

## Biman reinforced with additional ground handling capacity eyeing HSIA's T3

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Dhaka : Following several incidents of service gaps in Biman Bangladesh Airlines' ground handling operations at all airports of the country, the Civil Aviation Authority, in 2023, announced the government decided to give away the ground handling responsibilities at the upcoming state-of-the-art Third Terminal (T3) of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) to Japan through a public-private partnership (PPP). This led the flag carrier Biman to revamp itself with new and massive ground handling capacity in an attempt to retain the ground handling responsibilities at the iconic new Third Terminal of HSIA.

In an effort to rebuild its capacity not only to operate the Third Terminal but also to handle as many as such terminals, Biman Bangladesh Airlines has added several new motorised and non-motorised equipment worth almost BDT 1,000 crore in its Ground Support Equipment (GSE)

department over the last one year. The new additions will take the total number of equipment in the department to a staggering 3,600 while allowing Biman to be a world-class ground handling service provider at T3 of HSIA.

Shafiul Azim, Managing Director and CEO of Biman Bangladesh Airlines said this to the media while addressing an event titled "Ground Equipment Exhibition 2024 and New Equipment Commissioning" held at the capital's HSIA on January 4.

On the occasion, 70 per cent of the new additions was commissioned while the rest 30 per cent-105 equipment worth BDT 209 crore-await delivery by March 2024, added the MD and CEO.

At the event, the national airline of the country exhibited the new additions of ground handling equipment to the media to highlight the carrier's revamped ability to better operate all airports of the country, including the coming Third Terminal of Dhaka Airport.

Currently, the GSE department of the airline features a total of 273 motorised equipment. In case of non-motorised equipment that the department boasts, the number is even higher-2,903.

Also, the department currently comprises a total manpower of 500 people.

With the current number of equipment and expert manpower, at present, Biman can handle 160 flights per day. In 2023, the airline provided over 57,000 flights with ground handling services. However, coupled with the new additions that have been commissioned as well as the ones that are on the way, the airline's ground handling capacity will increase to 200-230 flights a day by 2024 end, further claimed Shafiul Azim.

It is only natural the flag carrier is reluctant to give away the ground handling responsibility at the new terminal of Dhaka Airport as this particular service of Biman across all airports of the country currently brings the airline an annual turnover of BDT 1,000-1,200 crore.

However, to retain its position as the sole ground handling service provider, it was vital and only a matter of time the airline completely revamped its GSE department following several complaints of service

gaps.

Services of Biman such as luggage handling were questioned by passengers. However, the delay in luggage delivery has been reduced significantly over the last one year, said Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport's Executive Director Kamrul Islam while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor earlier. Currently, luggage becomes available within 18 to 20 minutes of a plane's landing, a significant improvement from the several hours it used to take even a year ago, according to him.

Also, at the Exhibition Programme on January 4, Biman displayed the state-of-the-art body-worn cameras it is introducing for its ground handling staff, in an attempt to address longstanding allegations of pilferage, missing luggage and passenger harassment at the airport.

Regarding issues such as luggage left behind, luggage slitting and theft, the airline's MD and CEO said, the majority of these cases are attributed to the respective airlines.

Furthermore, it may be mentioned here that new cameras have been installed for round-the-clock CCTV monitoring to curb theft and prevent luggage cutting at the luggage belt area of the airport, as per the MD and CEO.

Regarding worries that Biman's monopoly in ground handling compromises its service, Shafiul Azim said, Biman enjoys the monopoly because of its unparalleled capacity. With the ever-increasing capacity of the airline's GSE department, Biman's monopoly exists and will always prevail, claimed the MD and CEO, adding, like Biman, flag carriers worldwide also enjoy such privileges in their respective countries' airports.

He also expressed his worries that if the ground handling responsibility is given to any foreign company, it may create a security hazard as HSIA is a Key Point Installation (KPI).