

## SriLankan Airlines eyes clear skies

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Dhaka: SriLankan Airlines, the national carrier, plans to expand its fleet to 25 aircraft and is moving forward with the acquisition of two additional wide-body planes by the end of this year. The move aims to boost flight frequency on existing routes and resume services on currently suspended ones, an official said.

Recently, SriLankan Airlines added a new Airbus A330-200 to its fleet on dry lease, the first to join the airline in seven years.

Chairman of the national carrier Sarath Ganegoda told Daily Mirror that his office had budgeted for two more aircraft, but non-availability of them in sufficient numbers in the world market had hampered plans for increasing the fleet.

Asked how flight operations will increase, he said the frequency to certain European destinations such as Frankfurt in Germany. He added

that the airline is looking at resuming operations to Beijing in China to boost tourism.

Currently, SriLankan Airlines operates with 23 aircraft, with the latest addition.

The previous government originally planned to sell off the cash-strapped airline under its plan for restructuring the state-owned enterprises. Later, it abandoned the plan.

The new government, led by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, appears to have a different plan for the development of the national carrier instead of privatising it, mainly because of its contribution to the national economy by bringing tourists.

President Dissanayake, in his 2025 budget speech, announced the allocation of Rs.20 billion for the settlement of the airline's legacy debt. The government was to sign an agreement with the banks and set aside Rs. 10 billion for loan capital repayment in 2025 and Rs. 10 billion for interest payments.

The development of the airline industry is challenging in the world today since there aren't enough aircraft in the world after COVID-19. Former Chief Executive Officer of SriLankan Airlines Richard Nuttall said in an interview with media last year that engineers and technicians left the industry after the pandemic.

According to him, the manufacturers stopped manufacturing because they couldn't put people together during the pandemic.

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