as well as domestic and international airlines operating in Bangladesh have been increasing year on year.

Already, 35 airlines are operating in Dhaka including 2023's two new entrants EgyptAir and Flynas. Furthermore, a number of new airlines are on their way to start flight operations gradually to and from Dhaka in near future such as Air China, Air Premia, Fita Air, Ethiopian Airlines and Royal Brunei Airlines, mentioned the Executive Director.

The flight number increase this year is not only owed to new airlines starting operations in Dhaka but also the existing carriers' gradual increase of frequencies, added Kamrul Islam.

It may be mentioned here that the national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines has launched new routes and increased frequencies of its existing flights. Similarly, Saudia has increased frequencies. So have Air India, Vistara, Singapore Airlines, Malaysian Airlines and Emirates, among others.

Moreover, the passenger number growth is witnessed across all segments this year-migrant, education, medical, pilgrim, leisure, business and even transit. Speaking of the latter, Kamrul Islam mentioned, many passengers on Biman's direct flight from Dhaka to Toronto and Tokyo are from the neighbouring countries. Even many passengers of other airlines are transiting via HSIA.

With the starting of Terminal-3 operations in 2024 and more expansion of Biman's fleet, the number of passengers will only rise, stressed the Executive Director.

However, with such ever-increasing growth, there can be no alternative to the importance of passenger facilitation and service at the busiest airport in the country. Over the years, there have been incidents and reports of many challenges passengers as well as the authorities faced across a range of areas at the airport.



Such a long-standing issue was luggage left behind problem of some airlines. To prevent that, the authorities have undergone effective measures like restricting flights and/or seats of certain airlines as well as influencing them to change their baggage policies. Hence, the luggage left behind rate currently at Dhaka Airport is even less than the global average, informed Kamrul Islam.

To facilitate the passengers in more supportive ways, a specialised training programme, "Passenger Service and Facilitation in Civil Aviation", has been enacted and all the staff working Dhaka airport are participating the passenger facilitation course in civil aviation. So far, in 2023, 19 courses have been conducted with 28-30 participants in each course session. Working members from 35 airlines, 24 government agencies including Immigration, Customs, national carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines, Aviation Security, Armed Police Battalion and Health Department are participating in this course.



The course, designed and aligned with ICAO Annex 9 (Facilitation) standards, aims to implement the National Integrity Strategy, transforming ethical and behavioural standards for airport officials and staff. Hence, there has been a massive cultural shift in paradigm at the airport, also stressed the Executive Director.

The airport authorities have also deployed 54 members at the airport premise to help passengers from five help desks 24/7 in three shifts, also mentioned the Executive Director, adding, these are all part of the airport's custom-made efforts to facilitate the country's passengers as per the latter's requirements.

By 2024, the airport will also have ILS Category-2. Then flights can land even in shorter distance visibility than the present without the need for diversion during densely-fog weather, Kamrul Islam also informed.

Lastly, the Executive Director mentioned the biggest achievement of CAAB in 2023 was the soft opening of Third Terminal (T3). As the current terminals have some infrastructure limitations, the full opening of T3 will pave the way for more improvement of the airport's services, concluded Kamrul Islam.