

Biman resumes Narita flight taking bilateral ties between two countries to new heights

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 02 September, 2023



Dhaka : The country's national carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines has ramped up operations by resuming direct flights to Narita. September 1, 2023, marks a new feather in Biman's cap of expansion spree as the airline restores one of its previously shut down route-Dhaka-Narita-as part of its efforts to utilise its full potential. The move paves the way for bilateral relations between the two countries to reach greater heights. Thanks to direct flight services between Dhaka and Narita, trade and travel between the two friendly nations will be strengthened further.

History shows that Dhaka was first connected to Tokyo back in 1969 by Pakistan International Airlines with stopovers in Bangkok and Manila, formerly known as the Pearl Route.

After independence, in 1980, Biman Bangladesh Airlines relaunched services to Narita with one weekly flight. Also, after not getting an

additional flight slot at Narita, the airline commenced one weekly flight to another destination near Tokyo-Nagoya-in 1992.

However, due to operational issues, Biman had to suspend flights to Narita and Nagoya in 2006.

Now, after 17 years, Biman Bangladesh Airlines has resumed its operations to Japan with three new weekly flights to Narita.

Talking to The Bangladesh Monitor in an interview held at Biman's head office in the capital recently about the airline's Narita flight and other developments including further expansion plans, Shafiul Azim, Managing Director and CEO of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, said, "Recruitment for skilled manpower including more pilots is currently underway at Biman so that the airline can resume other previously shut down routes and launch new ones."

"We have also partnered with Korean Air and All Nippon Airways to fly passengers to Seoul and other onward destinations across the Asia Pacific from Narita," mentioned the MD and CEO.

"Additionally, we are planning to carry passengers up to the west coast of the United States and Montreal of Canada through such code sharing initiatives," added Shafiul Azim.

On the other hand, the airline aims not only to cater to the needs of Bangladeshis flying to Japan or Japanese visitors visiting Dhaka but also to attract Japan-bound travellers from neighbouring Nepal and India.

"Hence, we are offering connecting Delhi and Kathmandu with our flights from Dhaka to Narita," claimed the MD and CEO.

More new routes

That is not all. Biman is also launching flights to many other new destinations. When asked about the upcoming routes Biman is planning to commence, Shafiul Azim said, "After Narita, Biman is eyeing to launch flights to Guangzhou, Chennai and Rome, among others."

Biman will be launching flights to Guangzhou on September 14, mentioned Shafiul Azim, adding, the airline will also start flights to Chennai by end 2023.

He further mentioned, Sydney and Jakarta, among others, are also under Biman's expansion plan. The MD and CEO informed these are promising new destinations that Biman could fly to.

Biman is also eyeing to increase frequencies on Dhaka-Toronto route to 4 flights a week from the current 2 due to high demand, shared Biman's chief.

Biman also signed an agreement with Gulf Air for code-sharing purposes recently. Under the agreement, passengers can travel between Dhaka and Bahrain, with onward connections to Chattogram and Sylhet available through both airlines.

About direct flights to NY

Direct flights from Dhaka to New York has been a long pending demand of passengers. However, there has been little development in this regard.



Shafiul Azim

Asked about how far Biman has progressed to launch direct flights to New York, the Biman boss said, all necessary formalities from the airline's end are complete.

Now, only the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh has to meet the criteria of the Federal Aviation Authority of the USA to earn Category-1 status.

Once done, FAA will allow direct flights to New York from Dhaka, claimed Azim.

Priority: value for money

Apart from launching new routes, Biman is also leaving no stones unturned to improve its services so that the airline is regarded among the top carriers in the region.

"We are currently prioritising how to make profit while ensuring the best customer service. We want to offer customers value for money," said the airline's chief.

Hence, there have been massive improvements in on-time performance,

onboard service, and ground handling operations of Biman, he further informed, adding, there has not been any irregularity or unfortunate incident in Biman's service recently.

Improved ground handling

One of the biggest complaints against Biman was its poor ground handling service. Also, there have been concerns about whether Biman will operate the upcoming Third Terminal at Dhaka Airport as the ground handler or not.

Asked about the latest update on the matter, Shafiul Azim said, without ground handling operations, Biman, as a company, will surely plunge into losses. Currently, the airline is making profits, claimed Azim, and as the national carrier, it must remain to do so, he expressed.

Hence, Biman is launching a new ground handling company that will ensure international standard service, informed the airline's chief. Manpower training is currently underway for this purpose at both home and abroad, he further noted.

Also, Biman's positive efforts of improvement were reflected in this year's Hajj operations of Biman, claimed Azim, adding, there had been no complaint and everything went smoothly.

Development of airports

For Biman to further tap its potential, the country's aviation infrastructure must be developed, stressed the airline boss.

Shafiul Azim expressed his wish to make a hub in Sylhet to operate flights to London. There is only a handful of passengers from Dhaka who fly to London while the lion share of passengers are from Sylhet, he informed.

Therefore, Azim wishes to bring passengers from Dhaka to Sylhet with a connecting flight while the crew and planes remain at the new hub in Sylhet, he expressed, adding, this way, there will not be any need for a short landing.

However, to develop Sylhet or Chattogram as a hub, CAAB has a major role to play, stressed the MD and CEO of Biman.

About the upcoming Third Terminal, the MD and CEO agreed it will generate 20 per cent capacity increase for the ground handler.

However, to accommodate more flights, a second runway is crucial. Even though CAAB is planning to establish a dependent runway, there will be a time, when the country has to move to another independent runway, said Azim.

Since it is not possible to have another independent runway at the current airport in the capital, it is time to consider establishing a new fully equipped airport in the outskirts of the capital, mentioned Shafiul Azim.

That new airport must have more than one independent runway as air travel in the county continues to rise, shared the MD and CEO of the airline.

Nevertheless, with such route expansion efforts, coupled with induction of more ultramodern aircraft in Biman's fleet, the national carrier will fly into greater skies of glory in the coming days, concluded Shafiul Azim.