

## Passengers hostage to Biman ground handling agents at HSIA

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka : Passengers' sufferings at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital have increased manifold as ground handling works by the country's national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines hit a new low.

Passengers have become hostage to Biman's poor and irresponsible baggage handling performance. As a result, thousands of passengers are suffering daily as they are being forced to wait for hours to get their baggage after arrival at Dhaka Airport.

According to international standard across all airports worldwide, passengers' baggage must arrive in the belt area in 20 minutes.

In 2017, even the country's national flag carrier introduced Red Cap, a mechanism used in major international airports across the globe, to reduce the baggage delivery time to 20 minutes from one hour at Dhaka Airport.

Yet, the flag carrier has never been successful to serve the purpose.

Due to the irresponsible attitude of Biman ground handling agents, it is currently taking over two hours for the baggage to reach the belt area, leaving passengers in despair.

A passenger, citing anonymity, flying on a Gulf Air flight from London landed at HSIA on July 6 at 5:20 am. After getting the baggage out of the aircraft and putting

it in the trolley, the Biman ground handling agents left the area as their shift ended at 6:00 am.

The trolley with the baggage remained at that same position as the agents of the next shift were yet to take over while hundreds of passengers had no other option but to wait at the baggage belt area in uncertainties - all tired and worn out - after flying for so long.

Even passengers of other flights by other airlines that landed during that time at the airport suffered from the same unfortunate and distressful fate.

After almost an hour of waiting, the next shift of Biman ground handling agents came and brought the trolleys with the baggage to the belt area at around 7:30 am and passengers were finally able to get their respective baggage.

On top of it, the shortage of trolleys at the airport made the situation even worse as passengers had to wait in long queues to get a single trolley to carry their baggage. That too is a matter of luck as many passengers could not even find one.

The trolley crisis has been lingering on for years now and it seems that there is no end of it.

This cruel situation at Dhaka Airport is taking place every day for a long time and thousands of passengers are suffering due to the irresponsible attitude of Biman ground handling agents and airport authorities.

According to reports, on June 27, Shamim Islam landed at Dhaka Airport on a flight of Gulf Air from Bahrain at 6:00 am. However, it took over two hours for his baggage to reach the belt area. Hence, he missed his flight from Dhaka to Sylhet scheduled at 8:00 am. The poor passenger had to purchase tickets to Sylhet again with no refund.

Reports further mentioned, a Qatari immigrant named Md Ibrahim reached Dhaka Airport on June 17 by a Qatar Airways flight at 2:10 am. He had to wait over three hours at the baggage belt area for his baggage to come. He sighed, there is no seating arrangement at the baggage belt area. Neither there is any arrangement to have a glass of water.

Passengers are having to wait for hours and hours in such miserable state for years now and the authorities are not batting an eye, claimed the passenger.

Reports also added, on July 1, Saudi Arabian immigrant Biplob Ahmed, landed at Dhaka Airport at 11:50 am on a flight of Saudi Arabian Airlines. Yet, he received his baggage after having to wait for straight two hours.

On June 16, irregularities in baggage delivery were discussed at the monthly coordination meeting of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism. At the meeting presided by the Ministry's Secretary Mokammel Hossain, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahbub Ali instructed to increase manpower and equipment to run ground handling activities properly.

In terms of baggage handling, the maximum time was instructed to be kept below 60 minutes.

At the meeting, M Mafidur Rahman, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh also advised to appoint an officer at the airport to monitor baggage handling activities properly.

On July 3, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen even blasted officials at Dhaka Airport for the sufferings of the passengers who are having to wait for hours for their baggage upon arrival.

The Minister said the complaints he heard frequently from expatriates were found to be true when he arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport from Portugal on June 3.

"I arrived around 10:30 am and saw long queues of passengers waiting for their

baggage. I discovered that a flight from Dubai landed at 8:45 am, but baggage was not put on the belt even at 10:45 am," said Momen to the media at the foreign ministry later in the day.

Furthermore, many of the passengers did not find any trolley to carry the baggage from the belt to the exit, he added.

The Foreign Minister then called the manager concerned and asked about the delays in baggage handling and why trolleys were not found.

"The manager said many flights landed at the same time and then there was an [end of] shift [for employees] in the morning and the employees of the next shift were yet to arrive," Momen said, adding that he got angry at that point.

"Terminate them if they don't come on time and recruit new people,' I shouted."

He then called State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahbub Ali and informed him of the passengers' sufferings.

Even Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina earlier ordered concerned authorities to urgently resolve the aforementioned and other relevant crisis at Dhaka Airport.

However, it appears that nothing is working to ensure better services to the passengers at the airport by Biman ground handling agents and the airport authorities.

At the airports across the country, Biman Bangladesh Airlines alone is responsible for ground handling works. All other airlines have no choice but to resort to Biman Bangladesh Airlines to operate ground handling services on their behalf.

According to reports, in the last three years, Biman earned BDT 3 thousand 48 crore from ground handling services.

Even though ground handling is a vital earning source for Biman, the airline apparently is doing nothing to ensure smooth management, claimed aviation experts of the country.

They recommended, if Biman cannot improve their services, then they should either leave ground handling services to the respective airlines. Or now is the time that the authorities concerned should actively consider allowing one or two more ground handling service providers with international reputes to ensure smooth passenger handling capabilities across all airports in Bangladesh.

Also, Biman can bring in more agencies to do ground handling works, if they cannot ensure smooth operation themselves.

Changing of shifts should not be an issue for which the passengers will suffer, said aviation stakeholders.

The previous shift of agents should leave only after handing over the responsibility of their job to the next shift to ensure flawless services to the passengers.

What they are doing now is outrageous and this must be put to an end, they concluded.