

Bangladesh aims to be regional air hub : PM

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Dhaka : Bangladesh is trying to become a regional air hub by developing supporting infra-structure for better air connectivity.

This was disclosed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina while virtually inaugurating the expansion work of the Cox's Bazar Airport runway on August 29, as part of a project to make it an international standard first maritime airport by 2024.

"We want to make Bangladesh the center of communications for the entire world capitalising its geographical position," she said virtually from her official Ganabhaban residence.

Hoping that Cox's Bazar airport would be the world's most attractive place for refueling, the Premier said the runway would have to be developed in such a way that the world's largest planes could land at the airport easily and quickly for refueling.

"I believe that, after completing expansion work of the runway, the Cox's Bazar Airport will be the most comfortable place for the planes travelling from East to West or West to East to stop and refuel."

Cox's Bazar tourism hub

Sheikh Hasina said her government wants to turn Cox's Bazar into one of the most modern cities, having all the facilities to attract more tourists, especially foreigners as they could enjoy Bangladesh the most.

"We have lot of plans (regarding overall development of Bangladesh) while it is

more about Cox's Bazar. We will develop Cox's Bazar in such a way that it becomes the world's best sea beach and tourist spot and the most modern city," she added. Extending greetings to those who took the initiative of expanding runway by reclaiming land from the sea, facing protest of environment activists, she said the runway would be eye-catching and many people would throng Cox's Bazar only to see it.

Sheikh Hasina said that her government has a plan to transform the Sonadia Deep into an eco-park protecting the natural beauty and sea-species alongside developing the Shahparir Deep, Saint Martin Island and Maheshkhali Deep to make Cox's Bazar one the most attractive tourist places.

As part of the move, the government is constructing a marine drive from Cox's Bazar to Teknaf and a rail line from Chattogram to Cox's Bazar, she added.

Foreign tourists zone at Cox's Bazar

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that a 'special zone', reserved only for foreign tourists, will be built in the world's largest sandy sea beach Cox's Bazar.

There are plans to make sure foreigners can enjoy everything they want, she said, after unveiling the foundation stone of the runway extension project of Cox's Bazar Airport, which aims to offer a longer range of domestic and international passenger services.

Cox's Bazar will be turned into the world's greatest tourist destination and a highly modern city, said Hasina. "In that way, we will develop and enrich the whole Cox's Bazar," she added.

Cox's Bazar airport runway expansion

The government has taken the initiative to upgrade the airport through extending its runway by reclaiming land from the sea so the international flights operated by wide body aircraft can land at the airport.

After completion of the project, the new 10,700 feet runway will allow wide-bodied aircraft like Boeing 777 and 747 to operate at the airport paving the way for operation of international flights.

On August 29, an inauguration ceremony took place at Cox's Bazar Airport chaired by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who joined virtually from Ganabhaban. State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahbub Ali and its Secretary Md Mokammel Hossain spoke on the occasion while Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman gave the welcome address.

Cabinet members, local lawmakers, public representatives, political leaders and government officials were present at the airport side.

PM's Principal Secretary Dr Ahmad Kaikaus, PMO (Prime Minister's Office), Secretary Md Tofazzel Hossain Miah and PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim were present at Ganabhaban.

CAAB signed a deal for the project with the Chinese joint venture of Changjiang Yichang Waterway Engineering Bureau (CYWEB) and China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) on February 9 this year.

The project is scheduled to be completed by May 2024 with an estimated cost of BDT 1,568.86 crore. The project was approved by the government on November 4, 2018.

The detailed design and construction of temporary facilities, including a site office, road networks, jetty, and concrete batching plant had been substantially completed. After completion of the project, tourists from different countries can directly reach Cox's Bazar as a tourist destination.

The project is an important advancement towards the government's vision to make

Cox's Bazar a single tourism hub for the inbound tourists here.

Runway expansion not enough

Expanding runways at the airports of the country alone will not facilitate international flights operations. The government must develop ground handling, refueling and other support services at the airports as well.

Along with it, the government has to waive the high aviation charges - aeronautical, landing, parking etc - currently set. Compared to even the neighbouring countries, our aviation charges are much higher and aviation fuel is also very costly.

Jet fuel price is unreasonably high in our country due to the monopoly of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation.

Currently, the price of jet fuel in Bangladesh for international sector is BDT 50 a liter while BDT 65 for domestic operators. It is very high, compared to the price in the global aviation market. The jet fuel price in the country has increased several times in the recent past, while global market has been stable.

Also, import charges of aircraft spare parts for maintenance is also very high.

Another worrying high expense is the surcharge imposed on the local airlines for late payment of various charges - BDT 12 surcharge being charged for BDT 1 unpaid fee. This is forcing airlines to go out of business.

Lastly, tourism and trade activities in all cities of Bangladesh must be bolstered to facilitate international air movement to Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet and Saidpur.

Hence, expansion of runways, development of airports and relaxation of aviation related charges - all these efforts together can only in time make Bangladesh a global aviation hub. The government, led by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has addressed this and began taking necessary actions.

Now, they must ensure that the development projects of the airports finish in time and reconsider the unreasonably high aviation charges to facilitate further growth in international flight operations to and from Bangladesh.