

## **Biman crowned with CEO no 42, yet to get out of limping existence**

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Dhaka : Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited, the national flag carrier - that is yet to get out of limping existence\_ has been crowned with a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) - the number 42 in 49 years.

On January 4, 1973, Biman Bangladesh Airlines was born, through a presidential order, signed by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. 49 years is fairly long time to be on solid ground operationally. Unfortunately, however, for various man-made reasons, originating mainly from wrong policies pursued over the years, this has not happened. In fact, the operation has shrunk and are still in disarray.

One of the wrong policies was very frequent change of top administrative officer of the airline and that too with mostly non-aviation civil and military bureaucrats-not with airline professionals.

True to the saying "morning shows the day"- Capt Nasir Haider, the first chief of Biman stayed on the job for only 13 days. In the first five years, seven more persons served as chief of newly formed Biman. They are: Capt F Rahman for 8 months; Air Comdr A K Khandaker for 10 months; Mosleh Uddin Ahmed for 8 months; Hadeyat Ahmed for one year 5 and a half months; Kurshid Anwar for 5 months (during Kurshid Anwar's stay, designation was changed from President to Managing

Director); Azim Uddin Ahmed for 3 days only and Abdul Mannan for 3 years 7 months.

#### Long list of CEOs

The administrative head or CEO of Biman get three different designations. The first three CEOs were designated as Administrators, the next three were designated as Chairman and the rest are Managing Directors. The following are the list of CEOs:

1. Captain N S Haider (January 1, 1972 to January 22, 1972). 2. Captain Mashiur Rahman (January 22, 1972 to September 27, 1972) and 3. Air Commodore A K Khandaker (September 27, 1972 to July 27, 1973). They were designated as Administrator. 4. Mosleh Uddin Ahmed (27.3.73 to 5.12.75). 5. Hadayet Ahmed (5.12.75 to 19.1.77). 6. M K Anwar (19.1.77 to 24.6.77). They were designated as Chairman.

Under the law promulgated in 1977, the Chief Executive Officer of Biman was designated as Managing Director. They are:

7. M K Anwar (24.6.77 to 22.8.77). 8. Azimuddin Ahmed (22.8.77 to 25.8.77). 9. Abdul Mannan (25.8.1978 to 27.4.1981). 10. Manzoor-ul-Karim (30.4.1981 to 26.5.1984). 11. Syed Shamim Ahsan (26.5.1984 to 25.11.1984). 12. M Faizur Razzaque (25.11.1984 to 3.9.1987). 13. Group Captain Shawkat-ul Islam (Retd) (15.9.1987 to 12.12.1990). 14. A M Mufazzal Karim (15.12.1990 to 20.11.1991). 15. Abdul Muyid Chowdhury (20.11.1991 to 27.3.1994). 16. M Mahmoodur Rahman (27.3.94 to 3.4.94). 17. Ahbab Ahmed (3.4.1994 to 22.5.1995). 18. M Mahmoodur Rahman (22.5.95 to 28.8.95). 19. Mohammad Omer Farooq (25.8.1995 to 22.8.1996). 20. Al-Amin Chowdhury (22.8.1996 to 12.6.1997). 21. Air Commodore M Rafiqul Islam (12.6.1997 to 10.9.2000). 22. Air Commodore M Khusrul Alam (10.9.2000 to 31.12.2003). 23. Air Commodore Lutfar Rahman (31.12.2003 to 31.12.2004). 24. M Mahmoodur Rahman (1.1.2004 to 5.2.2004). 25. Air Commodore Liaquat Ali (5.2.2004 to 21.4.2004). 26. M Mahmoodur Rahman (27.4.2004). 27. Akhtar Hossain khan (27.4.2004 to 14.6.2004). 28. M Mahmoodur Rahman (14.6.2004 to 13.3.2006). 29. Dr. Abdul Momen (14.3.2006 to 11.9.2008). 30. Gr Capt Mashiur Rahman (Actg) (11.9.2008 to 16.9.2008). 31. Air Comdr Zahed Quddus (17.9.2008 to 5.4.2009). 32. A M Mosaddeq (Actg) (6.4.2009 to 8.6.2009). 33. Air Comdr Zakiul Islam (8.6.2009 to 25.4.2012). 34. Capt Sk Nasiruddin (Actg) (25.4.2012 to 27.6.2012). 35. A M Mosaddeq (Actg) (27.6.2012 to 17.3.2013). 36. Cavin John Steel (18.3.2013 to 17.4.2014). 37. A M Mosaddeq (Actg) (18.4.2014 to 4.1.2015). 38. Kayle Haid (5.1.2015 to 3.1.2016). 39. Wing Comdr M M Asaduzzaman (Actg) (4.1.2016 to 31.5.2016). 40. A M Mosaddeq (1.6.2016 to 30.4.2019). 41. Capt Farhat Hasan Jamil (30.5.219 to 15.9.2020). 42. Mokabbir Hossain (15.9.2020 to 25.2.2021) 43. Dr Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal (6.2.2021.....)

#### Stuck in non-growth

Potentials were there and prospect of becoming a vibrant airline excelling in aviation was great, but unfortunately, nearly five decades of mismanagement, has made Biman to suffer and to endure limping existence.

Management and fleet are the two vital areas of any airline and efficiency of both greatly contributes to success. After long last, Biman is now equipped with fairly adequate modern fleet but there is absence of professional management to run the airline professionally, efficiently and commercially.

#### Lack of professionalism

The capacity shortage and un-reliable fleet is no more troubling Biman. Frequent change of CEO, since its establishment in 1972, has deprived Biman of professional and solid leadership as well as continuity of management. Different management style of different persons, their varied non-commercial background, levels of their

efficiency and attitude to the job also causing harm to the proper management of the airline.

In 49 years, the position was changed 42 times and 36 persons graced the chair, as three persons Lt Col (Retd) M Mahmudur Rahman; A M Mosaddeq Ahmed and M K Anwar, occupied the chair more than once. Rahman and Ahmed four times each as acting CEO and Anwar in his five months stay hold the position of President and Managing Director.

In most of nearly five decades of existence, the managements that the airline got were far from the efficient managements it needed. Coupled with deficiency in management, un-restricted interference from the top, particularly by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT) and not so welcome hold of unions, have made the management of Biman devoid of any vitality. The situation has resulted in weak administration and in-efficient management. There is no sign of any action to lift the management of Biman out of this morass.

The 36 persons have so far graced the position of CEO. Most of the CEOs are from civil and military bureaucracy, with no knowledge of running a commercial airline. Of the very few non-bureaucrats, three were pilots and two were foreigners and their total period on the job were also short.

After turning Biman into PLC, two foreign professionals were appointed as MD and CEO. Their appointment in isolation without other changes made no difference in management. Moreover, for reason unknown, they left the job serving only one year each.

The promise and its death

Not very long ago, the national flag carrier of Bangladesh-envisaged a bright new era with new fleet, new brand image and identity and new management. But the bright prospect of the new era has almost totally dimmed, due to withdrawal of earlier efforts to provide new identity, induct professional management and infuse skilled manpower-to make Biman a modern and efficient airline. The promise of a new era not in sight anymore-at least under existing situation.

After turning Biman into Public Limited Company (PLC), during the rule of immediate past Caretaker Government, the re-constituted Board of Directors of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited initiated measures to take the national flag carrier to a new era with adequate modern fleet, new look and professional management.

The Board finalised modernisation of Biman fleet. 10 aircraft-four Dreamliner B787s, four B777-200ERs and two B737s, with option for equal number of aircraft, were ordered and already all the aircraft have been delivered.

The Board also started 'Road Show' to attract foreign assistance to re-structure the carrier and to recast management, to run the airline professionally, efficiently and commercially.

One of the major targets in this regard was to install efficient professional management for the national flag carrier.

All these efforts are time consuming measures. There is no short cut. As a result, except order for new fleet, all the other much needed initiatives taken during the rule of caretaker government to make Biman a well-equipped, well managed efficient and profitable airline, could not come to fruition.

Great setback

Identity renewal had been a well-known approach in the past, but it was now a strategic objective and an important operational and marketing requirement necessitated by conditions in the industry and by the challenge of the future.

To the joy and delight of all concerned, Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited took the

first step towards a 'New Era' with the unveiling of new logo and livery-the essential new corporate identity on February 3, 2010. But the joy was short lived, as the progress hit a stumbling block and decision concerning new logo and livery was overturned in April. A sudden unexpected and unexplained decision of the government is the cause and the old logo and livery was reinstated.

#### No restructuring

There is urgent need for Biman to tailor and implement comprehensive programmes for the development of services and enhancement of standards both on the ground and in the air, including reservations, check-in procedures, catering and entertainment programmes, among others.

It was strongly felt that Biman must have services, structure, management methods, service standards and everything that enhances the airline's position and reputation, enables it to compete on equal terms with others, to provide distinctive service to achieve success and excellence.

But, unfortunately, the efforts that were made to find experienced international operator to assist in getting professional management as well as re-structuring Biman to make it more dynamic, more flexible with rapid response to market demands and customers' needs, stopped after change of government. There is no sign of revival of the effort.

#### Poor manpower

In the absence of direct officer level recruitment at Biman, the middle management positions-Assistant Manager, Manager and Deputy General Manager-are presently manned mostly by "unionised promotes". As a result, quality of supervision has nosedived. Close connection of these promotes with the unions is also hampering proper functioning of the organisation.

It may be noted that because of the opposition of the unions, in nearly 50 years history of Biman, only about 40 officers in four batches could be recruited. The present vacuum in management is because of that.

Since its birth in January, 1972, barring insignificant exceptions, Biman has failed to recruit proper manpower mainly because of disagreement between the management and unions. In early 1980s, the management and unions concluded an agreement on the question of fresh recruitment. The two sides agreed that 35 per cent of the vacancies would be filled by direct recruitment and the rest by promotion from lower level. Unfortunately, the management of Biman has not been able to make the recruitment as agreed, mainly due to opposition from various unions.

This failure has created a serious situation for the airline. For long, main stay of Biman's management was the qualified group of officers that it inherited from PIA. With all of these people have gone on retirement fairly long ago and no back up executive cadre followed, the situation in Biman in this regard does not look good.

#### Pathetic situation

Factors having direct bearing on success of airline includes the best use of technology, communications, aircraft and equipment. Biman has made huge investment in new aircraft. With modern aircraft in the fleet, skilled and efficient workforce is needed to ensure quality services, efficiency and profitability. But situation is alarming. The need is immediate corrective action to save the national flag carrier from fatal damage. There is no alternative than immediate infusion of new blood and intensive training programme to elevate level of efficiency and improve standard of services.

There is no sign of change in the situation, although the list of CEOs getting unusually longer through rapid change at the top. Corrective measures are needed

to be taken immediately to put the national flag carrier on right track.