

# Four airports remain stalled, forgotten

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**Online Desk :** The expansion of Bogura Airport has halted due to the lack of a land acquisition proposal. On the other hand, Ishwardi Airport in Pabna has remained shut despite its immense potential. Moreover, no initiatives have been taken to reopen Lalmonirhat Airport and the Thakurgaon Airport has been closed due to several issues. If operations begin, these four airports could transform the socio-economic scenario of the north. A new era of air communication would unfold. Additionally, trade and development in 16 districts of northern Bangladesh could see a major lift. People in these areas are demanding the commercial operation of these airports.

**Bogura Airport :** According to sources, Bogura Airport was scheduled to begin operations this month after 16 years. Construction work on the runway, taxiway, dumbbell, and apron surface area — worth Tk 11 crore — is currently ongoing. However, the absence of a land acquisition proposal has halted the airport's launch. The initiative to establish Bogura Airport was taken in 1987. During its 1991–1996 term, the BNP government made policy decisions and approved a Tk 22 crore project to develop the airport. Its structural work was completed in 2000, but no flights have operated in the 25 years since. Recently, the aviation ministry instructed the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) to form a four-member committee to launch the airport. The committee visited the site, submitted a report, and began an expansion project. Bogura Deputy Commissioner Hosna Afroza told Bangladesh Pratidin that construction has been completed, but expansion work is stalled due to the absence of a land acquisition proposal.

**Ishwardi Airport :** Traders and investors from Pabna and three surrounding districts have long been demanding the reopening of Ishwardi Airport. According to sources, the airport's potential has increased significantly due to the ongoing construction of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and the Ishwardi EPZ. Foreign nationals, buyers, and officials from Russia and elsewhere could greatly benefit from the airport. If reopened, it would benefit not only Pabna but also neighbouring districts such as Natore, Sirajganj, and Kushtia. Ishwardi is 175 km from Dhaka, which takes six to seven hours by road. Thousands are forced to travel daily via bus or train. Over 5,000 Russians work in the Rooppur project, and road travel to Dhaka wastes valuable time. Built during British rule, Ishwardi Airport had regular flights from 1962 to 1989. It was reopened in 1994 after Tk 4 crore in renovations but shut down again due to low passenger numbers. United Airways briefly resumed flights in October 2013, but operations ceased again on May 2014, after just six months. Pabna DC Mohammad Mofizul Islam told Bangladesh Pratidin that reopening Ishwardi Airport is essential for the Rooppur project and will also invigorate local trade while increasing government revenue.

**Lalmonirhat Airport :** No efforts have been made to reopen Lalmonirhat Airport, though its operation could bring an economic revolution to the Rangpur region. The interim government has made promises, and the DC of Lalmonirhat has sent a letter to the CAAB chairman requesting its reopening. Lalmonirhat DC H M Raqib Hayder confirmed no government activity has begun yet but said there's been assurance from the interim government. Reopening the airport could significantly change the region's prospects.

**Thakurgaon Airport :** Built in 1940 on 550 acres of land in Shibganj, eight km southwest of Thakurgaon town, the airport was heavily damaged during the 1965 Indo-Pak war when it was bombed by the Indian Air Force. Later, it was repaired after Bangladesh's independence and even operated commercial flights for a few years. However, citing losses, flights were stopped in 1980. Although efforts were made again in 1994, the project never materialized. Thakurgaon DC Esrat Farzana told Bangladesh Pratidin that while the airport is closed for various reasons, a proposal has been submitted to the interim government's chief adviser to reopen it. If reactivated, it would significantly enhance connectivity.