

## CAREER

# Why aspiring Bangladeshi pilots seek TRAINING ABROAD

NUSRAT MEHERIN FAIZA

"When I grow up, I want to be a pilot" – this is a dream many children hold onto as they're captivated by the allure of soaring through the sky. As time goes by, this dream often collides with harsh realities and only a few remain committed to this goal. The rest either pursue a different career path or abandon their dream altogether due to the financial challenges of being a pilot.

In Bangladesh, turning the dream of becoming a pilot into reality is particularly difficult. Those who remain committed to their dreams must put up with significant financial burdens, obsolete training facilities, and uncertainty about future career prospects. These challenges often force aspiring pilots to make tough decisions, either switching to a different career field or, in some cases, seeking training opportunities abroad.

The cost of training in flying schools in Bangladesh presents a significant challenge. Flight schools, in general, can be expensive, irrespective of the country. However, the major issue most aspiring Bangladeshi pilots, who seek training abroad, face is in terms of the standard of the training facilities offered here. In most cases, these facilities are not worth the money trainees have to pay.

"Two primary deciding factors for most aspiring pilots are the time required to complete flight training and the cost of training," says Ahmed Farhan, a commercial pilot trained at a private flying school in Dhaka. "Due to the increase in fuel prices globally, flight training in Bangladesh has become significantly more expensive. Aspiring pilots realise that the cost of training in Bangladesh is comparable to that of schools abroad. Given the choice, why pay nearly the same amount and lose more time?"

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The main issue that doesn't justify the cost is the outdated and poorly maintained aircraft that flying schools use here. The most commonly used training aircraft are the Cessna 150 and 172 models, which were once reliable but now show signs of wear and tear, often disrupting training schedules.

"The maximum number of aircraft a flight school has in Bangladesh is five, while the minimum is one," Farhan added. "This is not enough to accommodate all the trainees who are waiting to get their flight hours, leading to long delays. The unpredictable weather further adds to the challenge. As a result, many find it more appealing to go abroad for training to finish in about a year and accumulate nearly 100 flight hours."

Besides, the aviation training options in Bangladesh are limited compared to countries such as the United States, Canada, Thailand, or Australia, where

abundant training facilities are equipped with the latest technology. "The disparity in training options is a major reason why many aspiring pilots choose to go abroad for their training and education to access better resources and gain more comprehensive experience," said Farshid Ahamed Siad, a private pilot trained in the United Kingdom.

Rafid Hussain, a commercial pilot license (CPL) holder who completed his training at a renowned flying academy in Melbourne, Australia, emphasised on the high standards maintained by Australia's Civil

In addition to paperwork and regulatory issues, the job market in Bangladesh provides limited opportunities for pilots. Since students, in most cases, cannot finish their training on time in Bangladesh, airlines themselves struggle to fill in the pilot shortage from time to time. Bangladesh's aviation sector is relatively small, with a limited number of airlines and minimal openings for newly qualified pilots. "Competition for these positions is fierce, and the pay scales often need to catch up to those in other countries," added Farshid.



ILLUSTRATION: ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). CASA ensures that Australian aviation programmes meet the highest international benchmarks. When asked why he chose Melbourne for flight training over any other location, he highlighted Moorabbin Airport's extensive flight training facilities. The airport is Australia's leading general aviation flight training airport, home to around ten flight academies with well-maintained aircraft like the Cirrus SR20, Diamond DA40, and Piper Archer. Rafid noted that this choice helped him obtain the CASA license and develop valuable soft skills.

The regulatory environment also adds to the complexity. The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) oversees pilot licensing and regulation, a process which often gets lengthy and challenging. Another issue that compounds the problem is obtaining an equivalency certificate if a student is from a different curriculum. Some student pilots suggested that the CAAB can embrace a more flexible policy regarding the recognition of Cambridge curriculum certificates, no matter where the training is completed. Currently, the pilots from the Cambridge curriculum are required to secure an equivalency certificate from the Dhaka Education Board, a laborious process that can take several months to complete. Once the equivalency certificate is in hand, CAAB allows these student pilots to embark on their flight training. This often leads to delays in flying hours – something trainees cannot afford.

Despite the challenges within the aviation training sectors, an initiative has been launched by a private airline in Bangladesh to train cadet pilots. This is a commendable development in the local aviation industry as it enables selected cadets to undergo flight training in Florida, where the duration to complete their training is significantly shorter compared to the typical timelines in Bangladesh. More specifically, the cadets are able to graduate in a mere year and a half. This acceleration in training not only demands less time commitment but also offers the cadets an early start to their careers. It facilitates their swift return to serve as commercial airline pilots, a beneficial move for both the cadets and the airline industry in general.

While the challenges aspiring pilots face in Bangladesh are deep-rooted, there are still signs of progress. The opening of the new terminal and introduction of new aircraft for international and domestic flights have renewed hope that the country's airline infrastructure will receive further investment. With the right support, investment, and proper infrastructure, aspiring pilots can complete their flight hours on time. Through continued advocacy and reform, the dream of soaring high may soon be within reach for many more young Bangladeshis.

*Nusrat Meherin Faiza is a writer, tutor, and chronic overthinker. Reach out to fuel her overthinking at nmfaiza15@gmail.com*