

Cashing in on Hajj pilgrims

A monopoly in flights will force Hajis to count extra dollars this year

M ABDUR RAHIM

All non-ballotee Hajj pilgrims this year will again be forced to buy plane tickets at a staggering price of \$1,050 because of a monopolistic situation that prevents all foreign airlines except the Saudi Arabian Airlines from operating Hajj flights.

Up to 2001, the religious affairs ministry used to assign the national carrier Biman to carry ballotee Hajj pilgrims but allowed non-ballotees—people who perform the pilgrimage in private arrangements—to choose from a host of airlines at competitive prices.

But an agreement signed last

year with the Saudi Arabian Airlines allowed it to be the only foreign airline to ferry non-ballotee Hajj flights alongside the national carrier at the price, elbowing all other airlines out of the market.

All other foreign airlines will once again be barred from carrying pilgrims during this Hajj season as Biman is going to renew its last year's agreement with the Saudi airlines to share transportation of non-ballotee pilgrims. A civil aviation circular to this effect will be issued in a few days, official sources said.

With the market competition removed, non-ballotee pilgrims will be forced to dig at least \$300 deeper

into their pockets without the option to buy tickets from airlines such as Gulf Air, Qatar Airways and Emirates, which offer \$750 for Dhaka-Jeddah return airfare.

Even the Saudi carrier's regular return airfare for the route is \$820, and the agreement last year helped the airline pocket over \$4 million in excess of its normal revenue from handling some 19,000 pilgrims, the lion's share of the deal, leaving Biman to carry some 12,000 pilgrims.

Biman also carried some 10,000 ballotee pilgrims at \$870 for the trip last year. This year, the civil aviation ministry raised the airfare for

ballotees to \$900 while non-ballotee airfare remains unchanged at \$1,050.

Talking to The Daily Star, President of Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB) and Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) MA Muhaimin Saleh expressed surprise at the decision 'that will victimise non-ballotee pilgrims'.

"It is mysterious that although the restriction is affecting passengers and benefiting a foreign airlines, the civil aviation ministry is still going to slap the same restric

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Donors' influence in state policies slated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The final plenary session of the 49th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) ended with the speakers expressing their concern over the 'erosion of state sovereignty' as a result of economic interdependence and donors' influencing government policies.

Newly elected president of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Peter Milliken, who is also speaker of the Canadian House of Commons, and host country Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui addressed the final plenary session as two lead speakers at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre on Saturday.

Milliken said, "There is at least a desire, if not a worry, to examine the extent to which economic interdependence, technological change, regional integration and the multiplicity of non-state and international organisations are eroding state sovereignty."

With the CPA's outgoing President Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar in the chair, the session dwelt on the issue of 'Balancing Multilateral Support and National Sovereignty: Managing the Interface between the International Community and Local Interests'.

Milliken, who arrived in Dhaka last Friday and missed the best part of the 49th CPA conference due to pressing preoccupation in Canadian parliament, rated his

country's relationship with the United States as one of the "most deeply interconnected relationships between states in the world."

"But there are certainly differences, and they have highlighted the fact that Canada and the United States are separate and sovereign states, with distinctive and sometimes opposing views. One example of this is Canada's decision not to join the US-led coalition against Iraq," Milliken explained.

Siddiqui, the other lead speaker of the day, observed that payments to the experts and consultants and overhead expenditures consume the major part of the grants and

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Japan to write off debts under new policy

STAR REPORT

Japan is about to bring some positive changes in its aid policy towards Bangladesh, sources said.

Under this new policy, Japan will write off debts instead of providing debt relief grants (DRG) to Bangladesh. Officials of the two countries are now discussing the policy change, sources at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) said.

Since 1979, a part of Japanese loans for Bangladesh comes under the DRG. Under this system Bangladesh repays its loan in yen. Japan then gives that amount back to Bangladesh in dollar as grant.

In the new system, no country will have to bear any loss due to exchange rate fluctuations, ERD sources said.

The DRG facilities are applicable for loans taken between 1972 and 1988, and Bangladesh has got \$2 billion under the DRG to date.

Bangladesh now owes Japan \$6 billion, the ERD sources added.

Robbers clean out 4 shops at Ctg on night of Shab-e-Barat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Robbers sedated security guards at Amin Centre and looted at least Tk 20 lakh worth of ornaments and other goods from the posh shopping mall at city's Lalkhan area Saturday midnight.

Police suspect involvement of security personnel in the daring robbery carried out on the night of Shab-e-Barat, and detained Delwar Hossain, a top official of Federal Safety Guards, a private security firm responsible for market security.

Police and market sources said four security men including shift-in-charge Mansur Ahmed offered sweets to five other fellow security guards in line with the Shab-e-Barat tradition. The five men fell uncon

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Arms recovered, UP chairman's brothers caught

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police recovered three illegal firearms and ammunition from Sarwatoli under Boalkhali thana and arrested two younger brothers of a local UP chairman Friday night.

Sources said a police team led by Officer in-charge (OC) of Hathazari Police Station Md Mahfuzul Alam nabbed a criminal identified as Abdul Mannan alias Jamai Mannan, 35, from Najumiarhat area at around 11:30am Friday.

Upon his confession, police raided the house of Sarwatoli UP chairman's younger brother Salahuddin Rumi at Horabag under Boalkhali thana. They recovered two revolvers, a sawn-off rifle, seven bullets, a gun belt and special jacket.

Police arrested Saifuddin Bappi, another younger brother of the UP chairman and also a listed criminal of Boalkhali, from the house.

Mannan and Bappi are active members of the criminal group Syed Noor Bahini and accused in several criminal cases including those for murders, police said.

A case was filed with Boalkhali Police Station.



Prayers observing the Muslim holy night of Shab-e-Barat at the Baitul Mukarram Mosque end with the final munazat at dawn yesterday.

Two 'abducted' teenage girls rescued from Dhanmondi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police rescued two teenage girls, believed to have been abducted from Green Road area on October 6, from Science Laboratory in Dhanmondi yesterday.

Both of them, 14 years old, told police they had gone out of one of their houses with two young men and married them on Friday.

The teenagers are class nine students -- one studying at Dhanmondi Kamrunnesa Government Girls' School and the other at Khulna Collegiate School.

A patrol team of Dhanmondi police picked up the two from Science Laboratory area while they were going to New Market for shopping in a rickshaw at around

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CU agrees to revise grading system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

After two months of agitation both for and against revision, Chittagong University (CU) authorities agreed Saturday to revise the university's grading system.

The revised grading system was settled at a meeting of the syndicate, the highest decision-making body of the university, chaired by Vice-chancellor (VC) AJM Nuruddin Chowdhury.

However, the Sadharan Chhatra Chhatra Sangram Parisad (SCCSP), which has been agitating against the revisions to the grading system, has threatened to begin a tougher agitation programme if the authorities do not cancel the revisions and

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PHOTO: STAR

The elephant killed by a BDR officer last month at Pablakhali sanctuary, a forest reserve in Rangamati. An elephant can be killed only if declared a rogue by government wildlife experts.

BDR push back 7 Indians

BSS, Dinajpur

The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sent back seven Indian citizens within 24 hours of their push-in by the Border Security Force (BSF) of India yesterday morning.

Colonel Awlad Hossain, sector commander of the BDR at Dinajpur, said, "We have pushed back the seven Indian nationals including

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Oct 13		5-35 pm
Oct 14	5-56 am	

Prayer Timings		
October 13		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-00	5-25
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-46	5-51
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

BDR officer kills wild elephant in forbidden forest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A BDR officer killed an elephant last month at Pablakhali sanctuary, a forest reserve in Rangamati.

The shooting took place even though the Wildlife Act of 1973 prohibits entry into the sanctuary without the permission of forest officials. The Act also makes killing of any wild animal a punishable offence.

An elephant can be killed only if it is declared a rogue elephant by the government's wildlife experts.

According to sources in the forest department, Lt. Col. KM Mominur Rahman visited East Raznagar with his troops on September 8. He heard from the locals that a 12-year old girl had been killed the night before by an elephant. The locals also informed him that the elephant was roaming around in the Pablakhali forest

reserve.

Rahman entered the teak forest reserve without permission and came face to face with a stray male elephant.

In the official report, the zonal office informed the Rangamati BDR headquarters that when the elephant started to move forward, Rahman shot it with his sub-machine gun, killing it on the spot.

Later, the forest officials visited the spot and the Barkal upazila livestock officer conducted a post-mortem on the elephant. At least 51 bullets were found in the trunk, eyes, head, throat, ears, legs and torso of the elephant, according to the report. After the postmortem, the forest officials buried the elephant to guard against the theft of its tusks as a trophy.

The divisional forest officer of the

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2 market watchdogs wait in wings for consumer rights

Drafts to be sent for cabinet approval soon

STAR REPORT

Amid failures of the agencies to protect consumers' interest, the government is soon going to place drafts of two independent market watchdogs for cabinet approval.

The proposed Consumer Council will be tasked with market intervention in case prices of essentials go up without any genuine reason or if the traders take recourse to unethical practices, according to the commerce minister.

And the Consumer Bureau will

do the necessary research like collecting current prices of commodities in the international market and providing the government with market forecast.

"We have already finalised the drafts of two proposed regulators to protect the interest of the consumers. Market situation will improve substantially once the two watchdogs are formed," Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury told newsmen at his Secretariat office Saturday.

The minister also expressed his dissatisfaction at the sharp rise in prices of some essentials just

before Shab-e-Barat.

"It is the government's job to keep essential prices within the purchasing capacity of the commoners. I hope these two regulators will be able to take timely action in order to protect the interest of the consumers," Khosru observed.

A ministry cannot deliver without such organisations and steps have been taken to restructure it, he added.

It has become a practice that essential prices would shoot ahead of Shab-e-Barat or Ramadan with

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Top criminal Kamu held with arms, accomplice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sabujbagh police Saturday held two alleged criminals with a firearm and 24 bullets in Madertek Chowrasta area after trading gunshots.

A patrol team of police challenged Kamruzzaman alias Kamu

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Hartal called at Ctg for seven points demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Greater Chittagong Development Action Committee will enforce an eight-hour hartal in the district Thursday in its efforts to realise several points of demand.

The key points of the demand are upgrading Chittagong city to a commercial capital in true sense, improvement of law and order and preference

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South Africa clinch series

AFP, Rawalpindi

South Africa beat Pakistan by seven wickets in the fifth and final day-night limited over international played at Rawalpindi cricket stadium on Sunday.

The win gives the tourists a 3-2 victory in the five-match series.

Brief scores: Pakistan 192 in 49.3 overs (A Razzaq 38; S Pollock 3-33) and South Africa 193-3 in 45.5 overs (B Dippenaar 74, J Kallis 40)

Result: South Africa won the match by 7 wickets and take series 3-2.



CPA delegates are greeted with flower petals at a civic reception given by Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka at the Jatiya Sangsad South Plaza in Dhaka yesterday.