

## **Fare difference between Bangladesh, other countries pushing passengers towards foreign travel agencies**

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Dhaka : Country's travel industry is undergoing a grave crisis at the moment, as fare differences are being observed between Bangladesh and other nations. Airlines are charging more for every single ticket purchased in Bangladesh, while the same ticket will cost at least 40 per cent less, if purchased from another country. Hence, customers are shying away from booking tickets from Bangladesh's travel agencies. Rather, they are purchasing those from the foreign counterparts.

Abdus Salam Aref, President of Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh, said this while talking to The Bangladesh Monitor at his office in the capital recently.

As a result, about 20 per cent-BDT 8,000 crore-of the country's total

annual air ticket sales of BDT 40,000 crore is going abroad, stressed Aref, adding, Bangladesh and its travel agencies are missing out on such a big volume of business.

Furthermore, a handful of Bangladesh's online travel agencies (OTAs) have connected the APIs of foreign travel agencies into their respective systems and are selling tickets to the customers at lower fares than the others.

By doing so, 8-10 of such OTAs have taken over 50-60 per cent of the country's market, while the rest 40 per cent has been occupied by the foreign counterparts, informed Aref.

If the government does not put a stop to this syndicate, 90 per cent of the 4000 travel agencies operating in Bangladesh will collapse, claimed Aref.

ATAB has addressed the issue with the ICT Division as well as the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT), urging them to prevent the usage of foreign APIs in Bangladesh, informed the President.

Another malpractice currently in place among OTAs of the country, Aref expressed, is offering incentives to take advance money from clients and providing customers with unrealistic discounts, only to capture the market share unethically.

Aref informed, ATAB has urged Bangladesh Bank, NBR and MoCAT to monitor these, to ensure fair competition in the market.

Such syndicates are further adding to the woes of the travel industry, which is already suffering from a shortage of passengers and flights.

Following the mass uprising against the former government and flash flood in many districts of the country, from mid-July, Bangladesh is observing less people travelling both domestically and internationally.

The shortage of passengers has led the airlines shrink flights on many routes, including domestic and international destinations like India, as certain visa issues remain from the latter's end for Bangladeshis following the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's escape to India during the ousting of the former Awami League government.

On the other hand, earlier, many foreign airlines had been unable to

repatriate their earnings to their respective countries due to the US dollar crisis in Bangladesh. That also made many international carriers reduce their flight services to and from the country prior.

Owing to the aforementioned reasons, sales in the country's travel industry have shrunk down to less than 50 per cent currently compared to the same period last year, claimed Aref, adding, it might take up to six months for the sector to recover.