

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.

Fakhrul 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.

Replies 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."

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 Sangsata (Bausos) at the National Press Club in the city.

The Sangsata 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

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.

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 functional, 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 Bausos Chairman Golam Sarwar Milon, the roundtable was also addressed by local government expert Dr Tofayel 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.

Bu 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 Zafnullah Chowdhury, project coordinator of Gonoshastha Kendra, adding that even the chairman should be elected

US diplomat for lifting ban on politics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Charge d' Affairs 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' affairs 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' affairs 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 chargé 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 chargé 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.

Brac allocates Tk 50 lakh for flood relief

Brac, one of the country's leading development organisations, has made an initial allocation of Tk 50 lakh in relief for the people severely affected by floods across the country, says a press release.

Brac will concentrate its relief efforts in the worst-affected regions, including Manikganj, Netrakona, Cox's Bazar, Feni, Noakhali, Nilphamari, Kurigram, Comilla, Lalmonirhat, Sylhet, Sunamganj, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Mymensingh, Sirajganj, Bogra, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Tangail and Dhaka.

The relief will be distributed among 1,39,600 distressed families in these areas. More than 52,000 of these families have already lost their homes and have been forced to take refuge elsewhere while 43,000 are living in damaged houses and 44,600 have suffered severe losses due to damaged crops.

Brac's relief operations will include distribution of essential medicines and dry foods, including rice and biscuits. It will provide housing materials for those whose homes have been destroyed. It will also provide assistance to the government in distributing cooked food to victims.

The efforts are part of a long-term commitment by Brac to ensure adequate relief to the victims of floods and other natural disasters.



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

Fouj (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 archrivals, 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.

Additional 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, Harun Rashid, Col Shawkat Ali Khan, Mishu Rahman and DCC Chief Executive Officer Saifuddin Ahmed also attended the ceremony.

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