

CAL confirms CEO Medera goes on vacation leave

PORT OF SPAIN

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CARIBBEAN Airlines Ltd (CAL) chief executive officer (CEO) Garvin Medera has proceeded on vacation leave.

CAL's chief operating officer (COO), Nirmala Ramai, will act as CEO in his absence.

A release, purportedly from CAL, was circulated on social media yesterday, stating that the board of directors had announced that Medera had been placed on administrative leave, effective immediately, pending the outcome of an internal review.

The statement added that Ramai would assume the role of acting chief executive officer until further notice.

CAL however issued a statement indicating that this 'release' was false.

In the brief statement, the airline said, 'Caribbean Airlines advises that the information currently circulating regarding the 'Leadership Transition and Stability and Growth Strategy' in the public domain is false. This information did not come from Caribbean Airlines nor any other authorised source.'

The *Express* understands that Medera continues to be the substantive CEO of the airline—a position he has held since his appointment in 2017, eight years ago.

Sources told the *Express* that major changes are coming to the airline under the newly appointed chairman, attorney Reyna Kowlessar, in keeping with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar's mandate that CAL must get its accounts in order within two years.

The new board, led by Kowlessar, was named by Persad-Bissessar on June 6, with instruments of appointment presented by Finance Minister Davendranath Tancoo on June 24.

Sources said the new board has been facing challenges and pushback from senior management, but remains steadfast in its resolve to ensure accountability and transparency in CAL's operations and accounts.

At a United National Congress (UNC) meeting in August, the Prime Minister issued a stern warning to CAL, noting the airline's failure to submit audited financial statements for the past nine years.

She voiced concerns over the lack of transparency, especially given the company's 86-member finance department and more than \$60 million spent on Ernst & Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers to conduct financial audits.

'Do you know that not one single Caribbean Airlines route is profitable? Not one route is profitable, yet plane filling up everyday going and coming. Not one single route of Caribbean Airlines is bringing a profit, but we are spending millions of dollars there,' she had said.

Persad-Bissessar said taxpayers' money would no longer be used to support CAL and its management who receive large salaries while failing in their duties.

'I am giving the management of Caribbean Airlines two years max. They have to sort out the mess, otherwise, everyone there

will have to look for a new job. Everyone will have to look for a new job. Your future is in your hands.'

Since Persad-Bissessar's warning, CAL's chief financial officer, Varuna Kuarsingh, has been suspended.

Additionally, CAL's communications executive manager, Dionne Ligoure, resigned and joined the Massy Group as vice-president, Corporate Communications and Corporate Affairs.