

Biman MD leaves after less than 3 months' service

New chief expected to join Saturday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Managing Director of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Air Commodore Mohammad Liaquat Ali has left after serving the national flag carrier for less than three months only.

Sources, however, said he was removed from the position following a conflict with Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin.

Nasiruddin reportedly asked the establishment secretary to remove Liaquat Ali after the airforce officer refused to approve the recruitment of 17 new employees who have the minister's blessing.

Disagreement on many issues strained the relationship between the two men ever since Liaquat joined as Biman's MD on February 5, sources said, adding that he also opposed procurement of two 26-year-old F28s from Indonesia on the grounds that they did not meet tender specifications.

The establishment ministry is likely to appoint Akhtaruddin Ahmed, director-general of the Social Welfare Directorate, as new chief of the national airlines with the status of joint secretary. Ahmed is expected to join Saturday but it could not be confirmed. He will be 22nd chief executive officer (CEO) of Biman.

The outgoing MD is the shortest

serving CEO of Biman since its establishment in 1972 through a presidential order.

His predecessor Air Commodore Lutfur Rahman served for one year only before leaving on December 31 last year.

Sources said such frequent change of MDs has deprived Biman of solid and professional leadership.

On the other hand, no Biman insider other than Captain NS Haider, Captain Mashiur Rahman, Azim Uddin Ahmed and Abdul Mannan has ever headed the organisation as mostly civil servants and airforce officers with limited knowledge about the aviation industry got the appointment.

India accepts Pak dates for nuke talks

AFP, New Delhi

India has agreed to Pakistan's proposal to hold talks on nuclear confidence-building measures on May 25 and 26, an Indian foreign ministry statement said yesterday.

The Pakistani proposals for the dates of the talks, which had been agreed when the leaders of India and Pakistan met in Islamabad in January, was made earlier this month through the Indian high commission in the Pakistani capital.

"We have today conveyed our acceptance of these dates," the Indian foreign ministry in the statement said.

The proposed talks are part of efforts by the arch-rivals to mend ties and resume dialogue which has been stalled since July 2001.

India and Pakistan decided to resume talks after a ground breaking meeting between Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf on January 6 in Islamabad on the sidelines of a regional summit.

Following Vajpayee's meeting with Musharraf, senior officials of both sides met in mid-February for talks, which they said would continue in June.

The often-hostile neighbours' possession of nuclear arsenals has made South Asia one of the world's most feared potential nuclear flashpoints.

Many observers believed the subcontinent was on the verge of a nuclear conflict when the two sides came close to their fourth war two years ago over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

Pakistan went public as a nuclear power when it conducted a series of test nuclear explosions in May 1998, weeks after similar tests by India.

Neither side is signatory to non-proliferation treaties.

India had also agreed to hold talks on prevention of drug trafficking and smuggling on June 15-16, the Indian statement said.

Police informant shot dead, passport broker strangled in Mirpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unknown assailants gunned down a police informant and strangled a passport broker at Paikpara in the city's Mirpur area yesterday and a trader was shot by his cousins at Jhigatola in Hazaribagh.

Police found the bodies of passport broker Shah Alam, 35, and police informant Kalam, 35, under water hyacinth in a lake at South Paikpara at around 9:30am.

Marks in Alam's throat suggest that he was strangled with a rope and

the killers shot Kalam thrice in his head and there was a cut in his left thumb, hospital sources said.

Alam, a resident of Amlirtek Notun Bazar in Shyarnoli, went out of his home at around 10.00am the previous day but he did not return home at night, said his wife Parvin Begum.

When his nephew Mehedi Hasan talked with him over mobile phone at around 7:00pm on Tuesday, Alam said he would return in five minutes.

The bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy.

Officer-in-charge of Mirpur Police Station Saidur Rahman Babul said that they were yet to get any lead into the killings.

Parvin suspected that Kalam had hired the assailants to kill her husband to settle a longstanding score with Alam.

The assailants also killed Kalam just to keep their act a secret, she added.

She quoted the local people as saying that Alam and Kalam were seen moving together in Agargaon area on Tuesday.

Alam was also beaten up by Kalam's men on April 2, Parvin said.

At Jhigatola, hide trader Masum, 30, was shot allegedly by his three cousins.

Masum and his friend Yasin was travelling in a rickshaw when his cousins Pappu, Tokai Mizan and Sohel and four unknown youths intercepted him near Jhigatola post office.

They shot Masum in his abdomen and in his legs, the victim said at the DMCH.

Shahidur to file writ

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report and the removal decision terming them as 'flawed, unfair and illegal' and said politics was at the root of the 'injustice'.

"This is nothing but politics at its worst and I am the victim," he said, adding: "A great injustice has been done and I intend to seek justice from the court of law."

Shahidur argued that the constitution did not empower or authorise the council to make a decision on the removal of a judge from office or to advise the president.

He said the council's only function was to investigate and find out the facts of a case and present its findings to the president for a decision based on the facts.

"In this case, the council broke the law, ventured beyond its authority and advised the president to remove me from office."

President Iajuddin Ahmed signed the removal of Shahidur on Tuesday in line with the first ever council verdict on a judge's gross misconduct.

Supreme Court Bar Association President Rokanuddin Mahmud charged Shahidur with taking Tk 50,000 in bribe to fix bail for an accused in a women repression case.

Shahidur accused Rokanuddin of framing him in the case with a political motive.

"I had a political hue, I was a

member of the ruling BNP. But I had no political identity after I took the judge's office."

"But Rokanuddin is very much active in Awami League politics. He wants to undermine the government and the judiciary, he's playing a political game," the first ever judge removed from office, accused.

"Rokanuddin could not prove his case to the council and the council has also acknowledged that the allegations against me have not been proven beyond all reasonable doubts. Yet they recommended that I should be penalized anyway."

He alleged that in the wake of his appointment as a judge politically-biased people acted vigorously against him.

Why did the government remove you as you claim to be a BNP man?

"The government fell into such a trap that it had nothing to do but to remove me to erase the blame that it saved me."

Shahidur, appointed as the additional judge on April 24 last year, said if he resigned earlier then others also facing such charges had to copy his action under pressure.

"I faced the judicial council only to put an end to politicking with judges. I had to become a scapegoat to protect others.

"I have not done any wrong, I have no guilty feeling."

3 minor children accused

UNB, Munshiganj

Sixteen members of a family, including three children, all accused of a criminal charge, appeared before a magistrate's court yesterday.

Accused 18-month-old Runa was in her mother's lap, while Saddam, 8, and Razia, 9, were behind her.

Accused of forcibly digging in a field of a neighbour in Medni Mondol village of Louhajang upazila, they came on receiving summon from the court.

The magistrate ordered verification of the identity of the children by local Union Parishad chairman.

Death anniversary



Today is the fifth death anniversary of Chand Sultana, a developer of non-formal education materials, says a press release.

She developed education materials for different age groups and especially for women's empowerment.

Obituary

Abdul Mannan, a former chairman of Baraibari UP, Kishoreganj, died of bone cancer at his village home on April 17 at the age of 75, says a press release.

He is survived by his wife, three sons and four daughters.

Mannan was also involved in various socio-cultural activities in his area.

DHAKA TODAY

Film show

The Academy Film Society will screen an Indian film titled 'Dil Chata Hai' (2001), an American film titled 'Radio' (2003) and a Spanish film titled 'Matador' (1986). Venue: Society auditorium, 21/C Jigatola. Time: 3.30pm, 6.30pm and 8.30pm.

Indian film show

The High Commission of India will screen a film titled 'Hungame'. Venue: Indian Cultural Centre, Gulshan.

Meet the lawmakers

The National Organising Committee of the Global Action Week will hold a meeting titled 'Meet the lawmakers' on the occasion of Global Action Week - 2004 of the Global Campaign for Education. Venue: Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. Time: 12.00 noon.

Seminar

The Jatiya Lekhok Forum organises a seminar on 'The role of libraries in shaping the minds of children', with Education Minister Dr M Osman Farruk as chief guest. Venue: Public Library seminar hall. Time: 3.00pm.

Workshop

Bangladesh Protibandhi Kalyan Samity will hold a 'Disabled People's Organisation PRSP Consultation Workshop'. Venue: BIAM auditorium, 63 New Eskaton. Time: 9.00am.

Condolence meeting

The Jatiya Geeti Kabi Parishad will hold

a condolence meeting in memory of late SM Hedayet, a renowned lyricist. Venue: Beijing Garden Chinese Restaurant, Fulbaria. Time: 4.30pm.

Earth Day

The School of Environment Science and Management, Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), organises a programme to mark the Earth Day. Venue: IUB campus # 8. Time: 10.30am.

IUB academic award ceremony

The Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) will hold its annual academic award ceremony for 2003. Venue: IUB campus, House # 6, Road # 14, Baridhara. Time: 2.30pm.

DHAKA TOMORROW

Painting exhibition

The first solo exhibition of paintings by Mohammad Shahjalal Shaheen will be inaugurated. Venue: Drik Gallery, House # 58, Road # 15A, Dhanmondi. Time: 5.30pm. The exhibition will remain open from 3.00pm to 8.00pm daily till April 29.

Inauguration

Sylhet Division Development Parishad will inaugurate its own office building and hold a reunion. Venue: 60/C Naya Paltan. Time: 9.30am.



PHOTO: STAR

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil speaks at a press conference at Dhanmondi office in the city yesterday while presidium member Abdus Samad Azad looks on.

HC asks REB

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charge of low-key corruption in a controversial move that he challenged saying the board did not follow the appropriate procedure.

"The same group that is trying to rob people by getting Dhaka North Power Project (DNPP) cleared as it is now is trying to force me out of the RPCL as I am standing in their way," Sabur told The Daily Star.

The project consultant, Lahmeyer, has tampered with the DNPP criteria to clear way for only one company to get the 153 million euro deal and only Alstom that submitted bid documents in February's tender was found qualified.

Lahmeyer was also selected without bidding allegedly because of lobbying by its local agent that has strong influence over the REB and now even attends the REB board meeting illegally.

DNPP's German donor KfW revealed the anomalies in an investigation report submitted in February. Earlier, the Asian Development Bank alleged corruption in the DNPP and appointment of Lahmeyer.

"Now they are trying to give this company the Tk 1,000 crore contract," a RPCL source alleged. "They are also trying to appoint Lahmeyer as an operation and maintenance consultant for 25 years on a monthly fee of Tk 3 crore without a tender," he added.

The Prime Minister's Office asked the REB to respond to the concern of the donors and observed in a letter that costly projects like the DNPP often turn out to be loss-making. The letter suggests the REB ensure all measures so the DNPP does not become a loss-making concern.

REB Chairman Ziaul Islam Chowdhury, who initiated the move to oust the RPCL managing director on allegations of corruption of different hues, says he does not see corruption in the RPCL deal.

Five RPCL officials complained to the chairman that the RPCL managing director encashed a 30-day leave and drew incentive bonus from the company illegally and obtained financial benefit in the name of supplying snacks to meetings of the Power Division. He was also accused of nepotism and leaking out confidential information of the company.

Sabur refuted the allegations and said: "These are all baseless and I have given categorical answers to all allegations. Some REB members are trying to harass me instead of responding."