

Biman starts journey as public limited company

Agreement with govt signed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday started its journey anew as a public limited company (PLC) named Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd with the signing of an agreement between Biman and the government.

"Biman will now run independently and Biman board will take decisions on its own," Communications Adviser Maj Gen (retd) MA Matin told newsmen at the agreement signing ceremony at the civil aviation and tourism ministry.

It is now the largest PLC in the country with an authorised capital of Tk 15,000 crore divided into 150 crore ordinary shares of Tk 100 each.

The new PLC has acquired all movable and immovable assets and liabilities (about Tk 2,000 crore) of Biman Bangladesh Airlines through yesterday's agreement.

Fakhru Alam, joint secretary to the civil aviation and tourism ministry,

and Dr MA Momen, managing director (MD) of Biman, signed the agreement.

Earlier on July 23, Biman had applied to the office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms to be registered as Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd.

"Biman has entered a new era with its conversion into a PLC... From now on, it will not remain a part of the government as it was in the past," the communications adviser said.

An operator will be appointed to run Biman efficiently and tender would be floated for this within three months, Matin said.

Replying a question, he said, "Biman's present bad shape is due to government control over it."

On purchase of new aircraft, he said, "Biman board will take decision in this regard." He however added, "It is not possible to buy new aircraft now because it takes a couple of years to get a new one."

Asked about offloading of Biman shares, the adviser said, "Biman board will decide on this after an operator is appointed."

He mentioned that the government will gradually offload up to 49 per cent shares of the airlines to the private sector and retain 51 per cent shares.

The Biman board of directors now comprise secretaries of the Cabinet Division and the ministries of energy, commerce, finance, civil aviation, foreign affairs. The six secretaries and a joint secretary to the civil aviation ministry have been made seven shareholders of the new PLC.

Under the PLC arrangement, the cabinet secretary is the first chairman of the PLC and the present MD of Biman is its CEO as well as MD.

The present caretaker government took the initiative to turn Biman, a huge loss-making concern, into a PLC to make it a healthy commercial venture.

Strengthening local govt a must for admin decentralisation

Experts tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Strengthening local government is a must for administrative decentralisation which is needed to ensure the rights of people at grassroots level, said the experts at a roundtable yesterday.

They said as the representatives of the local government are not elected by the people, they show little responsibility and accountability to provide better services to them.

The roundtable was organised by Bangladesh Union Sadasya Sangstha (Baisos) at the National Press Club in the city.

The Sangstha presented an 18-point recommendation titled 'Ways to strengthen and make vibrant the local government institutions' to the seven-member committee formed by the caretaker government.

The recommendations include the structure, manpower, finance, duties, responsibilities and coordination among the local government institutions.

It also recommended how the relations would be maintained between the central government and the local government and the local

government and parliament members.

"It is not possible to make the union parishad vibrant with only 2.67 percent development budget fixed for local government which is 40 percent in Kerala and 16 percent in West Bengal. Besides, to increase manpower and to work properly the budget should be increased," said Matiur Rahman Tapan highlighting the problems facing the local government.

As chief discussant, Coordinator of Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) Ferdous Ahmed Qureshi said to strengthen the local government, the greater districts should be made divisions and separate divisional council should be formed.

But political decentralisation is a must before administrative decentralisation, he said, adding, the system of electing local government should be changed.

"The local government representatives should be elected directly by people's vote, not by the suggestions of donor agencies," said Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, project coordinator of Gonoshasthya Kendra, adding that even the chairman should be elected

by direct vote of the people and not by the members.

Member of the Local Government Strengthening Committee Dr Badiul Alam Majumder said the local government should be given four Fs- function, finance, functionaries and freedom.

"We should follow the principle of resolving the problem where it emerges," he said, adding that only those problems could be brought to the central government, which are not possible to resolve at local government level.

"If we want to create opportunity to flourish leadership, we should also strengthen local government," said Badiul Alam.

Moderated by Baisos Chairman Golam Sarwar Milon, the roundtable was also addressed by local government expert Dr Tofael Ahmed, former secretary to the government Khondokar Fazlur Rahman, Prof Ferdous Hossain, Banker Shah Mohammad Nurul Alam, former parliament member Golam Rabbani, and JSD General Secretary Abdul Malek Ratan.

20 top police officials transferred

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty top police officials were transferred and given new postings yesterday in a shake-up of the police administration.

Besides, two of them were given promotion. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Sheikh Mohammad Sazzad Ali of DIG headquarters was promoted to Additional IG (current charge) and posted at the police headquarters while Additional DIG Abdus Salam of Chittagong was made the DIG (current charge) in Sylhet.

DIG Syed Shah Jamal Raj of Sylhet was transferred to the DIG headquarters and DIG Mahbubul Mohsin of Rajshahi was made the commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.

At the same time, 16 SPs (superintendent of police) were transferred to different areas.

2 DCC sanitary inspectors held on bribe charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested two sanitary inspectors of the health department of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) as they were allegedly taking bribes from bakery owners in the city's Badda area on Monday evening.

The arrestees are Makhon Howlader, 45, and Abdus Salam, 43.

After interrogation, the Rab handed over them to Badda Police Station and a case was filed against them yesterday.


Lightning kills one in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

A villager was killed and two others were injured when lightning struck them at Nijpara in Kaunia Upazila at about 11:00am yesterday.

The dead was identified as Ranjit, 22.

He was fishing in a pond along with Golap and Mirza when the lightning struck them, the police said. The other two were injured.



Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at a few places over all the six divisions with moderately heavy rainfall is also likely at places in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said

Highest temperature 34.7 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 24.5 degree Celsius at Sylhet.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:42pm and rises at 5:28am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	32.5	25.6	80	89
Chittagong	31.0	26.5	83	96
Rajshahi	33.0	26.7	86	80
Khulna	33.2	27.0	84	70
Barisal	32.2	26.5	89	76
Sylhet	28.8	24.5	100	95
Cox's Bazar	32.6	26.2	80	76

US diplomat for lifting ban on politics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Charge d' Affaires Geeta Pasi yesterday urged to lift the ban on politics saying it is required to bring positive change in Bangladesh.

"Dialogue is part and parcel of an effective reform process. As such, lifting the ban on politics is absolutely critical as a kick start to positive change in Bangladesh. The arbitrary application of the ban has been a concern, both domestically and internationally," she said.

Geeta Pasi added lifting the ban does not mean ushering back the culture of violent partisan street politics. "It would signal that there is room for a new, constructive political discourse, and help guarantee that this new breeze of reform can permeate the political parties," she said.

The US charge d' affaires was addressing the monthly luncheon meeting of American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham).

"To back up our calls for a robust political and electoral process, we are providing assistance in a variety of key areas: to increase the capacity of the judiciary, improve local governance, strengthen civil society, and help promote a free and professional media - all essential elements in a functioning democracy," Geeta Pasi said.

She viewed that corruption is an insidious disease that saps a nation of its vitality and promise, and it has no place in a democracy.

The US charge d' affaires said to make a real break with the past, and to earn people's confidence, the government needs to ensure corruption cases are prosecuted fairly, transparently, and without selectivity or political motivation.

"It is crucial that all those accused are accorded the full range of their legal and constitutional rights," Geeta Pasi added.

"This is a time of great opportunity in Bangladesh's history - the political, social and economic investments you make today are the venture capital of a new future for Bangladesh that must include a clear and unwavering focus on democratic values," she said.

The US charge d' affaires said reports of deaths in custody and allegations of mistreatment of detainees, 'secret' detentions, and other breaches of due process raise concerns both here and abroad.

Citing Petrobangla-Chevron dispute, she said major investment partners of Bangladesh are being treated in a manner inconsistent with international norms and which signals other foreign investors to stay away.

"Bangladesh must respect contracts and international standards for resolving disputes in order to continue to attract foreign investment," Geeta Pasi suggested.

The US charge d' affaires found that Bangladesh has already proven itself to be a world-class competitor in the readymade garments industry.

The dramatic improvements at Chittagong Port, in terms of pricing, transparency and efficiency are one such example of Bangladesh taking positive steps to control its own economic future, she said.

Geeta Pasi said the US is reviewing a petition from the AFL-CIO, an American labour organisation, requesting that Bangladesh's preferential trade status be curtailed because of inadequate follow-through in implementing the legislation to protect workers' rights.

"Upholding international labour rights standards, then, must be of vital importance to both governments and private businesses," she said.

In his welcome speech, AmCham President Syed Ershad Ahmed urged the government to implement the Foreign Private Investment Promotion and Protection Act properly to ensure a congenial environment for the foreign investors.

Asked about offloading of Biman shares, the adviser said, "Biman board will decide on this after an operator is appointed."

He mentioned that the government will gradually offload up to 49 per cent shares of the airlines to the private sector and retain 51 per cent shares.

The Biman board of directors now comprise secretaries of the Cabinet Division and the ministries of energy, commerce, finance, civil aviation, foreign affairs. The six secretaries and a joint secretary to the civil aviation ministry have been made seven shareholders of the new PLC.

Under the PLC arrangement, the cabinet secretary is the first chairman of the PLC and the present MD of Biman is its CEO as well as MD.

The present caretaker government took the initiative to turn Biman, a huge loss-making concern, into a PLC to make it a healthy commercial venture.

Brac allocates Tk 50 lakh for flood relief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police detectives yesterday unearthed a den in the city where drivers have long been selling fuel oil of the vehicles of different government and private offices and private cars.

The law enforcers also arrested six people from the den, a rickshaw garage, near Shahidullah Hall of Dhaka University during a raid and seized 12 litres of fuel oil, Tk 9500 and fuel measuring equipment.

The arrestees include four drivers, Majidul Islam, Mohammad Salam, Rony and Farhad, owner of the garage Selim and his manager Shahjahan.

Selim said he buys fuel oil at Tk 40 a litre and sells it at Tk 50. And 80 to 100 drivers come to his garage to sell fuel oil daily, he added.

Addition Deputy Commissioner of the Detective Branch Masudur Rahman said the gang has been carrying out the illegal trading for the last 10 years.

Dhanmondi roads renamed after Hafiz, Mohiuddin

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has renamed Dhanmondi Road No 8/A and Dhanmondi Road No 33 (old) after Mirza Golam Hafiz and Mohiuddin Ahmed respectively in recognition of their outstanding contribution to different democratic movements of the country, says a DCC press release.

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka unveiled the name plaques of Mirza Golam Hafiz Sarak and Mohiuddin Ahmed Sarak at a ceremony in the city yesterday where family members of Mirza Golam Hafiz and Mohiuddin Ahmed were also present.

Prof Anisuzzaman, Harunur Rashid, Col Shawkat Ali Khan, Misha Rahman and DCC Chief Executive Officer Saifuddin Ahmed also attended the ceremony.



Bricks and piles of earth on a road at Laxmibazar add to traffic congestion in the area. The picture was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

2 outlaws killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two leaders of outlawed parties were killed in crossfire during a "shootout" between police and their cohorts early yesterday after police raided Khejurtala village of Kushtia Sadar upazila where two outlawed parties rendezvoused.

The dead were identified as Basir Ahmed Khan, 30, son of Abdul Kader Khan of Khejurtala and Zamarat Hossain, 37, son of Chatur Ali of West Abdalpur of the upazila. Basir was a leader of Biplabi Communist Party (BCP) and Zamarat was of Gana Mukti Foulj (GMF).

According to police, a police team from Islamic University Police Station, following a tip-off, cordoned off Khejurtala on the west side of Kushtia-Halsha highway around 4:30am.

They claimed leaders of GMF and BCP, alleged archivals, were holding a secret meeting there. Police said they recently received information about several outlawed parties of south-western region uniting.

After cordoning off the area, police asked them to surrender but the criminals opened fire on the police team, instigating a 30-minute firefight.

RANGS BHABAN SC judgement on govt appeal tomorrow

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court delivers its judgement tomorrow on a government appeal against the High Court verdict on the dispute over the demolition of the 22-storey Rangs Bhaban.

After hearing of the long-pending government appeal for the sixth day yesterday, a five-member bench of the Appellate Division fixed the judgement date.

The Rangs Bhaban was constructed in front of Bijoy Sarani on Old Airport Road at a cost of Tk 700 crore during Ershad regime.

SALE OF STOLEN FUEL OIL

Six arrested in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police detectives yesterday unearthed a den in the city where drivers have long been selling fuel oil of the vehicles of different government and private offices and private cars.

The law enforcers also arrested six people from the den, a rickshaw garage, near Shahidullah Hall of Dhaka University during a raid and seized 12 litres of fuel oil, Tk 9500 and fuel measuring equipment.

The arrestees include four drivers, Majidul Islam, Mohammad Salam, Rony and Farhad, owner of the garage Selim and his manager Shahjahan.

Selim said he buys fuel oil at Tk 40 a litre and sells it at Tk 50. And 80 to 100 drivers come to his garage to sell fuel oil daily, he added.

Addition Deputy Commissioner of the Detective Branch Masudur Rahman said the gang has been carrying out the illegal trading for the last 10 years.

WEALTH REPORT ACC has nothing to do with Hasina's letter

UNB, Dhaka

In response to former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's letter to the Anti-Corruption Commission chairman, the ACC secretary yesterday said they have nothing to do with it and she will have to submit her wealth statement by August 8.

"Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wrote a letter to the chairman seeking advice and cooperation in submitting her wealth statement. The commission in its meeting today considered the issue with sympathy. It appeared to the commission that it has nothing to do with it," ACC Secretary Mokhesur Rahman told reporters at his office.

He said the ACC letter containing the commission's decision was sent to detained Hasina through jail authorities yesterday noon.

In the letter to the ACC chairman, the AL chief stated how she would submit the statement since she is in jail now, Bangladesh Bank is not providing her account details and documents have been seized from her residence.

Meanwhile, ACC Commissioner Habibur Rahman said ex-prime ministers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia must submit their wealth statements within the stipulated time despite difficulties in having details of their bank accounts from the Bangladesh Bank.

Awami League chief Hasina has till August 8 to submit her wealth statement while BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will have to come up with the accounts by August 7.

The ACC on July 17 issued notices to Hasina and Khaleda directing them to submit their wealth statements within seven working days. The deadlines were extended later.

BSF opens fire across border

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkhira

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) opened fire across the border at Rudrapur in Kalaroa early yesterday.

Sources said the BSF members from Pipli camp in Swarnnagar under North 24 Pargana district, West Bengal, fired five bullets at about 4:30am, but the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) members of Rudrapur camp did not retaliate.

However, there was no report of casualty.

When contacted, Major Kamrul Hasan, operations officer of 41 Rifles Battalion, confirmed the incident.

DHAKA TODAY

Inauguration

The inauguration of the central library of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) will be held. Venue: CA Bhaban, Karwan Bazar. Time: 5:30pm.

Seminar

Contacts International organises a seminar on studying abroad. Venue: Hotel Razmondi Ishakha. Time: 10:00am.

Roundtable

Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Sujon) and The Hunger Project- Bangladesh will jointly organise a roundtable titled 'Decentralisation and local government: Opinions of the concerned and international experience'. Venue: Cirdap auditorium. Time: 10:00am.

World Breastfeeding Week

The inaugural ceremony of the World Breastfeeding Week will be held. Venue: Bangladesh Shishu Academy. Time: 10:00am.

Exhibition

Centre for Asian Art and Culture (CAAC)

organises a poster and photography exhibition. Venue: 62, Science Laboratory Road. Time: 5:30pm.

Launching ceremony

The launching ceremony of 'Anyamela', a local ethnic wear, will be held. Venue: ETC, Dhanmondi#27. Time: 11:00am.

Book festival

A ten-day Oitijhya Book Festival will begin. Venue: Public Library. Time: 10:00am.

Farewell

Department of Theatre and Music, University of Dhaka will bid farewell to Sarvajit Chakravarti, deputy high commissioner of India in Dhaka. Venue: Natmandal, Dhaka University. Time: 7:00pm.

ActionAid Roundtable

Dhoritri Foundation for Information Education and ActionAid Bangladesh will jointly organise a roundtable titled 'Social justice and human rights of women cleaners'. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 3:00pm.

DRAFT COAL POLICY New committee invites media at its meeting for transparency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tasked with finalising coal policy, the new committee decided at its first meeting yesterday to allow the press to be present at its discussions for ensuring transparency.

Headed by ex-vice chancellor of BUET Prof Abdul Matin Patwari, the eight member committee will also visit the Phulbari and Barapukuria coal mine areas to take public opinions on the mines.

The committee will also hear the persons opposing the coal mining, especially the Phulbari coal project, sources said.

Two experts-- Prof Nurul Islam and M Zaman will also be invited to help the committee scrutinise the sixth draft policy that has recently been finalised.

The meeting was additionally participated by the energy secretary Nasir Uddin and energy taskforce leader Major General Wadud. The next meeting will take place in Petrobangla Saturday.

This committee was formed as the sixth draft version of a national coal policy drew a lot of criticism for being anti-investment and self-contradictory. This new committee was announced on June 21 through a circular with a one-month deadline to complete its task, the first meeting was held more than a month later because Patwari was on a tour abroad.

Other members of this committee includes: Chairman of University Grants Commission Prof. Nazrul Islam, defence representative Maj Gen Ismail Faruk Chowdhury, journalist Ataus Samad, geologist Prof. Badrul Imam, research director of Centre for Policy Dialogue Prof. Mustafizur Rahman, Petrobangla director Mogbul-e-Elahi and Chief Executive Officer of Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Center (IIFC) Nazrul Islam.

The finalisation of the coal policy is being viewed as a very important document that will decide the future of the existing deals with Asia Energy or the Hosaf and also the other offers that is awaiting the government approval.

Death anniversary

Today is the first death anniversary of Ibrahim Talukder, a teacher and father of artist Zahid Mustafa, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad mahfil will be held at his residence at Thanapara in Tangail district after Asr prayers.

Family members of Ibrahim Talukder requested his relatives, friends and admirers to attend the programme to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

Md Lutfar Rahman

Today is the 7th death anniversary of Md Lutfar Rahman, a senior tax lawyer of Chittagong, says a press release.

On the occasion, a doa mahfil will be held at Chittagong, Dhaka and Naogaon. Relatives, friends and admirers have been requested to pray for the peace of the departed soul.