

Airbus aims at partnership with Bangladesh to fully utilise its aviation market

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Dhaka : The aviation market of Bangladesh is currently underutilised. Hence, the country's government, with its vision of establishing a Smart Bangladesh by 2041, aims to expand the aviation sector and, for this purpose, a joint communique was signed in May 2023 for a partnership in the aviation sector with the giant European planemaker Airbus, said Morad Bourou-ffala, Chief Representative of Airbus in Bangladesh, on October 9, to a group of Bangladeshi media representatives visiting the final assembly line of A350s at the Airbus headquarters in Toulouse, France, known as the aerospace capital of Europe. In 2021, Bangladesh's GDP was USD 416 billion with a population of 169 million with 7.5 million emigrants while Vietnam's was USD 366 billion with a population of 97 million including 3.4 million emigrants and Philippines was USD 394 billion comprising a population of 114 million with 6.1 million emigrants.

Yet, the fleet size of Bangladesh across all its local airlines in operation was only 36 including only 10 wide-body aircraft while Vietnam and Philippines' were 187 with 35 wide bodies and 172 with 29 wide-body aircraft respectively.

Such data was presented by Juan Camilo Rodríguez, Manager, Wide-body Market Development of Airbus during the visit of the Bangladeshi media representatives to Toulouse.

In his presentation, Rodríguez highlighted that the demand for international travel to and from Bangladesh continues to grow, thanks to the rising number of travellers that includes migrant workers, non-resident Bangla-deshis and the upper/middle-class segment of the country.

For reference, data from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh states Bangla-desh's airports handled 9.63 million international passengers in 2022, which is higher than 8.59 million in pre-pandemic times of 2019.



Bangladeshi journalists seen with Airbus officials at the mockup centre of A350s at the planemaker's headquarters in Toulouse, France on October 9 _Photo : Monitor

Rodríguez claimed the number will only grow further, with projections showing that air travel will double from/to/within Bangladesh by 2031, 6 per cent internationally, 8 per cent domestically and 6.4 per cent in total.

Hence, Bangladesh requires more aircraft to capture the market opportunities, stress-ed Rodríguez. He said, in the next two deca-des, there will be a global demand for over 40,000 new passenger and freighter aircraft, adding that, in Asia Pacific alone, excluding China, the demand will be for 9,500 new aircraft including 2,000 wide-bodies during the period between 2023 and 2042. This is where Airbus would like to come in with its state-of-the-art A350 aircraft, expressed Rodríguez.

Earlier, French President Emmanuel Macron, during his maiden visit to Bangladesh in September, 2023, thanked the country for keeping its "trust" in Airbus as Biman Bangladesh Airlines showed interest in buying 10 wide-body A350 aircraft, including two freighters. Wide-body aircraft have two passenger aisles that can accommodate seven or more

seats in a row.

The iconic A350 made its first flight on June 14, 2013. In the last one decade, Airbus has delivered 552 A350 aircraft which have 99.5 per cent operational reliability and are flying on 1,071 routes worldwide by 39 operators currently. Airbus dominates the fleets of major airlines in the Americas, Europe, Asia Pacific, Africa and Middle East.



Morad Bourouffala, Chief Representative in BD; Antonio Da Costa, VP Marketing and Juan Camilo Rodriguez, Wide-body Marketing Manager of Airbus seen at a Q&A with Bangladeshi journalists in Toulouse _Photo : Monitor

Antonio da Costa, Vice President, Marketing of Airbus, while speaking to the Bangladeshi media during their visit to Toulouse said, the A350 offers 25 per cent lower fuel burn compared to its previous generation. This brings better efficiency, economics and sustainability for long-term development, he added.

Today the lion share of Bangladeshi traffic is carried by foreign airlines. With the new-generation wide bodies of the A350 offering 25 per cent lower fuel burn and best passenger experiences, Airbus can equip Bangladeshi airlines with the right tool to compete with the foreign airlines taking advantage currently, further claimed da Costa.

Also, as part of A350s continuous development, da Costa highlighted, the aircraft is reducing weight, enhancing performance and increasing maximum takeoff weight as well as cabin volume, among others.

In case of cargo, the freighter A350 is also setting a new benchmark with the largest main deck cargo door, 17 per cent wider than the competitors, lowest CO2 emission per trip and larger package size than any freighter in production, claimed da Costa.

However, Airbus's entry into the Bangladesh market raised some concerns among aviation experts as the country is dominated by Boeing in case of widebodies. Bangladeshi journalists visiting Toulouse during a Q&A at the Airbus facility, asked the management whether the national airline Biman could handle a mixed fleet. Da Costa replied, this new-generation aircraft of Airbus is easier to operate and maintain than the previous one. For instance, the same pilot can operate all lines of the Airbus family. Say, when Bangladesh buys A350s, pilots would train to operate those. Later, if the country buys A320s or any other line, the

same pilot would be able to fly those aircraft. Da Costa claimed, this is something impossible in case of the American planemaker Boeing's aircraft, which is the major rival of Airbus.

However, Airbus not only wishes to make a transaction with Bangladesh by selling its planes and leave. It is aiming for a partnership through which the plane making giant can help Bangladesh to be an aviation destination, expressed Morad Bourou-ffala. As air travel will double by 2031, the demand for all related services will also increase. For instance, 131,000 new pilots, 144,000 new technicians and 208,000 new cabin crews will be required, said Rodríguez, adding that Airbus could provide Bangladesh with solutions as it helped many countries with the development of such skilled jobs.

The Chief Representative of Airbus in Bangladesh informed that Airbus has been with Bangladesh from day one with the intention of its aviation sector's development. He mentioned that the company has forged partnerships with different entities related to the sector in Bangladesh. It may be mentioned here that the partnership between Bangladesh and Airbus began three years before the joint communique that took place in May, 2023. Airbus signed a memorandum of understanding with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University in 2020 to provide its students with world-class pilot training and maintenance engineering skills.

Lastly, Bangladesh could be an aviation hub by taking advantage of the existing passenger flow and its geographical location, Bourou-ffala concluded.