

BD suffers pilot shortage, requires 70 new pilots annually : US-Bangla CEO

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Dhaka : As per global planemakers'-Boeing and Airbus-forecast, the world needs 5,50,000-6,45,000 pilots till the year 2038 while the current requirement of pilots globally is 30,000. All the flying academies worldwide together can produce a maximum of 25,000 pilots at the moment. Meaning, a gap of 5000 pilots would still linger. Furthermore, the scenario is even worse in Bangladesh as the flying academies here, due to various limitations, do not produce enough number of pilots to help the country's aviation industry grow and sustain.

Lutfor Rahman, CEO of US-Bangla Airlines said this while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at his office in the capital.

As our country's flying academies have been producing poor number of pilots due to limitations with aircraft, maintenance, airspace and finance; coupled with the coronavirus pandemic that kept the facilities

closed for three years, a huge gap of pilots has emerged in the aviation industry of Bangladesh, stressed the CEO.

"Bangladesh currently requires 70 new pilots annually till the next 10 years to meet the ever-increasing demand, to replace pilot retirees and to continuously grow in order to sustain," claimed Rahman.

The CEO informed US-Bangla Airlines alone requires 30 new pilots each year to successfully execute its growth plan till 2027.

By 2027, US-Bangla plans to double the number of aircraft in its fleet to 40. The CEO mentioned the airline is bringing 26 additional aircraft, comprising a mix between narrowbodies (B737, A321) and eight widebodies (A330-900 or B787-9).

With these planes, the airline will be increasing frequencies on the existing international routes as this segment has higher retention at the moment compared to domestic, said the CEO.

The airline will also launch two new international routes-Jeddah and Medina while eyeing to enter the European skies by 2024 end, shared Lutfor Rahman.

However, to execute this massive growth plan, there is no alternative to getting more pilots. Hence, US-Bangla Airlines has taken matters into their own hands and sent 21 cadet pilots to the Epic Flying Academy, Florida in the United States of America to receive fully-funded training to become aviators.



Lutfor Rahman, CEO, US-Bangla Airlines

Once the 12-months long training is complete, the Bangladeshi cadets will obtain the Federal Aviation Administration Commercial Pilot License (FAA CPL), return to Bangladesh and join US-Bangla Airlines as First Officers in 2024, to serve till the next 12 years as per contract.

"Without our own initiative, there was no alternative to get the required number of pilots every year," stressed Lutfor Rahman, adding, "Thereby, we will continue this programme every year till we have our required number of pilots."

The CEO mentioned, they will be sending a second batch of cadets to

the US for flight training and have already selected six of them while they await more applications. This time, they have also eased the GPA requirements.

"Our target is to get even younger blood this time. That's why, we are accepting applications from even those who are to receive their HSC results yet," informed the CEO, adding, "The main idea behind this initiative is to get the best possible intellect and talent from the field."

In the second batch, the airline targets to send 21 students again. Not only this initiative helps US-Bangla to get its required number of pilots essential to grow and sustain but also the cadets enjoy the opportunity to have their jobs secured even before completion of the training.

However, increasing the number of pilots alone will not help the airline with its expansion plans. Manpower must be expanded across all expertise. Therefore, the largest private carrier of the country has taken another initiative-sending engineers to India to receive aeronautical engineering training.

"Already, we have sent four engineers and 30 more will go soon," informed the CEO.

Currently, the airline boasts 200 pilots comprising 44 foreigners while the rest are Bangladeshis.

"This initiative of ours to send pilots and engineers abroad for training is to develop the fittest as well as the most skilled and talented manpower from the local human resource," explained Lutfor Rahman.

It may be mentioned here that US-Bangla Airlines is also establishing its own flight academy in the country by 2024 across 12,000 sqft of space. Aircraft acquisition is complete for the state-of-the-art facility which will include aircraft simulators too, first-of-its-kind in the country.

"Once operational, if we can ensure the world-class quality as per our target, we will no longer require to send pilots abroad for training," mentioned the CEO.

"Currently, it is costing USD 74,000 and a 12-year contract for the cadets training in the USA. Once our academy is ready, cadets will be able to receive the same standard of training in the country, say at USD 50,000 and with less contractual obligation," he added.

"Also, in collaboration with the group's Green University, we plan to bring the training under a Bachelors programme. So, the pilots will not only obtain a CPL but also a Bachelors degree," concluded Lutfor Rahman.