

Etihad hosts "Key Partners Meet" in Dhaka

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Dhaka: Abu Dhabi-based UAE flag carrier Etihad Airways hosted an exclusive "Key Partners Meet" at an elite hotel in the capital on April 23, bringing together the airline's prominent stakeholders and business partners from across Bangladesh.

The meeting was held ahead of the carrier's resumption of Dhaka flights starting June 26. Etihad expresses optimism about extending the service into a regular daily operation beyond October 24, as officials indicated during the gathering.

Senior officials of Etihad Airways, including Javier Alija, Vice President of Sales, E-Commerce, and Digital; Naveen Chawla, Head of Regional Sales; Rohan V. Bhadgaonkar, Acting General Manager; and Mahbubul Anam, Managing Director of Wings Express Ltd., Etihad's General Sales Agent (GSA) in Bangladesh, attended the event, along with other senior officials from the airline and the GSA.

Vice President Alija opened the session with a detailed presentation on the airline's recently launched "Beyond Borders" brand platform. The initiative aims to strengthen global connectivity by bringing people, cultures, and businesses closer together while enhancing the customer experience across its network.

A key objective of the strategy is to serve underserved destinations that major carriers often overlook. Alija cited Charlotte, North Carolina, as one such example, where Etihad operates four weekly flights, making it the only Middle Eastern carrier to offer scheduled services on the route.

Serving these niche markets grants Etihad customers access to a broad and distinctive network, linking destinations worldwide through the airline's hub in Abu Dhabi. Alija noted that the city itself has transformed into a major global hub in recent years. Its primary gateway, Zayed International Airport, has undergone significant upgrades and now offers state-of-the-art facilities to match international standards.

In parallel with Abu Dhabi's growth as a hub, Etihad is modernizing its fleet with next-generation and fuel-efficient aircraft, offering a premium first and business class experience alongside a comfortable economy cabin. The airline plans to retrofit its legacy fleet with the new Generation 5 cabin in the coming year.

Beyond its long-haul wide-body operations, Etihad has recently introduced narrow-body aircraft types, including the Airbus A321LR, on select routes. Alija acknowledged that some passengers remain hesitant about flying long distances aboard single-aisle jets but emphasized that Etihad's premium products on the A321LR deliver an experience he likened to the comfort of private jets.

The Vice President also highlighted Etihad's US preclearance facility, which allows passengers bound for the United States to complete immigration and customs formalities in Abu Dhabi and arrive at American airports as domestic travelers, enabling a faster exit or onward connection.

On the network front, Etihad recently announced the addition of five new Chinese destinations — Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Hangzhou, and Shenzhen — with services commencing in late 2026 and rolling into early 2027, complementing its existing operations in Beijing.

The airline will also start flights to six new destinations across Africa, including Accra in Ghana, Asmara in Eritrea, Harare in Zimbabwe, Lagos in Nigeria, and Kinshasa and Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Resumption of Etihad's Dhaka Service

Earlier, on April 8, Etihad announced a four-weekly seasonal service to Dhaka, running from June 26 to October 24, marking the carrier's return to the capital after a three-year absence. The flights will be operated by Boeing 777-300ERs, configured with 28 business and 374 economy class seats.

During a Q&A session following the presentation, airline management expressed interest in extending the Dhaka service beyond October 24 and potentially increasing its frequency to daily operations. However, the final decision will hinge on passenger demand, which officials expect to be sustainable.

Management pointed to Nairobi as an illustrative example of the carrier's growth trajectory in newer markets. Etihad initially launched four weekly flights to the Kenyan capital before scaling up to 14 weekly flights within a year, underscoring the airline's willingness to expand capacity in response to strong demand.

The formal session gave way to an open dialogue, during which the airline's local partners shared feedback on Etihad's earlier operations in Dhaka. Senior officials received the remarks constructively, acknowledging past shortcomings and reaffirming their commitment to delivering a quality service in line with the "Beyond Borders" initiative.

Etihad's return to Dhaka and its renewed engagement with local partners reflect the airline's intent to establish a meaningful, long-term presence in Bangladesh, offering travelers access to its growing network, premium cabin products, and unique facilities such as US preclearance.