

## Biman flies into heavy flak from auditors

### Corruption and irregularities cited as causes of operational losses

By Gobinda Bar

A special audit of the national airline has revealed corruption and irregularities on a massive scale, causing losses worth Tk 104.95 crore. The audit into the 1995-96 accounts of Bangladesh Biman shows that the airline has another Tk 53.45 stuck up in bad debt with agents.

The special audit revealed that irregular handling of business with sales agents is the principal cause behind Biman's bad debt. Credit facility exceeding agents' bank guarantee, issuance of credit instalment without adjustment of earlier sales accounts and non-pay-

ment of money collected from the sale of tickets by the agents were cited as specific instances of mismanagement.

Biman also suffered losses through unauthorised payment of incentive commissions, un-planned expenditure for sales promotion, transport of Bangladeshis deported from abroad, faulty purchasing processes and excess payment of overtime allowances, the report said.

A total of 157 sales agents, affiliated with ATAB, operate with a bank guarantee of Tk 1.50 crore in place of the Tk

13.35 crore necessary. This has helped create the huge debt problem.

The audit found that 11 sales agents owe the airline around Tk 2.96 crore, which should be adjusted against their bank guarantee. The auditors suggested that legal measures be taken to collect another Tk 2.99 crore which has remained outstanding from 20 travel agents for long, the report said.

The report also mentioned gross violation of rules in giving incentive commission to Messrs Bengal Air Service from August 1987 to February 1989, creating a loss of Tk 34.36 lakh.

Besides, Biman suffered a loss of Tk 3.97 crore from shipment of Bangladeshi deportees, Tk 24.32 crore due to failure to collect outstanding dues and Tk 3.94 lakh due to irregularities in Biman's internal purchases. Illegal overtime allowances accounted for Tk 8.92 crore losses, the report said.

The secretary of the ministry of civil aviation and tourism was informed of the irregularities and malpractice, but no action was taken, the report said.

The report also suggested restructuring of Biman's entire flight operation plan to make it

profitable. It said that Biman's Dhaka-London, Dhaka-New York and Dhaka-Tokyo routes incurred a loss of Tk 91.43 crore during 1994 to 1996. The auditors suggested that the concept of 'prestige routes' be abandoned and flights on loss-making routes be stopped.

The report also drew a comparison between Biman and Singapore Airlines that showed the former to be over-staffed and inefficient. It also suggested increasing Biman's performance standard, cutting unnecessary manpower and improving its efficiency.

## Health sector makes World Bank see red

By Naimul Haq

The ministry of health and family welfare has recently come in for a bashing from the World Bank, which claims that administrative weaknesses are responsible for poor performance during the fourth population and health project (FHPH).

In a letter to the health ministry the World Bank said, "routine administrative weakness constrained project performance which include frequent transfer of key officials, delayed release of funds, long delays in approving revisions in the project programmes and inappropriate use of expensive specialised training".

The letter accompanied the report of a Bank review mission that evaluated FHPH performance in late May. The mission's report was submitted to the government in June, but was never made public.

The total cost of the World Bank consortium aided projects in the FHPH was US\$ 755 million, out of which government's contribution was \$254 million. World Bank contributed \$180 million in credit and co-financing grant totalled \$248 million.

A World Bank high official while talking to the Daily Star Wednesday said, "About fifty per cent of the total 66 World Bank consortium aided projects

implemented during the past five years (FHPH) failed to show expected progress."

For instance, the overall performance of 'human resource development' (HRD) has been short of expectations, said the review mission in its assessment on individual projects. The mission's report said the project suffered delays from the beginning due to delayed appointment of staff. The project made little progress, resulting in limited effectiveness. The project did not have a vision or a management strategy. Lack of policy guideline was one of the reasons for weakness in implementing the activity, as the project steering committee did not meet regularly.

The assessment report on strengthening of nursing education project said, that it failed to produce any impact at the policy level. Government's recruitment and transfer policies were mainly responsible for delay in filling up of senior nursing posts under the project.

The overall assessment report on 'institute of mother and child health' said the government has not yet approved conversion of the institute into an autonomous body as agreed earlier. It said paucity of facilities for local training of health

workers on emergency obstetric care and related services has been a major cause for the delay in implementation of the maternal and neonatal child care pilot project.

The 'health care quality assurance' project's original budget was reduced from Tk 8 crore to Tk 4.43 crore due to slow implementation and also delay in approving the revised budget.

The 'management information system' (MIS) for health took two years to be designed and it took another two years to get it approved by the government.

The project was far behind the schedule, which is due to inability to implement decisions of the steering committee.

The 'maternal and neonatal health care', one of the vital components of the FHPH had a delayed start that also faced various problems. There have been long delays in completing baseline surveys and also in clearing overseas training and procurement of essential equipment.

The objective of reducing diarrhoeal deaths by 50 per cent has not been achieved largely due to mismanagement and inadequate supervision, the mission report said.

A high official of the min-

istry on condition of anonymity said, "Most of the time unnecessary delay in decision and release of funds hampered usual activity of the projects which ultimately had bad effects on the implementation of the projects."

Meanwhile, the ministry, despite being made aware of the adverse effects on frequent transfers, ordered change in at least one very 'key' position in the directorate of health services which, according to senior officials within the ministry, will harm implementation of HPSF.

The Bank's letter to the government also said, "Strict implementation of the rule that no official will be transferred from an assignment without completing three years excepting compelling circumstances, could significantly add to the public sector efficiency".

The World Bank also recommended development of a personnel tracking system to ensure that those who return from long-term training programs abroad are posted to assignments in which their newly acquired skills and knowledge can be utilised to the program's benefit under the new health and population sector programme (HPSP).

## Major reshuffle in JCD

In a major reshuffle yesterday, the central committee of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and its Dhaka University and city units were reorganised, reports UNB.

Habibun Nabi Sohel has been named as president and Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu general secretary of the central committee.

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has approved the 205-member committee of her party's student wing.

Outgoing president of JCD Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anie has been made a member of the national executive committee of BNP.

Sohel, now in jail, was general secretary of the previous committee while Pintu senior vice president.

Former president of Dhaka University unit of JCD, ABM Mosharrif, has been made organising secretary of the new committee.

M Monir Hossain and Mustafizul Islam Mamoon were made president and general secretary respectively of the Dhaka University unit.

The Dhaka city unit has been divided into two. Mamun Hasan and Harunur Rashid were made president and general secretary of city (north) while Sagor Ahmed and Hasan Sarwar Sumon president and general secretary of city (south).

## SC verdict goes against divorcee benefit

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday struck down a verdict of the High Court which earlier held that a divorced wife was entitled to maintenance by her former husband until her remarriage or death, reports UNB.

The full bench of the Supreme Court sought the interpretation of the Holy Quran on the dispute from two eminent religious leaders before pronouncing the verdict.

Khatib of Baitul Mukarram Mosque Maulana Obaidul Haq and Editor of monthly Madina Maulana Mousuddin held that the Quran does not support maintenance of a divorced wife till she remarries or is dead.

The court also allowed eminent jurists Barrister Ishtiaq Ahmed, Dr Kamal Hossain, Barrister Amirul Islam to give their views on the dispute.

The verdict of the Supreme Court came upon an appeal filed by Hibzur Rahman against the decision of the High Court that his divorced wife Shamsun Nahar Begum is entitled maintenance by Rahman till her remarriage or death.

## Shab-e-Barat tonight

Muslims across the country will observe the holy Shab-e-Barat, the night of fortune, today with due solemnity and religious fervour, reports APB.

The occasion will be marked by night-long prayers seeking divine blessings for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the nation as well as solidarity and unity of the Muslim Ummah.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave message on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat. In her message, she urged the countrymen to maintain sanctity of the holy night.

## Holiday

The offices of the Daily Star will remain closed today on the occasion of holy Shab-e-Barat.

Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper tomorrow (Saturday).



Children of the same God

Life for these mentally retarded children has been devoid of the joys other children take for granted. But there are moments to relish, joys to behold and comradeship to remember. For these two colourfully dressed children photographed above, that moment came yesterday at the Dhaka University sport ground, where the Kalyani project of the Bangladesh Pratibandhi Foundation organised a day of fun and games on the occasion of International Day of the Disabled People.

—Star Photo: AKM Mohsin

## Hopes belied, Mayor admits

By M Anwarul Haq and Morshed Ali Khan

Mayor Mohammad Hanif has said he tried to run the Dhaka City Corporation to the best of his ability but had his failures as he wanted to be 'accommodative'.

"I had my successes but I must admit that in many areas I had my failures too," the mayor said in an interview with The Daily Star.

"The citizens' expectations from me as their first, directly elected mayor could not be fully materialised. Hopes naturally were very high. Whether it was the missing manhole cover, load shedding, gas shortage, traffic jam or construction on encroached land, people expected remedy from the mayor," said Hanif, whose tenure ends in March next year.

"Not everyone understands the reality that the DCC's work is limited to its own particular areas and many of the problems are actually under the jurisdiction of other organisations like



Hanif: Accommodative Mayor.

WASA, DESA, Rajuk, Titas or the Traffic Department.

"Rickshaws definitely are one of the main causes of Dhaka's terrible traffic mess, but obviously it is not the sole

reason. The police and the Traffic Engineering Department have also a major role to play. Similarly, hawkers have virtually occupied the pavements, and have been evicted several times. But they keep on staging comebacks because DCC cannot act and implement things alone. There must be attempts to rehabilitate them permanently in some place, some where, said Hanif.

It is a city of nine million people with eight parliamentary constituencies, he reminded.

A metropolitan government, Hanif feels, is perhaps the best way of tackling the 'mixture of problems' that different government departments now seek to resolve. Such an authority would have helped effectively implement all major decisions relating to city development.

Hanif was not much appreciative of the Coordination Committee headed by the LGRD

minister, set up as a substitute for metropolitan government. He feels the committee has not been much effective 'since it is weakened by a clause which says the decision of the government is binding provided it has financial resource and the law permits.'

When asked if he intends to contest the next elections, Hanif said, "That will be decided by the party. I have not decided anything yet. The high command will make the final choice."

How many of his election pledges he could materialise? The mayor explained his performance relating to four commitments he had made in 1995.

"I said the DCC would not be made partisan. And I can proudly say that it has not been made so. In my absence, opposition ward commissioners had been appointed acting mayor. See Page 12 Col 5

## Learning to feed the world better

By Nazmul Ashraf, back from Savar

Sohada Aktar Rumi is preparing to be an ideal farmer. To translate her long cherished dream, she is now taking part in a training course to acquire basic knowledge on farming.

The six-month training at Agriculture Training Centre for Women (ATCW) at Savar near the capital imparts both theoretical and practical knowledge on production of crops and vegetables, poultry, fishery and tailoring.

Hailing from a remote village in Narsinghdi district, Rumi wants to take farming as her occupation.

Reminded of the difficulties she may face while working in the field, a determined Rumi in her late teens said, "I'll fight all odds to take up farming."

After the training, she will help her brother in farming and

poultry raising.

Rumi plans to encourage other girls in her area to attend the training course and to share her knowledge with others. "I want to motivate rural girls to do farming."

Sheuli Aktar from Barisal, Shirin Sultana from Narsinghdi and Momina Sultana from Narayanganj are some other trainees at the ATCW.

On return home, Shirin plans to work on family lands.

Monira's plan is a bit different. She intends to share her knowledge and skill with hundreds of beneficiaries of the organisation.

Sheuli, a student at the Bangladesh Agriculture Institute, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city, says she hopes to take a

job in the relevant field and also apply my skill in our family occupation, farming.

Pleased at the standard of ATCW training, they said such training could change the lot of rural women.

Nurun Nahar, one of the six instructors at the training centre, said, "In the classroom, we teach them modern method of farming and train them in the field daily."

All the six instructors are trained in Japan which financed establishment of the ATCW in early 1987. It is the lone such training centre for women in the country.

The crops and vegetables produced by the trainees are mainly of Japanese varieties but there are some local varieties too.

Nurun Nahar said they discourage use of chemical fertiliser and favour environment-friendly green fertiliser.

Most of the women trained at the centre get jobs in different NGOs while others apply their skill going back to their villages, said Alauddin Ahmed, administrative officer at the centre.

Situated on a 16-bigha plot at Narshinghpur village in Savar, the centre has a demonstration farm, ponds, fisheries and poultry sheds and necessary machinery and equipment.

## We want FDI, not ODA: Hasina

SAVAR, Dec 3: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today said her government is working for achieving self-reliance through production and it wants foreign investment, not assistance, reports UNB.

"We want to come out of the disgraceful situation of aid dependence... opportunity for prosperity though growth is our commitment and we have been struggling hard for that," she said inaugurating a backward linkage industry of South Korea at the extension of Savar EPZ.

Opening the Spinning and Dyeing Factory and Sweater Factory of Daeu Bangladesh, the Prime Minister assured the foreign investors of all-out support and cooperation.

Daeu Bangladesh, the first ever foreign invested backward linkage industry, went into operation with an investment of 27 million US dollars. It will produce yarn, yarn dyeing and sweater.

Bangladesh will have to be self-sufficient in backward linkage industry by the year 2005 for facing open competition with the withdrawal of the generalised system of prefer-

ence (GSP).

She said the open market economic policy, privatisation programme, the incentive packages and transparency of the government have made Bangladesh a right destination for foreign investment.

During the last two fiscal years, she said the Board of Investment registered 278 industrial units involving a total investment of about 4.4 billion dollars. "These are either under hundred per cent foreign ownership or under joint venture."

Hasina said her government has finalised a new industrial policy, emphasising on the private sector led growth. "In addition, we have taken a number of reformative measures which will help improve the investment climate in Bangladesh," she added.

She said changing economic and political condition in the Asian region is prompting many to reassess their investment strategies and plan for relocating new investments.

The Prime Minister said the Export Processing Zones of the country, with all services and other related facilities, have

been made attractive sites for setting up industries.

"In addition to the existing two EPZs, we have a number of EPZ projects which are undergoing different phases of implementation," she said.

The government has also allowed the establishment of EPZs at private level, she said mentioning that an exclusive EPZ of Korea is being established by the side of the Karnafuli river in Chittagong.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed said with the inauguration of the Daeu backward linkage industry, a new chapter in the garments sector is being opened.

FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoosaid Korea is one of the leading partners in economic development of Bangladesh.

Acting Ambassador of republic of Korea Tae Ho Lee, President of Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) AKM Shamuddin, Chairman of Daeu Bangladesh Chong Hoon Lee, Managing Director Kyung Hoan Kwon and Executive Chairman of BEPZA Brig (ret'd) MAB Siddique Talukder also addressed the function.

## Rising to the rice challenge

By Reaz Ahmad in Bangkok

They ate rice, talked rice and thought rice.

In this sprawling Thai capital that is hosting Asian Media and Rice conference, journalists from different countries of the Asian brotherhood found rice as their common favourite at lunch Thursday.

Some 30 newsmen from Asia's 11 major rice-growing nations had their first day of brainstorming at Bangkok's Siam Intercontinental while attending the first-ever such conference yesterday.

The conference, a collaboration of IIRI and Asfa Rice Foundation (ARF), began with a note of concern that funds for rice research are drying up as the Asian appetite for it remains intact.

But the participants, who also include experts, economists, agronomists and policy planners, have an un-

flinching faith in themselves. They vowed not to give in to the crisis of funds and promised to lead Asia, the contributor of 90 per cent of world's rice output, ahead.

They hoped Asia would rise up to the cause of genetic advancements in rice research.

In his keynote, just before the conference entered into formal working session, Pitak Intrawitayamunt, Minister to the Thai Prime Minister's Office, called for more media attention to issues concerning Asians staple food.

"Our rice scientists, technologists as well as our farmers in Asia cannot by themselves resolve the conflicts confronting our agricultural landscape, especially involving rice," said the Thai minister.

Rice experts predict that the world requires about 70 per cent

more rice than it currently produces to feed the expanding population over the next 30 years, and that the extra yields must come from the same or even from a smaller land area.

"Because of our ballooning population, we may not be able to produce enough rice in our dwindling farms to feed the billions of people world wide who are rice consumers -- most of them in Asia," Pitak noted.

On the opening day, other speakers and dignitaries included Dr Ronald P Cantrell, Director General, IIRI, Dr Emil Q Javier and Kuhn Mechal Viraivaidya, Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Organising Committee for ARF, Jose Burgos, a senior Filipino journalist, and Kwanchai A Gomez, Chair of the Conference Organising Committee.