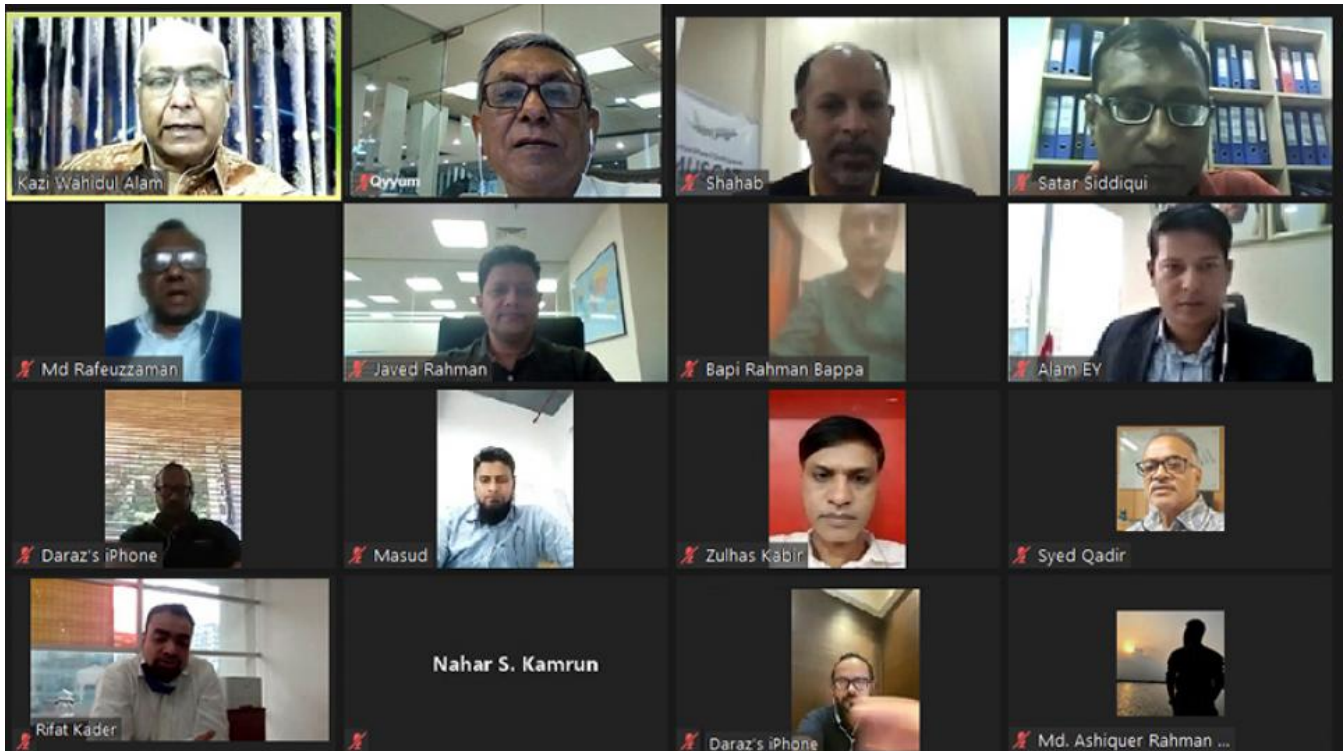


BD aviation market booming due to repatriation of stranded passengers

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: The movement in air travel, due to the repatriation of stranded passengers, has resulted in a boom in the aviation market of Bangladesh. Thus, we are witnessing new airlines coming in and old ones gradually increasing their frequencies in this post pandemic era.

This was revealed at a meeting, arranged virtually on September 30 by the premier travel trade publication The Bangladesh Monitor to announce the results of the air travellers' survey, it conducted recently. The meeting was attended by the representatives from both local and international airlines, travel trade personnel, as well as media representatives.

The Bangladesh aviation market is doing better than other markets in the world, said Mohijur Rahman Javed, Sales Manager, Emirates Bangladesh. "Mainly due to repatriation of stranded passengers." As soon as the travel restrictions in other countries are lifted, there will be more movement, he added. This will lead to a good pressure in the winter schedule.

Qazi Zahirul Qyyum, Director, Expolanka Group, which represents various airlines, including Etihad Airways, agreed and claimed this repatriation market of stranded

passengers destined to Gulf and Middle East countries will be available for two-three months more. Therefore, Etihad Airways, which resumes operations to Dhaka soon, will be increasing flight frequencies to accommodate them gradually.

This has led to new carriers coming into the market such as Jazeera Airways and Air Arabia Abu Dhabi which are to start flight operations to Dhaka in October, he added.

M Masudur Rahman, Sales Manager, Malaysian Airlines also mentioned that Europe and Middle East have good passenger traffic right now, compared to Asia due to travel restrictions in place. "But we're still hopeful," he added.

Since Singapore eased its travel restrictions, Singapore Airlines will also be resuming flight services to and from Dhaka, effective October 20, initially with twice a week flight, informed Rifat Kader, Sales Manager, Singapore Airlines.

Daraz Mahmud from Travelport claimed that Bangladesh had the highest air travel movement in APAC. To boost international flow further, he suggested the airlines and tour operators promote travel to destinations like Turkey, Egypt, and Dubai which have their borders open for foreign visitors.

On the other hand, the domestic market is witnessing tremendous growth in air traffic after the pandemic. Mesbah-ul Alam, Head of Sales and Marketing, NOVOAIR mentioned the carrier is operating 21 flights now daily, which includes 5 daily to Cox's Bazar. They will be adding two more in October.

Since CAAB lifted the seat limitation policy, the occupancy level in the domestic sector has returned to almost normal.

In terms of destinations, Cox's Bazar is having an encouraging passenger turnout, Mesbah said, adding, "Now we are promoting travel to Sylhet and Chattogram too with attractive holiday packages."

Commenting on the survey conducted by The Bangladesh Monitor, Shahab from Salam Air stressed that it will surely help the airlines to strategise in the post COVID-19 scenario. "It will come handy for developing confidence in the market which is essential right now," he added. In October, Salam Air will also be resuming two weekly flight services to Chattogram, in addition to Dhaka.

The results of the survey state that air travel is considered to be the safest mode of transportation in Bangladesh.

The survey was participated by 3,452 travellers between September 01 and 25. Of them, 26 percent were in the 20-30 age group; 22 percent were in the 31-40; 20 percent were in 41-50 age group and 18 per cent were in 51-60 age group. While the rest are above 60 years of age. Of the total respondents 87 per cent are from Business profession; 10 percent service and 03 percent are students.

Amid the ongoing pandemic, 66.7 percent respondents felt that air travel is the safest, while 23.3 percent opted for rail transportation and 10.1 percent considered surface transportation.

On the question concerning challenges for air airlines 37.7 per cent felt that under

the prevailing situation, restoration of passengers' confidence is the biggest challenge for the airlines, 33.5 percent felt maintaining health and hygiene, while 28.8 percent think travel restrictions in place, is the challenge.

A majority of 49.9 percent respondents felt that the biggest concern of air travel in Bangladesh at this moment is the high cost, while 31.4 percent consider personal safety and 18.7 percent considered protocols at the airports as the major concern.

A 57 percent travellers felt that the health and hygiene standards of the local airlines are satisfactory; while 30.7 percent considered it not so well and the rest 12.3 percent termed it as perfect.

As regards the purpose of air travel within the country, 35.8 percent respondents said they would travel for business purposes only at this time, while 30.5 per cent for leisure and 33.7 per cent for family purpose. Among the regular travellers in the domestic sectors, 32.9 percent have already undertaken a travel, while 41.6 percent consider traveling in the next three months. However, 25.5 percent of people will not take a travel within this year.

In case of international travel, 53.5 percent of the respondents will travel for the purpose of holiday at this moment, while 29.4 percent for business and 17.1 percent for medical purpose.

A 59.7 percent holidays seekers prefer to make their dream holidays in the countries of Asia in a post COVID situation, while 32.1 per cent in Europe and 8.2 per cent in Americas.

With 39.5 percent votes, India has been considered as the preferred medical destination, Thailand was favoured by 31.7 per cent and Singapore 28.7 per cent.

In response to a question on how soon they plan to undertake an international trip, 47.1 percent said they will not plan a trip unless an effective vaccine is found and 43.4 percent said they may do in next three months, while 9.6 per cent have already made a travel.

As regards to the purchase of air tickets, 68.3 percent respondents said they would buy their tickets through an online travel agency (OTA), 22.5 percent preferred a traditional travel agency, while 9.3 percent directly from the Airline.

Kazi Wahidul Alam, Editor of The Bangladesh Monitor, concluded the conference saying, "We must also consider the possibility of a second wave of the virus approaching in winter. It is encouraging that people have started to travel. But we must comply with health guidelines while travelling to prevent further health crises in the country."