

# Dhaka, Bangladesh gridlock delays Air Astra, Fly Dhaka debut

Posted on March 11, 2022 by Business Editor



The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) aims to delay the certification of startups Air Astra and Fly Dhaka to avoid further congestion at Dhaka, says Chairman Mafidur Rahman.

He told The Daily Star that airlines have been facing a space shortage airside and in the existing terminals as the airport's only runway has been closed from 0000L (1800Z) to 0800L (0200Z) daily since December 10, 2021, in preparation for the construction of taxiways for a third terminal.

He said the eight-hour flight ban was disrupting flight schedules and passenger handling at the airport. About 110 to 115 flights of 28 airlines were currently operating to/from Dhaka Airport, carrying up to 21,000 passengers within the reduced travel period.

Airline officials had reported chaotic operating conditions and blamed airport authorities for failing to provide emergency facilities.

Amid the present congestion, CAAB was discouraging the entry of more operators from the airport, Rahman said. "Once the situation becomes normal after the completion of the construction and expansion of the taxiways, we will [re]consider the matter," he said.

Fly Dhaka and Air Astra have already secured "no-objection certificates" (NOCs) from CAAB, but are yet to receive their air operator's certificates (AOCs). The regulator has asked the startups to slow down the finalisation of their certification, including the procurement of aircraft.

Bengali-language daily newspaper Bonik Barta reports CAAB has also asked the two airlines to set up bases at other airports – such as Chittagong and Sylhet – due to the parking space shortage at Dhaka Airport.

Air Astra Chief Executive Officer Imran Asif, told The Daily Star the airline was in the final stages of leasing three ATR72-600s and had already unveiled its livery after having received its NOC in November 2021. Despite the challenges of setting up a base outside Dhaka, Air Astra was planning to set up a base at Chittagong and aimed to start operations from there in mid-June 2022, he told Banik Barta. He said the first two ATR72-600s were scheduled for delivery in April. “Hopefully, it will be possible to get [our] AOC within the next month. In the meantime, all the work including recruitment of manpower and setting up of offices at different airports will be completed,” he said.

Fly Dhaka Managing Director Anisul Islam Mahmud said the nascent carrier was awaiting its AOC. The company had slowed down its startup operations as Dhaka Airport was not ready, company officials told Bonik Barta.

