

## New routes, better manpower, greater service await Biman : MD and CEO

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Dhaka : Country's flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines celebrated its Golden Jubilee on January 4, 2022. Even a few years back, Biman used to operate flights to and from 28 destinations worldwide. However, now as the airline celebrates its 50th anniversary, the route network has come down to less than half surprisingly. Hence, in an effort to return to its glorious position, Biman will be launching five new routes by the end of 2022.

Dr Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal, Managing Director and CEO of Biman Bangladesh Airlines said this while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at Biman's head office Balaka in the capital recently.



He expressed, the previous weekly frequencies are not worth mentioning. Even though the airline used to operate to more destinations earlier, now it flies to 20 stations meaningfully, with sufficient weekly frequencies, he claimed.

Abu Saleh stressed, "Truly, I do not find any logic to stretch much with the existing fleet of Biman," adding, "Still, the total international destinations Biman operates to would be something around 25 by the end of 2022," notified Mostafa Kamal.

In all these years since 1972 till now, Biman's greatest success is the sustainability it showed as the national flag carrier, said Dr Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal, Managing

Director and CEO of the airline.

"The airline has endured a number of crises over the years, yet it still maintains a steady growth in all respect," he claimed, adding, "Currently, Biman is a successful employer of over 6000 people."

However, in these 50 years of operations, quite a few shortcomings of Biman have been witnessed. In response to what it could not have achieved, the Managing Director and CEO of the airline, said, "We need to improve our customer service as we want to see happy customers. We know very well the expectation of our valued passengers. So, I believe we have to work on that."

Once Biman was burdened with gas guzzler age old aircraft, but it is no more the situation now. Since the year 2011, Biman has been gradually inducting state-of-the-art ultramodern aircraft in its fleet. However, yet, there has not been much route expansion accordingly, certainly not as much as it should.

Mostafa Kamal, Managing Director and CEO of Biman, reinforced that Biman has already expanded its international network by adding new routes like Delhi, Medina, Manchester and Sharjah while important frequencies to many destinations have been increased.

Our flag carrier Biman currently holds 15-17 per cent market share of passengers, 8-10 per cent of export cargo and 3-5 per cent of import cargo broadly, mentioned Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal.

Biman now has a sizeable most modern fleet suitable for long and short haul routes. Hence, it must try to capture more market share right now.

Asked about the measures, Biman Managing Director and CEO said, "We would like to add more capacities to capture more market share. Additionally, we would also like to have more crew so that we can optimise our daily use of aircraft in general," adding that they have taken steps in this regard.

In the year 2019, the entire aviation industry globally and nationally came to a standstill due to the coronavirus pandemic. This unprecedented challenge was most troublesome for the airlines specially as they were among the first to get hit.

Amid the devastating pandemic, Biman MD said, it negotiated with its lessors and other stakeholders to better manage the available funds to weather out the blow that came from the worldwide crisis. Importantly, Biman diversified its operations to endure the pandemic, he further mentioned.

Also, amid the pandemic, when thousands of passengers were stranded in international destinations worldwide, Biman came to the rescue, stressed Abu Saleh.

"It then extensively transported stranded people, emergency cargo, Covid-19 medical equipment and vaccines and for the first time in the history, flew more than 40 return flights to carry UN Peacekeepers across the globe," noted Biman MD and CEO.

He also mentioned with praise that all level workers of Biman made their highest sacrifice to combat the crisis that followed Covid-19 pandemic.

It may be mentioned here, Biman as the national flag carrier was able to enjoy a financial stimulus package worth of BDT 1000 crore given by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with which Biman combated the financial crunch caused by the pandemic.

Looking ahead, Biman MD said, the airline has almost reached the pre-pandemic levels in terms of revenue generation. However, it would get further momentum once all travel restrictions are lifted off, he claimed.

Also, Biman Managing Director and CEO expressed, he does not see any impediment ahead that might come in the way of the airline's growth. He claimed

Biman is already an international airline, saying, it did better than many other international airlines during the last few years.

In the market, Biman has a bad name for its inefficiency in ground handling at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Agreeing to this, the Managing Director and CEO said, Biman, being the only ground handler, has to make huge investment to build its capacity. He shared that in 2021, Biman has assessed its capacity need (gap) and the airline's board is well aware of the situation.

Even the State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahbub Ali has already given directive to enhance Biman's ground handling capacity for providing better services, CEO of Biman expressed.

With the existing fleet, Biman MD claimed there is little scope to expand the airline's network. "Yet, we shall make our endeavor to optimise our utilisation of aircraft by adding some more destinations," he assured.

Also, Biman has taken a number of steps including recruitment and training of its human resources, to make a better name in providing better services, said the airline's Managing Director, on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee. The Managing Director and CEO concluded, he looks ahead to more prosperity of Biman in the coming days.