

## Country's largest private carrier to add 6 widebody, 20 narrow-body aircraft to fleet soon

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Dhaka : It is a rare occurrence in Bangladesh that an airline sustains almost a decade. In the country's aviation history, only GMG airlines was able to operate for 10 years but failed to continue further. In this context, US-Bangla Airlines has set a unique example as the country's largest private carrier stepped into its 10th year of successful operations on July 17. Moreover, the airline's further growth and expansion plans show there is no stopping it. "In today's competitive age, there is no alternative to brand new aircraft, international standard customer service, and efficient backward linkage to sustain. Hence, US-Bangla is constantly making efforts in all these areas for better comfort of the passengers."

On the occasion of the carrier's 9th anniversary, Md Abdullah Al Mamun, Managing Director of US-Bangla Airlines, said this while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor in an interview held recently at his

office in the capital.

"Once we increase our frequencies, we will be ordering 20 narrow-body aircraft," the airline's MD shared.

There are also plans to add six widebody aircraft to the US-Bangla fleet by 2023, the first two of which-A330s-will arrive on September 1.

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Also, in the coming days, US-Bangla Airlines plans to operate flights to Delhi, Jeddah, Riyadh, Dammam and Abu Dhabi.

Furthermore, US-Bangla is progressing, as part of its plan, to operate flights to several destinations in Europe including London, and Rome by 2024 as well as New York and Toronto by 2025.

Md Abdullah Al Mamun, Managing Director of the airline, said that they have already received additional slots for flights from Dhaka and Chattogram to Kolkata.

"Currently, the airline operates three daily flights to Kolkata, one from Chattogram and two from Dhaka. Furthermore, US-Bangla recently received an additional flight slot to Kolkata from Dhaka," he mentioned.

The airline also received new flight slots from Chattogram to Muscat, Dubai, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi.

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Not only that but also the airline received another additional flight slot from Dhaka to Sharjah.

Lastly, US-Bangla received four new flight slots to Heathrow Airport in London.

"As the country is going through massive road and rail connectivity development projects, air travel on domestic routes will drop. Hence, in the next few years, capturing the international market would be key to sustain," said the Managing Director, talking to The Bangladesh Monitor,



However, for that purpose, it will be quite challenging for the local airlines to compete with the ever-increasing number of foreign airlines stepping into the Bangladesh market, he further stressed.

Abdullah Al Mamun also indicated that after five years, there will be more supply than demand in air travel.

"Hence, brand new aircraft, new international routes and world-class customer service will make all the difference for the customers in choosing which airline to fly in," mentioned the Managing Director.

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On the other hand, for backward linkage purposes, US-Bangla Airlines is going to set up its own MRO in the country by December 2023.

Once done, the airline will be able to carry out maintenance, repair and overhaul works at home, saving millions of taka that the airine had to spend in foreign lands till now for the same purpose.

Even at that hanger/MRO facility, the airline will be able to bring and keep widebody aircraft like Boeing 787, shared the airline chief.

Efforts to establish a flying school, and an engineering school, by the airline, to develop skilled manpower in the country, are also underway.

## Milestones

It may be mentioned here that the biggest private airline of the country started its commercial operations on July 17, 2014 by flying on Dhaka-Jashore route with Dash 8-Q400 aircraft.

Over the next one year, US-Bangla strengthened air connectivity in Bangladesh by launching flights to all the airports of the country, from Dhaka to Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, Jashore, Saidpur, Barishal, and Rajshahi.

On May 15, 2016, within two years of the airline's launch, US-Bangla operated its maiden flight on Dhaka-Kathmandu route and with it, the airline flew into the international skies.

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Currently, the airline flies to Kolkata, Chennai, Male, Muscat, Doha,

Dubai, Sharjah, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Bangkok and Guangzhou.

It may be mentioned here, US-Bangla ranked 5th among the South Asian airlines at the Skytrax World Airline Awards 2023.

Currently, the airline boasts a fleet of 20 aircraft in total, including eight Boeing 737-800s, nine ATR 72-600s and three Dash 8-Q400s.

US-Bangla also holds a record of operating over 90 per cent flights on-time.

At present, the airline has about 2500 staff and 40 sales offices at home and abroad.

Customers can purchase tickets of US-Bangla online through its website or mobile app. For frequent flyers, the airline offers its Skystar programme.

It may be mentioned here that US-Bangla was the first Bangladeshi airline to operate direct flights to China, India's Chennai, and Maldives' Male.

Also, US-Bangla Airlines has become the first private carrier of the country to successfully complete the IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA).

IATA awarded US-Bangla with the IOSA certification as the airline met all the required indicators.

Apart from passenger transport, the airline also carries cargo to various domestic and international destinations.

Since its inception, US-Bangla has also been directly involved in the development of sports in the country while contributing to several educational, social and cultural institutions.

Policy support needed to flourish

The Managing Director stressed that policy support is a must requirement for the local airlines to flourish further.

In Bangladesh, the authorities charges 15-25 per cent of tax on spare parts. Moreover, they keep increasing landing and parking fees year on year, sighed the airline boss.

However, our neighbouring country India does not charge any tax on spare parts. They do not even impose any landing or parking charges.

The jet fuel price has been rising exponentially year on year too.

All these factors weigh in on the operational cost of an airline significantly.

On the other hand, air travel has become costlier, stressed the MD as additional tax has been imposed on both international and domestic air travel. Due to this, there is less demand than supply currently. Hence, the airlines are not able to increase the fares even, instead they are having to feel the burn alone.

"God forbid, due to financial crisis, if the local airlines fall, domestic air travel and, with it, the economy itself, will collapse," concluded Abdullah Al Mamun.