

## **IATA not ensuring service to accredited travel agents in Bangladesh**

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Dhaka : It is a matter of great regret that International Air Transport Association does not offer any service to the IATA accredited travel agents in Bangladesh. The association has a small office in the capital without enough manpower. Upon reaching them, travel agencies of our country are shunned and asked to contact IATA's office in Singapore.

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

In Bangladesh, transaction between the airlines and travel agencies amount to BDT 30,000 crore per year. Of which, BDT 22-25,000 crore transaction takes place through IATA since travel agencies are bound to pay the member airlines through IATA's BSP channel.

Even after having such a huge transaction volume taking place in the country, IATA is not expanding its presence in Bangladesh, sighed the Secretary General.

"Therefore, the association should open a large service-oriented office in Bangladesh with enough human resources," said Aref.

On top of it, the airline trade body is continuously increasing its yearly accreditation fee and BSP Link charges, among others, for the agencies which is just plain unfair, stressed the Secretary General.

"ATAB has urged IATA to not impose such high charges on the travel agencies at the moment, while they are currently in efforts to revive from the disastrous effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, IATA did not listen," sighed Aref.

Speaking of which, Aref mentioned, back in 2019, IATA announced its GoLite Agent accreditation for Bangladeshi travel agents with no minimum financial security. It has been four years since then but IATA could not implement it yet, stressed Aref.

Nevertheless, the agencies are having to pay all the charges imposed by IATA meanwhile, even before starting their business as an IATA accredited agent, stressed the Secretary General, adding that this is just plain wrong.

This shows that IATA is selling its accreditation in Bangladesh in an effort to take away revenue from the market without actually providing the agencies with the facilities and benefits it promises, claimed Aref.

"ATAB urges the concerned authorities like the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, and Bangladesh Bank to look into the matter with utmost priority in an effort to ensure IATA's service to the country's travel agencies because the lack of it is resulting in suffering for thousands," said Aref.

The current committee of the country's apex body of travel agents took responsibility right after the pandemic when the industry was reeling from the effects of Covid-19.

Since, amid the pandemic, the global travel industry was halted, payments to travel agencies by many airlines were due.

Upon taking responsibility, the current committee supported the recovery efforts of the agencies. They strengthened communication between the airlines and travel agencies, helping the latter receive lion share of their dues from the airlines, claimed Aref.

Also, amid the pandemic, many agencies' license got expired and there were issues in the renewal process. ATAB spoke to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism expedited the license renewal process of the agencies facilitating them to restart operations in an effort to revive from the pandemic effects.

It has been a long running concern in the trade that many airlines are not offering capping to the agencies even after the country's law clearly states that any IATA accredited and licensed agent is eligible for capping from the airlines.

ATAB also addressed this issue by speaking to the airlines, facilitating capping for agents from most of the airlines, expressed Aref, mentioning, "If any other travel agency is left to get capping from the airlines, do reach out to ATAB."

Furthermore, ATAB has urged the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism to form a monitoring cell to oversee the activities of all the stakeholders of the travel industry to ensure everything runs smooth and nobody gets deprived, claimed the secretary general.