

Seven firms keen to spread wings beyond border

Cabinet decision allows private airlines to operate on foreign routes

INAM AHMED

At least seven companies have expressed their interest to get licences in the wake of the approval of a draft framework on allowing private airlines to fly on international routes.

The civil aviation ministry will initially allow three to four private airlines to operate, according to sources.

The cabinet made the major decision to allow private airlines on international routes on Monday. This puts in place a framework that would set the requirement for airlines to operate across border,

their capital structure, safety compliance needs and other criteria.

The seven applicants include GMG Airlines, Air Parabat, Bismillah Airlines, Eastwest Airlines, Basundhara Airlines and Aero Bengal.

Once the airlines are chosen, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) will allocate them routes.

This is the first time that the national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines will taste limited competition from the private sector on international routes.

The private carriers will also operate on Biman's routes, according to civil aviation ministry sources. However, some popular routes like the Middle Eastern ones may be kept out of the reach of the private sector for the time being. Initially, Kolkata and Kathmandu routes may be opened.

CAAB will soon check the air service agreements (ASA) with different countries and decide on the new flight routes. The ASA dictates how many airlines operate how many flights to a country.

There are many countries like

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The Chittagong Port Authority runs an eviction drive yesterday at the Agrabad Barik Building intersection in Chittagong.

PHOTO: STAR

Smuggling 14 Indians, 4 customs officials sent to jail

UNB, Sathkhira

Fourteen Indian nationals with smuggled jute seeds and five customs officials of Bhomra land port held by BDR were yesterday sent to jail when police produced them to the court.

BDR filed a case with police against the Indian nationals and the customs officials under the Special Powers Act.

Eight Indian trucks loaded with 104 metric tons of jute seeds were held on Monday at Bakal bridge near Sathkhira town. The Indian truckers and labourers claimed the jute seeds were imported but could not show documents.

Later, five officials of Bhomra land port including customs super Shamsur Rahman and customs inspector Syed Bazul Rahman were taken into custody for their alleged involvement in the smuggling of jute seeds.

Meanwhile, Customs Executive Officers Association has called for an indefinite strike here and at some other major land ports from today.

The association leaders said they called the strike to protest what they said illegal detention of a superintendent, an inspector and two constables of the Customs Department by the BDR personnel.

They also demanded withdrawal of the "false" case filed against the Customs officials, who are now in jail custody, and issued a 24-hour ultimatum for their release.

Customs sources said the officials were "forcibly" detained by the BDR personnel at Alipur while accompanying eight Indian trucks laden with 100 metric tons of imported jute seeds to deposit at

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Islamabad to resume air, bus, rail links with Delhi

I will go to India if Vajpayee can't come: Jamali

AFP, Islamabad

Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali yesterday announced Pakistan would soon resume air, rail and bus links with India as a goodwill gesture.

Unveiling a series of confidence-building measures at a press conference, the prime minister said his government had also decided to release detained Indian fishermen, would take steps towards restoring sporting ties and would upgrade the strength of Pakistan's mission in New Delhi by naming an ambassador to India.

IANS adds: Jamali said he would be willing to travel to New Delhi for talks with his Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee.

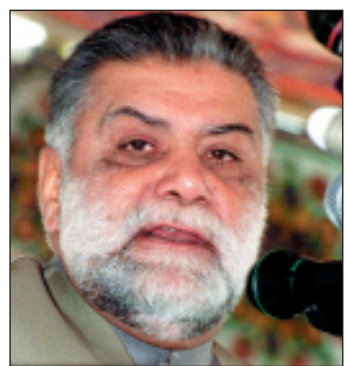
But The News quoted him as saying at a public rally on Monday that a congenial atmosphere would have to be created first for a meaningful dialogue at the level of ministers and diplomats between the two countries.

Earlier, he told a television channel that he was prepared to travel to India if Vajpayee could not come to Pakistan. "I have written to Vajpayee that if he could not come to Pakistan, for (the sake of) Pakistan, for India, for South Asia, I am ready to go there (India)," Jamali said.

"We are well-wishers of humanity. This is the goal we have to achieve and all other things are of secondary importance," he main-

tained. The people of both countries want peace and developments towards peace were a "good omen", he added.

"One-fifth of the world's population lives in the subcontinent, and



Zafarullah Jamali

peace will prevail in this region," he asserted.

Jamali's comments follow moves by India and Pakistan to resume their stalled dialogue, particularly over Jammu and Kashmir. Vajpayee startled everyone last week by announcing India would name a new envoy to Islamabad and resume air links snapped two years ago.

Meanwhile, The Daily Times reported that India had decided to start the dialogue process at a junior level and would upgrade this only if it felt that confidence building

measures were working on the ground.

The newspaper said soon after a new Indian high commissioner assumed office in Islamabad, Arun Singh, joint secretary in the Indian external affairs ministry, would visit Islamabad to kick-start the dialogue process.

A senior official in New Delhi was quoted as saying that India did not want to take chances this time as Vajpayee had described the latest push for peace as his "last and decisive" effort.

The Daily Times quoted the official as saying New Delhi would wait and see how Pakistan responds to its overtures. India will announce the next set of confidence building measures only if it was satisfied with the concessions granted by Pakistan.

Senior officials at the Indian home ministry were quoted in the newspaper as saying that there could be a lull in violence in Jammu and Kashmir, where about 40,000 people have died in a separatist campaign rages since 1989.

Indian industry also expects a boost once the talks take off and trade routes are opened as promised by Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri, the newspaper said. Pakistan expects India to enter into the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline deal, the paper added.

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Major Ctg port land grabber evicted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Land worth over Tk 3.50 crore, belonging to the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA), was recovered yesterday from a grabber.

Magistrate Munir Chowdhury led a daylong eviction drive at the city's Barik Building intersection in Agrabad Commercial Area with the assistance of policemen, firefighters, PDB staff, Bakhrabad gas

workers and CPA employees.

Sources said during the drive from 8.00am to 4.00pm, a huge commercial structure was bulldozed in presence of hundreds of people.

The two-storied building (Kabir Super Market), that housed over 60 establishments including stevedoring firms, shipping lines, offices of clearing and forwarding agents, a Chinese restaurant, an export-

oriented embroidery factory, jewellery shops and restaurants, had been under illegal occupation for more than two years, sources at the CPA said.

They said the owner of the 20-year old structure, who owns a leading ship-breaking yard at Sitakunda, was served with an eviction notice by the magistrate last month but he ignored it.

The land was under lease till the

year 2000, but afterwards it went under illegal occupation, as the owner did not update the lease, sources said.

During the eviction, normal movement of traffic from Dewanhat to the Export Processing Zone area was obstructed, causing great inconvenience to commuters on the busy road. The supply of electricity in and around the area also remained suspended.

BNP leader murdered in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A BNP leader was murdered at Deopara in Godagari upazila on Monday night.

A gang of seven miscreants swooped on Jahangir Alam, 40, vice president of Deopara unit of BNP, in Banglakanda area while he was returning home. They stabbed Jahangir in the chest and abdomen and left the scene. Jahangir died on the spot.

Police recovered the body yesterday morning and sent it to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

The reason behind the murder could not be known.

Family sources said Jahangir had an enmity with Yakub Ali of Banglakanda village over a piece of land.

Victim's wife Milu Ara Alam filed a case with Godagari thana accusing seven persons.

Police arrested Alam Uddin, one of the accused in the murder case.

Childhood in fetters

Born in jail, children of prisoners see no ray of hope

ZAYADUL AHSAN

They lack spark in their eyes, tenderness in their voice and spring in their steps. A fettered life in the high-walled Dhaka Central Jail has robbed them of their childhood.

The children have never eaten a full meal, played with toys, engaged in youthful pranks and seen the vast outside world. The ideas of school, jokes with classmates and playing truant are totally alien to them.

Yet their lives are full of struggles. The hearts of Snighda, Ronny, Rumpa and a few others cry for a fresh breath and spaces for a cosy sleep in the over-crammed jail room that also bristles with sexually predatory inmates.

Ten of the children, aged between two months to five years, took birth in the musty darkness of the jail and some others walked

into the 'virtual hell' along with their mothers.

Their upbringing is characterised by unusual lack of sympathy and company of violent convicts and is devoid of all basic needs of childhood, including adequate food.

It is hard for them to find a space to sleep at night in the room that hosts about 300 women prisoners instead of the usual number of 84.

"In a situation where the scrambling women literally push each other for a space, children get no priority. The national slogan 'Say Yes to Children' are cruel jokes to them," a jail official said, requesting anonymity.

"It's hard for a mother and harder for the child to survive in the hell," said a recently released woman. "It's a lifelong ordeal there."

"I can say for sure that a child who takes birth in the jail will never come to normal life and grow up with a misshapen personality. They will never ever be healthy unless the atmosphere is changed," a woman inmate told The Daily Star in the meeting room of the jail.

The woman landed in the jail being charged of wrongdoing in a land dispute case.

According to jail code, a woman prisoner may keep a child or children with herself for a maximum of four years. If the jail superintendent approves, she can keep them for up to six years.

But the jail authorities, grappling with extra prisoners, failed to allocate the children extra rooms.

Until recently, the jail authorities

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Two to die for killing college student in Chuadanga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chuadanga

A court have yesterday awarded death penalty to two youths and one year rigorous imprisonment to two others in college student Ripon murder case.

Additional District and Sessions Judge AR Masud gave the verdict at noon.

The convicts, Abdus Sattar Kjol, 21, and Rashedul Hossain Titu, 20, were given death penalty for killing their friend Quamruzzaman Ripon.

Two other convicts -- Arif, 18, and Sumon, 15, -- were sentenced to one year RI and fined Tk 1000 each, in default, they have to suffer three months more in the jail.

According to the prosecution, the accused slaughtered Ripon, 18, son of Shamsul Huda master, at village Paranpur under Damurhuda upazila of Chuadanga district on May 8, 2001 over a trifling matter.

A murder case was filed accusing six youths.

The court, after examining records and witnesses, acquitted two accused -- Selim and Enamul -- of the killing charge.

Stranded Pakistanis Govt to follow HC judgement on citizenship

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday said the government would move in line with a court judgement regarding the stranded Pakistanis born in Bangladesh.

Moudud also told the BBC Radio last night that the government would implement the judgement of the High Court, which has declared 10 refugees of the Geneva Camp as citizens of Bangladesh.

The High Court order followed writ petitions by one Mohammad Akib Khan and nine others including three women, who reside as refugees in the Geneva Camp at Mohammadpur in the city.

There are more than two lakh Pakistani refugees staying at various camps in Bangladesh.

Cops club BCL protesters of water, power crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday swooped on the activists of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the Awami League, who were demonstrating against shortage of water, gas and electricity, leaving at least 50 wounded.

BCL President Liakat Sikder and General Secretary Nazrul Islam Babu were seriously injured, among others.

At least nine wounded workers were admitted to different private clinics, fearing police harassment, BCL sources said.

Following the attack, the BCL called strikes in educational institutions across the country tomorrow. It will stage demonstrations today.

The BCL workers were to lay a siege to the office of the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA) yesterday to protest the acute shortage of electricity, gas and water.

The workers held a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar before proceeding towards the DESA office. Police stopped the procession at the High Court intersection. As the students tried to break through

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Constable behind Uttara rifle loot

Three arms recovered from a Tongi pond

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives yesterday recovered two rifles and a shotgun from a pond at Tongi that were snatched from three constables patrolling at the Alawal Avenue at Uttara on April 26.

Tipped off, the Detective Branch of Police found the arms wrapped in polythene in a pond at South Dattapara of Tongi at about 10:45am yesterday.

Unidentified criminals took away the firearms along with 60 rounds of bullets from constables Baten, Asad and Dastagir alias Al-Farid after doping them.

The detectives also found constable Dastagir directly involved in the arms looting during an investigation. The criminals had the other two constables have intoxicated cold drink at the instruction of constable Dastagir, one of the investigators said.

After the incident, police suspected Dastagir, kept an eye on him and then arrested him. Dastagir later confessed to his involvement in the looting during interrogation.

According to the detectives, Mamun, Selim Sharif, Babul and Jalil Jamadar of Babuganj, Barisal were involved in the incident. They are still at large.

Mamun is a brother of constable Dastagir. The three others used to maintain close link with outlawed groups active in the southern region of the country, sources said.

Police further said Mamun, the prime accused in Nasim Sharif murder case in Babuganj, planned the arms looting with the help of his brother constable Dastagir.

Police however are yet to recover 60 rounds of bullets looted from the constables.



PHOTO: STAR

Constable Dastagir is kept handcuffed after arrest yesterday for allegedly helping criminals snatch two rifles and a shotgun from policemen in Uttara on April 26.

Political overdose for primary students

18 books on the Zias, many authored by selection committee members, wives and friends

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

A committee has selected 18 books on late president Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as rapid readers for primary students.

Political bias rather than contents was pivotal in selecting 14 books on Ziaur Rahman and four on Khaleda, alleged sources in the publishing industry.

The list of 250 books selected for different areas of Bangladesh also includes many on Islamic ideology. The committee also recommended five books written by Professor Jahanara Begum, advisor of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) with a state minister status.

The motive behind the selection was not only to please the ruling BNP but to promote unfamiliar books, the sources alleged.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has floated a tender on procurement of about 2.22 lakh copies of the books

on primary and mass education. The government will spend several crore taka on the yearly project.

Many of the enlisted books were authored by committee members, their wives and friends, publishers alleged.

The list includes five books written by Abu Saleh, a leader of the Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha, three by Iftexhar Rasul George, owner of Nowroj Sahitya Sangsad, two by MA Motalib Akhond, four by Al Mujahidi and two each by Mahmud Shafiq and Ahmed Musa, members of the selection committee.

The committee headed by Professor Wakil Ahmed of Dhaka University ignored the books of noted authors like Begum Sufia Kamal, Shawkat Osman, Hassan Azizul Huq, Dr Anisuzzaman and Humayun Azad.

Prof Wakil Ahmed told The Daily Star

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