

Biman should run by professionals, not bureaucrats, now or never

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Dhaka : It is high time the country's flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines was managed by professionals, instead of the bureaucrats who have been failing to tap the airline's true commercial potential and achieve the desired market share since its inception.

During the 53 years of Biman's existence, the national airline saw the coming and going of 37 Managing Directors and CEOs, mostly civil or military bureaucrats, with only the exception of two foreign airline executives who were there for a brief period while the average tenures of all the Managing Directors and CEOs were little over one year.

It may be mentioned here, once the airline turned into a Public Limited Company in 2007, the then government promised to bring the airline out of bureaucratic legacy, inducting more representatives from the private sector with professional and entrepreneurship skills.

Although it was followed initially, later, the move was to no avail, as eventually the subsequent boards were again dominated by bureaucrats who were chosen considering their ranks and files. Even the recently reconstituted Board during the current interim government is no exception.

The newly restructured board, announced on August 27, 2024, effective immediately, is also dominated by bureaucrats, reflecting the usual practice of the previous regimes.

The current Biman Board Chairman is a former bureaucrat and so are seven other members of the 13-member board including Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary, Ministry of Finance Secretary, National Board of Revenue Chairman, Chief Adviser Office Secretary and Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh Chairman, Bangladesh Army Engineer-in-Chief and former Biman Director.

Only five members of the new board represent the business community: International Chamber of Commerce President, Bangladesh Association of Bankers Chairman, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh Council Member, Emerging Credit Rating Limited CEO and Rangs Waterfront's high official-even they have little insight about the airline trade.

It may be mentioned here, the airline is still on the hunt for a new Managing Director and CEO-a position which boasts a great deal of power to turn the airline around. Hence, it is imperative that an expert aviation professional sits in the chair.

Under bureaucratic control led by mostly in-service civil and military officers, Biman, over the years, has repeatedly failed to equip itself as an efficient "commercial" airline. The long history of inefficient management and failed attempts should be enough of evidence to pursue the much needed dynamic and professional expertise for Biman.

At Biman, poor management with no commercial aviation knowledge or experience so far has resulted in inefficiency, corruption and revenue loss in many sectors of operation.

Over the years, an airline is expected to only expand its network while Biman, on the contrary, surprisingly, has shrunk its operations by shutting down North American and many European destinations it once

flew to.

Even the efficiency and skill level of Biman's critical work force must be developed. In the absence of direct officer level recruitment, the middle management positions are currently manned by promotes mostly. Hence, the quality of supervision at the airline should be revived.

A few developments at Biman in recent times were resuming previously shut down routes such as Narita, Rome and starting operations to Guangzhou and Chennai. However, the airline is still lagging behind in acquiring new aircraft to cater to the much needed network expansion while global airlines are expanding their fleet aggressively to capture potential markets.

It may be mentioned here that Biman once flew to 30 international destinations. However, now, it only flies to half of that number.

Turning Biman into a commercially viable airline by infusing efficient management and expert board members is a dire need today, as have been practiced by almost all airlines around the globe. The move is a must to survive against the fierce competition from the region's mega carriers, which are currently carving out most of the market share of the country, with their worldwide dominance.