

# PM's step sought to end Biman crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Airline Pilots Association yesterday called for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's intervention to solve the problems confronting Biman, the national flag carrier.

At a press briefing at its Kurmitola office, it also announced an eight-point charter of demand for the government to meet.

The demands include an immediate lease on four Boeing 777 aircraft, an appropriate purchase policy and autonomy for Biman's board of directors.

Talking to reporters, the association leaders said Biman Bangladesh Airlines will reach rock bottom and foreign airlines will corner the market if its fleet is not

expanded.

They expressed disappointment at the Biman board's failure to have airlines leased from the firm recommended by the fleet planning sub-committee, a body comprised of representatives from different sections of the airline.

Association President Captain SM Helal said Biman has only five aircraft in its fleet at present. It needs to increase its operational capacity immediately, and the board must make a quick decision on the lease issue.

"We believe the prime minister's intervention will help resolve the problems at Biman," he added.

The association leaders said Biman lost many leasing opportunities due to the board's indecision. Noted

leasing companies do not respond to its tenders anymore.

Referring to the August 18 board meeting, Association's Secretary General Captain Mahubub said, "All but one of the members spoke in favour of taking out lease on four Boeing-777 300-ER. We wonder how come the board still couldn't reach a decision."

Captain Helal said, "We could not lease a single aircraft since 2006. We won't survive unless some airlines are added to Biman's fleet."

Pilot leaders criticised the Biman board for not attaching importance to the fleet planning sub-committee's recommendation for leasing four Boeing-777-300 ER from euroAtlantic, an aircraft leasing firm.

# Modhupur forest Industrial police

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people also commercially started pineapple and banana orchards in the forest. The government also paid no heed as wooden furniture shops, sawmills, pesticides and hormone shops and brick kilns mushroomed on the encroached forestland.

During this entire process, the state grossly violated the rights of the indigenous people who are traditionally living in the forest for long.

The government owes millions of dollars of soft loans to the Asian Development Bank for projects related to the Madhupur forest, the country's valuable biodiversity resource, which is gradually becoming a wasteland.

The official forest coverage of Bangladesh is around 17 percent against 25 percent, the general standard that a country should maintain.

Realising the alarming situation of low forest coverage, the government has set a goal to increase the forest coverage to 25 percent by 2015.

But in reality the coverage has gone down to 7.29 percent (1.08 million hectares) according to an unpublished joint study by Bangladesh Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation (SPARSO) and the Department of Forest in 2007.

Besides, the 7.29 percent coverage includes the forest of Chittagong Hill Tracts, sal forest, mangrove forest, bamboo or mixed forest and rubber plantation.

The Forestry Sector Master Plan, 1993, under which the government started tree plantation programme, says the annual deforestation rate in Bangladesh is 3 percent.

The Madhupur Sal Forest is a unique example how the government let the foresters steal trees, clear the forest to grow wood plants and let people grab forestland violating the rights of the forest inhabitants.

**STUDY ON A VANISHING FOREST**

Dr Tawhidul Islam of Jahangirnagar University studied the Madhupur forest during his doctoral thesis in Durham University, UK in 2002-2006 under Commonwealth Scholarship and witnessed sad episodes of deforestation.

Dr Islam analysed a series of satellite images taken in between 1963 to 2003 and detected how the government officials cleared the forest and let others do it.

He mentions in the summary of his thesis that remote sensing techniques have shown quality degradation of the forest, signs of areas cleared for air force firing range and social forestry, conversion of forestland into rubber plantation, evidence of engulfing forests with settlement expansion, and indications of the influence of infrastructure.

His study reveals that more than 85 percent of the Madhupur forest has been cleared in last 40 years. Whatever remains, in most of the areas the age of sal forest is not more than 10 to 15 years.

Within the defined study area in Madhupur the forest coverage reduced from 3,826 hectares in 1962 to 3,573 hectares in 1977, 1,801 hectares in 1997, and only 594 hectares in 2003.

"It is evidenced that the forest department cleared out natural forests to make room for this social forestry programmes, that eventually cause deforestation. In addition, the government plan to convert land use patterns to other land use types impacted on the forest," Dr Islam cites in the summary of his thesis.

Talking with different experts and local people it is known that although severely depleted, the remaining patches of the sal forest still hold a good number of unique birds, reptiles, insects, plants and animals that are found only in a deciduous forest like this.

**VIOLATION OF LAWS AND CONVENTIONS**

Bangladesh is a signatory to the Convention of Biological Diversity what makes the country responsible to take initiatives to conserve its natural resources.

But the government violated the convention by planting wood trees replacing the natural species.

According to the government statistics, right now 1,000 acres of the Madhupur forestland is being used as firing range, although article 23 (3) (ii) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1973 prohibits "firing any gun or doing any other act which may interfere with the breeding of any wild animals".

Besides plantation of exotic and commercial species like eucalyptus, acacia, banana, pineapple and so on in the National Park area of the Madhupur forest, ignoring the rights of the indigenous people is clear violation of the provisions of the Forest Act, 1927.

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meeting, also proposed that his forces could do the job. He is expected to submit a concept to the finance ministry in favour of his proposal soon, meeting sources said.

According to the home ministry proposal, the industrial police would consist of four separate units to be primarily deployed in four major industrial zones - Ashulia, Savar, Gazipur, and Narayanganj -- at a cost of Tk 20.3 crore. Each of the units would be headed by a deputy inspector general.

"Unrest and anarchy are often breaking out in industrial zones. But there is no separate police force there, and it is not possible to instantly tackle those situations due to a scarcity of force and the distances between the police stations and those zones," said Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sakhder in a letter to the Finance Division secretary on July 14.

He said industry owners are feeling insecure while foreign investors are being discouraged to invest due to frequent unrest in the garments sector. He urged the finance secretary to take steps to form the industrial police considering the premier's announcement in the parliament.

The home secretary also mentioned in the letter the finance ministry's earlier refusals of a couple of similar

proposals placed by the home ministry.

Apparel entrepreneurs have also been demanding creation of a separate police wing to protect the garments, industry, which often see labour unrest, resulting in substantial financial losses. The police department has also been pressing for realising the idea as it would increase the number of police, eventually benefiting the department.

Officials of the home ministry and the police department, who attended the meeting, expressed their astonishment at the finance ministry's observation.

"The prime minister made the announcement in the parliament due to repeated turmoil in the leading foreign exchange earning sector," said one of them, adding that ensuring security in industrial areas with the existing number of police personnel is not possible.

He also said there are people who instigate garment workers to create anarchy in the sector, capitalising on simple issues. "That kind of activities can be thwarted if a specialised force is deployed to maintain law and order in industrial zones round the clock," he observed.

Defending the idea of forming an industrial police force, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad said in a world of specialisation, special forces are needed for special sectors.

"How can a force contribute its full effort to maintain law and order in an area, if it does not know the people of the area, and their mentalities and tendencies," he told The Daily Star, adding, "When workers go on the rampage in Savar area, we have to collect forces from different districts which is time consuming and difficult."

Additional IGP (Administration) NBK Tripura said, "If the industrial police is formed and its forces are deployed permanently, they would be able to gather intelligence, and play a role in mitigating flare-ups at initial stages through arranging discussions between workers and owners."

Forkan Uddin Ahammad, director of operations (current) of Ansar and VDP, said they have around 16,000 personnel in their battalions

while an additional 3,00,000 trained personnel are in reserve, who are assisting both the army and police in fighting crimes in different places including Chittagong Hill Tracts and the southern region.

"Around 14,000 trained Ansars and VDPs are now deployed at different industrial areas, including Savar, Gazipur and Narayanganj while over 6,000 are helping the army in the hill tracts and 4,000 are helping the police. Some 2,500 are helping the police to fight extremists in southwestern districts, while 2,500 are deployed in Dhaka and Chittagong," he told The Daily Star, saying that the Ansar and VDP are quite capable of maintaining law and order in industrial zones, if deployed.

Asked about the finance ministry's observation, the home secretary said they will again discuss the proposal soon, but added that formation of an industrial police force is a must for ensuring congenial work atmosphere in industrial areas.

## Biman

FROM PAGE 1 for starts to join the fleet from 2011.

The Biman MD also said they are trying to lease aircraft to tackle the current situation.

Despite cutting flights on several routes, Biman is frequently failing to maintain its flight schedule, which is eventually contributing to the loss of its market share, said Biman insiders.

As an "easy remedy" to flight schedule chaos, Biman stopped flying on 10 international routes in the last two years and recently reduced flight frequencies on five profitable routes--Riyadh, Jeddah, Kuwait, London and Rome, Biman officials said.

The national flag carrier is currently going to 16 international destinations.

Apart from the two 11-year-old Airbus planes, it has aircraft aged between 17 and 31 years, commented its pilots and officials.

Biman presently owns three types of aircraft--three 29-year-old DC10-30s, two 31-year-old F-28s, and two Airbus A310-300s. The F-28s fly only on domestic routes.

Production of DC10-30s and F-28s has been discontinued because of their lack of viability in business.

# Afghan vote not universally free

## Warn observers; Taliban cut off fingers of 2 Afghan voters

AFP, AP, Kabul

Observers yesterday highlighted cases of fraud in Afghanistan's elections and said voting was not universally free due to violence and intimidation with speculation mounted about a possible run-off.

The top contenders in the race both claimed they were heading for victory after the second ever presidential election, which was acclaimed by the West but undermined by growing complaints of ballot-stuffing and low turnout.

Meanwhile, Taliban militants cut off the ink-stained fingers of two Afghan voters in the militant south during the presidential election, the country's top election monitoring group said yesterday.

Two voters who had dipped their index fingers in purple ink a fraud prevention measure were attacked in Kandahar province shortly after voting Thursday, said Nader Nadery, the head of the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan. Kandahar is the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban.

Rumours that militants would cut off voters' ink-stained fingers spread before

the vote. A Taliban spokesman had said militants would not carry out such attacks, but the Taliban is a loose organisation of individual commanders who could carry out the threat on their own.

Millions of Afghans voted in the country's second-ever direct presidential election, although Taliban threats and attacks appeared to hold down the turnout, especially in the south where President Hamid Karzai was expected to run strongly among his fellow Pashtuns. At least 26 Afghan civilians and security forces died in dozens of militant attacks.

Definitive results are not due until next month, leading Afghan and Western officials to call for calm as President Hamid Karzai declared a win and his main rival, ex-foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, insisted he was ahead.

The election may have been hailed a success in foreign capitals, which have pumped billions into Afghanistan since the 2001 US-led invasion and deployed 100,000 troops to contain a Taliban insurgency, but concerns have mounted.

"Free was not the case in some parts of the territory due to terror installed," said the head of the EU observation mission, Philippe Morillon.

"Generally what we have observed was considered by our observers with our methodology good and fair," he added, but reserved judgment on whether the polls were credible, saying "a lot of complaints" would take time to evaluate.

One foreign official said the Election Complaints Commission had so far received 100 formal complaints about irregularities, including "allegations of ballot-stuffing in Kandahar".

Leading local monitors, the Free and Fair Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), mentioned cases of intimidation, multiple and under-age voting, fraud, ballot stuffing, partial election commission staff and polling centres closing early.

"Our observers saw two voters whose fingers, with the ink, were cut off in Kandahar. We don't know who was responsible but we do know the Taliban did threaten this," said Nader Nadery, chairman of FEFA.



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### দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

১। এতদ্বারা ২০০৯-২০১০ অর্থ বছরে র‍্যা‍ব-৯, ইসলামপুর, সিলেট এর যানবাহনের বিভিন্ন প্রকার স্পেয়ার্স পার্টস/প্রব‍াদি সরবরাহের নিমিত্তে প্রকৃত প্রস্তুতকারী/সরবরাহকারী ও ডিলারদের নিকট হতে সিলমোহরকৃত খামে দরপত্র আহ‍বান করা যাচ্ছে। দরপত্রাদাতাদের পরিচালক, র‍্যা‍ব-৯, সিলেট এর অনুকূলে ব্যাক ড্র‍াফট/পে-অর্ডার এর মাধ্যমে দরপত্র জ‍ামানত জ‍মা দিতে হবে। অকৃতকার্য দরপত্রাদাতাদের নিরাপত্তা জ‍ামানত দরপত্র গ্রহণের পর ফেরত প্রদান করা হবে। দরপত্র সিডিউলের বিবরণ এবং মূল্য নিম্নে দেয়া হলো। র‍্যা‍ব-৯, ইসলামপুর, সিলেট এর কার্যালয় এমটি শাখা হতে অফিস চলাকালিন সময়ে ২৪ আগস্ট ২০০৯ ইং তারিখ হতে সিডিউল (সকাল ১০.০০ ঘটিকা হতে ১৬.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত সরকারী ছুটির দিন ব্যতিত) পাওয়া যাবে। দরপত্রাদাতাগণ দরপত্র জ‍ামানতসহ সিলমোহরকৃত খামে প্রত্যেক লটের জন্য পৃথক পৃথক ভাবে দর প্রদান করবেন। সিডিউলের বিবরণ এবং মূল্য নিম্নে দেওয়া হলো :

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