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Left in the cold

Flying academy graduates find jobs elusive

By Shehab Ahmed

At least 80 graduates who got Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) from the two flying academies are finding it difficult to get jobs in the limited local job market, aviation sources said.

Besides, the high cost of about Tk 700,000 for acquiring a CPL is also a dampening factor for bright youngsters who want to take flying as a profession, they said.

Only the Bangladesh Biman, the Plant Protection Department (PPD) and two private airlines - GMG and Air Parbat - which fly in domestic routes with two aircraft each, offer limited job opportunities. All the aircraft of PPD are now grounded.

For training flights on a Cessna-150 aircraft, per litre Motor Gas or high grade Octane

costs Tk 28. The fuel for Piper aircraft costs Tk 96 per litre. The fuel is only 1.50 dollars per gallon in Singapore, they pointed out.

The country is also being deprived of revenue as foreign airlines normally do not buy fuel in Dhaka due to high cost, the sources said.

To qualify for a CPL, one must have at least 200 hours of flying. One hour of flying lesson from the Bangladesh Flying Academy now costs Tk 3,000. The 51-year-old academy has 28 cadets including three women now.

The government provides Tk 8-10 lakh annually as support to a limited number of cadets who qualify in five subjects after tough tests conducted by the Civil Aviation Authority of

Bangladesh (CAAB).
"We are trying to keep the cost per hour as low as possible despite high operational cost which includes excessively priced fuel", said Captain Rafiqur Rahman, honorary Chief Flying Instructor of Bangladesh Flying Academy. The academy is also trying to subsidise the students' cost and run the academy with the revenue earned from charter flights, he said.

The academy has six aircraft. The two-seater Cessna-150 and Cessna-182 and four Piper aircraft are used for training. These are available on charter also. Per hour charge is Tk 16,000 for Piper-34 and Tk 25,000 for Piper-31.

The academy also needs more investment to replace its vintage fleet.



Bangladesh Flying Academy instructor captain Rafiqur Rahman (right) and the engineer (left) do not see hope for their students. — Star photo: AKM Mohsin

Khaleda iterates her agenda for dialogue

FENI, Oct 7: Opposition leader and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia today announced a single agenda for dialogue with the government - resignation of this regime to pave the way for general elections, reports UNB.

She dismissed any other talks with the government as, what she said, Awami League did not keep its promises.

The BNP chairperson told a huge public meeting here at Chhaganaiya court premises, "Our agenda is single - Awami League will have to quit power announcing general elections under the caretaker government."

Otherwise, Begum Zia said, they are not willing to sit across the table with the ruling party.

She said, "the days of this government are numbered. So they are talking of dialogue. Earlier, the government had a dialogue with the opposition and an agreement was signed. But they did not abide by the agreement."

Ashok Leyland eyes army order for 450 trucks

By M Shamsur Rahman

After cancellation of a previous tender for supply of 150 trucks for Bangladesh Army, Ashok Leyland, an Indian automobile company, is likely to participate in a fresh international tender for supply of some 450 trucks for the Army.

This was stated by Managing Director of the company R Seshasayee while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

Seshasayee is now in the city to sign an agreement with the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) to supply 68 double-decker passenger buses under an Indian credit.

Indian government provided credit to Bangladesh for procurement of 150 double-decker buses from Ashok Leyland. Forty-two buses were supplied earlier, 68 will be added to BRTC's fleet this year and the rest 40 will be supplied next year, he said.

The previous tender for supply of 150 trucks for the Army cancelled following criticism by the Leader of the Opposition that the trucks were not used even by the Indian Army.

Seshasayee claimed that the Indian Army was using Ashok Leyland trucks.

"We will participate in the tender but the decision is Bangladesh government's. We do not want to be in any controversy," Seshasayee said.

He also said his company expects to sign an agreement with Pragati for assembling its products in Bangladesh.



Artistes dance during the mass reception at Paltan Maidan yesterday. — Star photo: AKM Mohsin

BNP under polls pressure

By Rezaul Karim

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leadership is apparently facing a mounting pressure from the field level activists as well as the members of the parliament (MPs) of the party in favour of participation in the upcoming Upazila elections.

The party leadership which has so far failed to blow up a political storm through its on-the-street programmes against the government, is yet to take a decision in matters of participation at the Upazila polls. The alternative is to go ahead with its current one-point movement to dislodge the ruling Awami League from power.

Overwhelming majority of the BNP activists still tend to believe that the party's 'united' movement with three other opposition parties - Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Oikya Jote - against the February 23-25 municipal elections had proved to be a failure and that boycotting the polls was a wrong decision.

Another policy maker of BNP alleged that the hard-liners within the leadership, who basically crowd the Minto Road office and have no contact with the field level, have influenced the party chairperson to go for one-point movement.

Sources within the BNP felt that it would not be wise to give

'a walkover' again to the government as it did in the last February's municipal elections. Apart from that, the one-point movement, many insiders opine, is unlikely to gain the desired momentum prior to the holy Ramadan, Upazila and city corporation polls.

Majority of the party's field level 'leaders', who did not see eye to eye with the party's boycott of the last municipal polls, have strongly pleaded the case for contesting the Upazila election to be held within December 27 in accordance with the amendment of the Upazila Act.

A number of senior BNP leaders and MPs, who have visited their home districts and constituencies, confided to The Daily Star that local leaders and activists have made out a strong case for immediate decision in favour of participation in the Upazila elections. They said the local leaders have reportedly told the leaders and MPs that the party had taken an "unwise decision" in favour of boycotting the municipal polls and it would be "suicidal" to take a similar decision in matters of the Upazila polls.

"I can't give a satisfactory

reply to the local leaders in this matter because the party chief has initiated the one-point 'ouster-government movement' and has decided not to allow holding of the Upazila polls under the government," said a top leader who recently visited his hometown.

The leader said that the local leaders and activists were also critical about the 'premature announcement of the one-point movement' and that the party could organise the 'ouster-government movement' following all local government polls.

He observed that chaos might ensue while giving nominations for parliamentary polls if the party did not contest the Upazila election. This could be so, because the possible party candidates for municipalities were now trying to get party ticket for Upazila polls. Similarly the potential Upazila candidates would vie for MP election tickets if the party boycotted the Upazila polls.

He said the moderate leadership of the party had suggested the launching of the one-point movement after participation in the local government bodies elections, especially the Upazila polls.

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Farmers vow to fight 'greedy' multinationals

By Reaz Ahmad, back from Tanga

A South Asian galaxy of free-thinker and farmers began a three-day workshop in Tanga on Wednesday vowing to establish the peasants' sovereignty over seeds and protect the mother earth from ecological degradation.

They found the greed-driven multinationals along with the champions of Green Revolution and gene engineers as the evils for systematic extinction of hundreds of home-grown plant species and disturbing the ecological equilibrium.

The South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture (SANFEC), a regional think-tank, is organizing the international workshop titled 'Economics of Ecological Agriculture' at Ridyapur Nayakrishni Centre, Tanga of the local host UBINIG. Starting on October 6 the workshop would run through October 8.

On Wednesday morning, the workshop began with a big clap by all the participants to rejoice the just announced abandonment of Terminator Technology by the world's seed giant, Monsanto Corporation. Putting to an end to this technology was one of the priority issues that both the SANFEC and the UBINIG had been fighting against for years together.

While the UBINIG executive director Farida Akhter made the disclosure reading out a Daily Star report saying that the Monsanto had abandoned

pursuing the infamous terminator technology, experts, farmers and delegates from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kenya and host Bangladesh clapped in big hands.

They also vowed to further adhere their fight for protecting the farmers' rights, pursue replacement of chemical fertilizers by natural manure, deadly pesticides by integrated pest management and hybrid seeds by the traditional home-grown seeds.

Talking on the sidelines of the workshop, national award winning farmer from Cox's Bazar, Abu Taher Rahmani told The Daily Star that from his over two decades of farming experience he had found that unless doses of chemical fertilizers and pesticides were not enhanced year by year, rearing of more yield from the land was actually a myth.

"I have been using compost (natural manure) as fertilizer and urine of cows as pest killers for years now. I am no worse than any chemical fertilizer using farmers", claimed Rahmani. So Rahmani's taking pride for contributing to the cause of protecting mother earth and its eco-balance is well justified, commented other participants.

Similarly, Vijay Jardhari, a farmer from difficult Indian terrain of Himalayan region, advocated in favour of eco-

friendly farming. Vijay, whose role as a protagonist for 'Beej Bachao Andolan' (Save Our Seeds), earned him a nationwide fame, was talking to this correspondent on the sidelines of the workshop as well.

Vijay recalled passionately how his spouse Kamla and himself went against the wind to save home-grown seeds when it was too hard for co-villagers in his Tehri Garwal district (Western Himalayas) to resist the temptation of Green Revolution technologies. "In the long run, others follow our suit calculating the ecological cost-benefit", claimed Vijay.

Devindar Sharma, an Indian journalist and specialist on WTO trade regimes, told the audience that crisis inflicting Indian agriculture was essentially because the Green Revolution was encountering problems of sustainability that heavily relied on external inputs. "Already, the food bowl, comprising Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh, is facing a severe second generation problems from intensive agriculture", noted Sharma, also an executive member of the Asian Rice Media Advocacy Network (ARMAN).

Shahid M Zia, who represented the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) of Pakistan, listed a good many numbers of leafy plants which became almost non-existent, due to 'monoculture'.

Corrupt cops count coins

By Shaikh Nazrul Islam

Rickshaw-van pullers have to pay lion's share of their income to police officers for plying vehicles on the so-called VIP (Airport) Road, victims alleged.

A large number of street urchins work as frontmen for the law enforcers. The collection of this illegal toll occurs at different points from the rickshaw-van and rickshaws carrying goods.

Other points are Kakoli (Banani), Dhaka gate (Banani), Shewrabazar, Bishwa Road, Khilkhet, Kawla and Airport crossing.

Nine-year-old Aziz, one of the frontmen stationed at one of the points, said they collect money according to the directions of the uniformed men from every rickshaw-van or rickshaw that carries commodities.

"We collect money from rickshaw-vans and get 20 per cent of the total collection,"

Aziz said. He also said that as a lot of VIPs passed through the area and to keep an eye on the trucks they select us to take care of rickshaw-vans carrying goods.

A police sergeant at airport road said they had instruction not to allow tri-cycle rickshaws on the airport road. But they consider as they are helpless.

As usual, the DC traffic Mustak Hossain was not available for comment after several attempts.

Mohammed Hanifur Rahman, a rickshaw-van puller, carries glass bangles from Churhatta (Maulvi Bazaar) to Tongi and back, at least thrice a week.

"Pedaling more than 60 kilometres I get Tk 250, while I have to pay Tk 70 to ply on the airport road, at seven points to the traffic police and the police box" Rahman said.

Manik, another rickshaw puller, said page 11 Col 5.



How come? A slow-moving rickety three-wheeler jammed with furniture on the VIP Road, meant only for fast-moving auto-vehicles. Ask the cop nearby. — Star photo: Sk Enamul Haq

Shikdar yet to make confessional statement

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Oct 7: Ershad Shikdar, an accused in a number of murder cases and now on a 32-day police remand, is yet to make any confessional statement to police.

He was brought to police custody on Wednesday from Jessore Central Jail for interrogation in connection with five

murder cases. He will be questioned for these cases separately, said DC (Hq) Abdullah Azad Chowdhury today.

According to Police Commissioner M Anwarul Iqbal, the interrogation began on Wednesday night. But Ershad Shikdar has denied all the charges of murders and his involvement in occupying the railway land.

Ershad is being questioned in the heavily guarded Sonadanga Thana by senior police officers from KMP and other districts. Divided into ten groups, the police officers will interrogate him by turn, said the police commissioner.

Sixteen out of 20 police officers selected as member of a strong 25-member team arrived in Khulna on Wednesday. But the other four officers have expressed their inability to join the team, said D C (South) Mazharul Huq. The reason was not known as they did not inform the authority in writing, he said.

Meanwhile, the three-member probe committee headed by a Director of NSI started recording statements of different persons including political leaders this morning in the KMP headquarters.

They have been sent here by the Ministry of Home Affairs to make a list of police officers who took bribes from Ershad

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Ershad Shikdar's accomplice Liaquat held in Chittagong

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Oct 7: An accomplice of Ershad Shikdar was arrested by detective branch of police from a hideout in the city's Fanchliah area this afternoon.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided the hideout at 4 pm and arrested Liaquat Ali Laskar of Rupsha thana under Khulna.

Liaquat came here after the arrest of Shikdar and went into hiding, police said.

Liaquat was wanted in connection with seven criminal cases, including two murders, police said.

Mild tremor jolts Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Oct 7: A mild earthquake was felt in this port city for 10 seconds early this morning, Seismic observatory centre officials said, reports BSS.

The tremor struck at 4.25 am today. Police and local administration officials said that no major damage or injuries due to the quake have been reported from any place so far.

"The epicentre of today's quake was 78 kilometers off from the port city," the centre officials said.

According to records of the centre, some three mild earthquakes including today's one shook different places across the country including Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong since Tuesday last.

Army redeployed in city to ease traffic congestion

From Staff Correspondent

Army personnel have been re-deployed at different places of Dhaka city to ease traffic congestion, reports UNB.

Army personnel have been re-deployed at all important crossings of the metropolis, including Sayedabad, Jatrabari and Gabtali, to ease traffic congestion, said an ISPR press release last night.

The Army has also deployed a contingent from its engineer brigade to construct a Bailey bridge near Sayedabad in the city.

The 120-foot bridge on Jatrabari-Sayedabad section of Dhaka-Chittagong highway will facilitate smooth vehicular movement on the busiest gateway to the capital city.

Some 100 army personnel have started construction of the bridge on request from the City Corporation. The bridge is expected to be completed by Monday.

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| 4:15 | 4:15 | 4:30 |
| Maghrib | 5:50 | 5:55 |
| Esha | 7:45 | 8:15 |

Source: Islamic Foundation