

Biman's DC-10

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suspend operation of the aircraft and cancel its flight scheduled for 9:30am local time on Jeddah-Chittagong-Dhaka route due to a leakage in the hydraulic line in one of its wings.

The national carrier sent spare parts and technicians from Dhaka to Jeddah in a flight today at 1:00am. It might require only a couple of hours to repair the leakage, the official told The Daily Star.

After hours of misery, the passengers were taken to local hotels. The Biman authorities will bear all the expenses, according to Biman sources.

Biman will accommodate as many as it can in the next Jeddah-Sylhet-Dhaka flight scheduled for 6:00pm today, they added.

A top Biman official said they will have to revise the schedules of other flights due to the technical glitch detected during the aircraft's flight to Jeddah.

"We've already asked the next flight to land in Dhaka first to offload passengers before flying to Sylhet," said another Biman official seeking anonymity.

The Chittagong-bound passengers will take another domestic flight from the capital to reach their destination, he added.

Biman has a fleet of 12 aircrafts including four DC-10s. It is the only airline in the world which still operates 34-year-old DC-10s, mentioned sources in Biman.

JS body

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telecommunications ministry at a meeting at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban also asked the BTRC to settle the issue of licence renewal fees for mobile phone operators without further delay.

The BTRC in May last year cancelled licences of RanksTel, Dhaka Phone, National Telecom, PeoplesTel, and WorldTel after switching off services in March for their involvement in illegal international call termination through voice over internet protocol (VoIP) technology.

The telecommunications regulator has already taken initiatives to give back licences to two operators, committee chief Hasanul Huq Inu told The Daily Star.

"Today we asked officials concerned to return licences conditionally to the rest of the three," added the lawmaker of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD).

He also observed it is already too late to decide about licence renewal fees of mobile phone operators, which deprived the government of huge revenue.

"The government will shovel crores of taka once the issue is settled. The committee asked both the ministry and BTRC to resolve the issue immediately without wasting precious time," mentioned the JSD leader.

The House watchdog also recommended that the government waive all types of tax and duty on internet modem, noted Inu adding, they asked to allow tax-free import of internet equipment to ensure cheap internet service for the people.

The now-defunct landline telephone operators had been serving around six lakh clients, according to committee sources.

RanksTel was the market leader with more than 3 lakh subscribers followed by PeoplesTel's 1.6 lakh and National Telecom's 1.38 lakh. Besides, Dhaka Phone had 77,000 customers and WorldTel served 14,000, they added.

Khaleda

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judiciary situation in Bangladesh, said BNP Vice-chairman Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury who was present there.

The minister said that not only Prof Yunus issue is a case of human rights violation, there are also other instances of rights violation in Bangladesh.

The British minister wanted to know what steps Khaleda will take if she returns to power. In reply, she said the party will establish the rule of law and ensure independence of judiciary and strengthen it.

Khaleda was scheduled to hold a meeting with Conservative Party Co-chairman Sayeeda Warsi at 10:00pm London time.

Farmers beam

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Boro season--the biggest of the three rice-growing seasons--begins in December-January and ends in April-May. Aman and Aus seasons come next.

Output of Aman was 1.22 crore tonnes last season and that of Aus was 21 lakh tonnes.

According to a government estimate, the country's yearly demand for rice is over 3 crore tonnes.

Major Boro-growing regions are northern districts, greater Mymensingh and haor areas in Sylhet, Sunamganj and Moulvibazar districts.

Asked about the reasons for the better showing, Matia Chowdhury said the weather was good throughout the Boro season and there was no flash flood either. "We made all sorts of fertiliser available at cheap prices, and all this helped achieve a higher yield."

She also referred to the slashing of non-urea fertiliser prices in October last.

Habibur Rahman, director general of the Department of Agriculture Extension, said, "Too much of rain or foggy weather that brings on pest attacks was almost absent this season."

Besides, farmers used adequate non-urea fertilisers in addition to urea fertiliser, and it helped better sprouting of paddy plants and their balanced growth, he mentioned.

"Our yield this season is more than what we have been expecting. You will be happy to see cheerful farmers gathering Boro in their fields," Selim Basith, a farmer in Kadamtali area in Sylhet, told this correspondent over the phone.

Boro yield per hectare (231 decimals) this year will be around 4.5 tonnes, compared to 3.95 tonnes last year. Rice growers' only desire now is getting a good price for it, he said.

Mofizul Haque, a farmer in Sundarganj of Gaibandha, said he will get 24 maunds of rice per bigha. This is around two maunds more than last year's yield.

Poritosh Datta, a farmer in Phulpur of Mymensingh, said many of them used guti (granular) urea, which has helped increase the yield.

The agriculture minister said paddy price is still Tk 600 a maund. "If we see the price is going down and farmers are facing losses, we [government] will start procuring rice."

Urban health

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"Most of the slum and street dwellers have limited access to health care because the centres open after they go out to work and close by the time they are back to their huts," said Mohammad Jasim Uddin, a Health Systems scientist at ICDDR,B.

According to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), about 75 percent of the urban population in the country are out of the government's primary health care service, as the service mechanism for urban people is still inadequate and neglected.

The Local Government Division looks after urban health care, but it can cover only one fourth of the four crore urban population for a lack of manpower, money and infrastructure, sources close to UPHCP said.

UPHCP health services are limited to only six city corporations and five municipalities, which have only seven percent of the country's total population, UPHCP Project Director Abu Bakr Siddique told The Daily Star.

UPHCP provides services in reproductive health care, child health care, and communicable diseases control. It provides limited curative care only in Bogra, Comilla, Sirajganj, Madhobdi and Savar municipalities and six city corporations. The

remaining 104 municipalities are out of UPHCP service network.

According to Bangladesh Urban Health Survey 2006, childhood malnutrition is high among slum population. Almost 50 percent of slum children are underweight compared to 28 percent outside the slums.

It said over 56 percent of the slum children are stunted or suffer from chronic malnutrition.

The health infrastructure of the country was built centring the rural people 30 years back when urbanisation was slow.

It is now time to focus on health services of urban people as more people are migrating to the cities, experts said.

The country's urban population is expected to grow by 3.42 percent between 2010 and 2015, according to the World Urbanisation Prospects: 2007 Revision Population Database of the United Nations Population Division. This is higher than what is projected in rural population growth at a rate of 78 percent.

By 2050, urban people will account for over 56 percent of the country's total population, up from 30 percent today, experts said quoting the United Nations Population Division.

7 months gone

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to resist the ring looting the house of their neighbour Ruhul Amin around 2:00am on October 8 last year.

An unidentified gunman fired a bullet at his son Mizanur Rahman Soheli while he was repairing his car in Ashulia three months ago.

He escaped unhurt as the bullet missed him. Later Mizanur handed over a bullet casing to Rafiqul Islam, sub-inspector of Ashulia Police Station and also the investigation officer (IO) of the case.

The family apprehends assault from the killers who still remain at large.

Contacted, Officer-in-Charge Sirajul Islam of Ashulia PS denied hearing about the shooting incident.

Locals chased suspected killers Shipon, Shakil, Sahabuddin and their accomplices when they appeared at Gazirchat few days back but police always claim they could not trace the gang, mentioned Mohammad Meron Khan, another son of Mozammel.

"Hearing about the incident, I rushed to Gazirchat but could not arrest them," noted the IO.

Some of the arrestees admitted to the killing and disclosed names of their accomplices in the crime, according to the OC and the

IO.

Police produced the arrestees before the court and the judge granted them bail at different dates, mentioned OC Sirajul adding, they have nothing to do if the court frees someone on bail.

Mizanur said about 15 days ago he came across Shipon, an accused on bail, at Gazirchat. The suspect threatened him saying he (Shipon) needs to commit two to three more murders.

He filed a general diary with Ashulia PS mentioning some mobile phone numbers. The two brothers received frequent threats from those numbers to withdraw the murder case.

Mizanur, however, tried to convince the unidentified callers pointing out that they did not file the case. Since the government is the complainant, they had no authority to withdraw the case.

IO Rafiqul noted he wrote about this to the higher authorities and is yet to receive a report on tracking the mobile phones.

As the law enforcers could not recover the looted goods and money and arrest the alleged killers, they cannot submit the charge sheet, added Rafiqul.

The cop expected to prepare the charge sheet within around two more months.

Egypt military says no amnesty for Mubarak

AFF, Cairo

Egypt's ruling military council dismissed yesterday a report that it might pardon ousted leader Hosni Mubarak or his family, saying it does not intervene in judicial affairs.

"There is absolutely no truth to what has been reported by the media that the supreme council is moving towards a pardon for former president Mohammed Hosni Mubarak or his family," the council stated on its Facebook page. "The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces does not interfere in one way or the other in legal procedures to hold the former regime symbols accountable," the statement read.

Mubarak has been detained since April on suspicion of involvement in the deaths of protesters and corruption. He is under arrest in a hospital, where he was treated for a heart attack during an interrogation.

Veiled cops

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capital's Mirpur in June 2009, police said.

Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Kafrul Police Station, told The Daily Star they devised the technique so that the muggers cannot identify them.

"Our teams catch the muggers when they try to mug them."

One such team yesterday arrested two alleged muggers at Agargaon in the capital around 4:30am when they tried to mug the squad.

The arrestees are Sadnan Hossain Sajju and Azizul Haque. Two of the gang fled the scene.

The team was patrolling between Agargaon and Jahangir Gate link road in a microbus. As they reached Agargaon, four criminals in a private car stopped the microbus and tried to mug them.

"Police shot at them with the guns hidden under their veils. The muggers also fired back," Latif said.

The two arrested muggers, who received bullets in their legs, were admitted to the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD).

The police team seized their private car and a pistol with five bullets.

Five such special teams started the operation in the area on Monday, said Imtiaz Ahmed, deputy commissioner (Mirpur Division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

One of them is a "Burqa Team" while the four others patrol in plainclothes.

"Mugging had decreased in the area when we conducted such drives in 2009," recalled Imtiaz, who initiated the move.

Bus operators

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operators.

"The government on Monday said we wouldn't have to give any extra fare. But in reality, we are forced to pay extra fare. Where are the authorities to implement the government decision," said a passenger at Shabbagh.

"They [bus operators] charged me Tk 10, instead of Tk 8, for travelling from Science Laboratory to Kalyanpur. We have no option but to give the extra money since there is no authority to look into the matter," said a female passenger.

Bus operators started charging additional fares in the capital and other major divisional headquarters a day after the government increased the price of compressed natural gas by 50 percent on May 12.

Untoward incidents involving bus operators and passengers happened over fares in the last few days. The government on May 16 re-fixed bus fares increasing it by 30 percent in consultation with the leaders of the transport owners' association.

According to revised fares, buses and minibuses operating in Dhaka and Chittagong cities will charge each passenger Tk 1.55 and Tk 1.45 a kilometre in place of Tk 1.20 and Tk 1.10.

The minimum fare of this mass transport service has been raised to Tk 7 from Tk 5.



Economic Relations Division Secretary Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, left, and Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Tamotsu Shinotsuka shake hands after signing the loan agreement for the Padma Bridge at the National Economic Council auditorium yesterday.

PHOTO COURTESY: THE EMBASSY OF JAPAN

Padma financing

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ensured as the World Bank earlier approved \$1.2 billion for the project. WB also committed to giving \$300 million more.

Islamic Development Bank (IDB), and Asian Development Bank (ADB) are the two other co-financiers of the bridge project. The deal with IDB for \$140 million will be inked on May 24 while the deal with ADB for \$615 million will be signed in June.

The Bangladesh government will provide the rest of the fund.

The 6.15-kilometre four-lane Padma Bridge requires an estimated funding of \$2.97 billion.

Within a span of just two and a half years, the Awami League government successfully acquired land for the bridge alongside ensuring the project's financing, making the Padma Bridge scheme the fastest moving large infrastructure project in the country's history.

Communications Minister Abul Hossain said after the tsunami had hit Japan, the media apprehended that Japanese assis-

tance might become uncertain. However, with the signing of this agreement, there remains no obstacle to the implementation of the bridge project.

Replying to queries from journalists, the minister said, "A proposal has been sent to the World Bank for its concurrence to float tender for the construction of the bridge. If the concurrence comes today, we will start the work tomorrow."

ERD Secretary Musharraf Hossain said Japan had pledged Bangladesh the loan package before it was hit by the tsunami, but it is still providing the assistance. Since independence, Bangladesh has received more than \$10 billion in assistance from Japan.

Japan never fails to fulfil its commitment, he added.

Bridge Division Secretary Mosharraf Hossain said the biggest advantage of Japanese credit is that it may later turn into a grant. So far, Japan has provided loans to 32 projects, of which 17 were relieved of the debt.

Japanese Ambassador Tamotsu Shinotsuka said the

concessionality of the loan is the highest with .01 percent annual interest rate, 10-year grace period, 40-year repayment period, and 87.07 percent grant element.

Tamotsu Shinotsuka hoped that the projects will be implemented smoothly and effectively, and that the people of Bangladesh will get maximum benefit from the projects.

In 2005, Japan initiated the feasibility study of Padma Bridge which will connect the South-western region -- home to 25 percent of the total population -- with the rest of the country.

Japan embassy in a press release yesterday said in the past Japan contributed to the building of five big bridges -- the Jamuna, Paksye, Rupsha, Meghna, and Meghna-Gumti.

It said Padma Bridge will drastically lessen the travel time between Dhaka and Khulna from over 12 hours to approximately 3 hours. Escalated mobilisation of people and goods between the two cities will also improve the national GDP by .56 percent a year.

Kahn to quit

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"He is obviously not in a position to run the IMF," Geithners said.

"It is important that the board of the IMF formally put in place for an interim period someone to act as managing director."

It is the first time that a top official from President Barack Obama's administration has publicly spoken about the impact of Strauss-Kahn's alleged sexual assault.

Washington has a major say in determining who runs the IMF, because it has the largest number of votes in the organisation.

Strauss-Kahn is not due back in court until Friday -- and there are growing calls for the IMF to fill the leadership vacuum, the BBC's Steve Kingstone in Washington reports.

Jean-Francois Cope, the leader of the French governing UMP party demanded the replacement of Kahn must be named "in the coming days."

"I don't see how he can carry out the job as managing director of the IMF. So, by definition, this question will have to be settled in the coming days," the UMP leader Jean-Francois Cope told reporters after a party meeting.

Earlier, Austrian Finance Minister Maria Fekter said Strauss-Kahn was "hurting" the organisation.

Meanwhile, Japan, the second largest donor after the United States to the IMF, said yesterday it was too early to discuss replacement of Kahn.

"On this point, I think it's premature to even consider," government spokesman Yukio Edano told reporters when asked whether a successor should come from Europe again, Asia or another part of the world.

Division is also potent in selecting region from where the next IMF chief will be selected.

South Africa yesterday said the new head of the

International Monetary Fund should come from a developing nation opposing a German claim that vacuum should be filled from Europe.

A European should take the top job at the International Monetary Fund if the position opens up soon, given that the eurozone debt crisis is the fund's central issue, said Germany.

Government spokesman Christoph Steegmans said Europe has "an abundance of highly qualified candidates" to replace Kahn if needed.

Emerging powers including China believe it is time for Europe, the IMF's biggest capital contributor, and the United States, its home, to reconsider arrangements to share leadership at the IMF and World Bank between the two.

"South Africa calls for a candidate from a developing country to be given the opportunity to be the managing director of the IMF," Pravin Gordhan, South Africa's finance minister, said in a statement.

"Such a candidate will bring a new perspective that will ensure that the interests of all countries, both developed and developing, are fully reflected in the operations and policies of the IMF."

French finance minister Christine Lagarde has emerged as a possible replacement to Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

Dhaka, Thimphu

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Once India allows Bhutan to use its land, Bhutan will start using the airport, the sources added.

Bangladesh civil aviation minister and the visiting Bhutanese minister were present during the signing of the agreement.

The Bhutanese minister said the agreement will be beneficial to air service operators and businessmen of both the countries.

Connectivity

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yesterday, hoping donors will come forward to fund the projects.

A high-level Asian Development Bank delegation is expected to arrive in Dhaka next week.

"We will seek fund during meetings with them," the communications minister told The Daily Star.

He said even after the rail bridge is built, trains might not be able to use it from the day of opening, if the rest of the rail lines are not ready at the same time.

The bridge related infrastructure development proposals include turning the dilapidated 33-kilometre Dhaka-Mawa Road into a 4-lane highway spending \$38.1 million, which is now being considered by the Planning Commission, while a new project of constructing a rail link between Kamalapur Railway Station and Mawa is in the pipeline with a price tag of \$250 million.

Construction of rail lines between Bhanga and Jessore will cost \$250 million, between Bhanga and Barisal will cost \$272 million, and between Tungipara and Mongla Port will cost \$150 million.

Acquiring land for the projects will require additional fund which is also not ensured yet.

Importance of Padma Bridge is huge for international connectivity as one of the proposed Asian Highway routes will use the bridge.

Although tender for the main bridge and river training are yet to be floated, rehabilitation of 76,000 affected persons due to acquisition of 1,100 hectares of land are going on in full swing.

The bridge will have a 4-lane road on the upper level, and a single track dual gauge rail on the lower level.

The main bridge will also have provisions for future installation of a broad gauge rail line as well as other facilities including gas and telecommunication lines.

Egyptian

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yesterday. It said in a brief news flash the Egyptian militant Saif al-Adel was named interim leader, while Mustafa al-Yemeni, whose nationality it did not give, would direct operations.

US special forces shot dead al-Qaeda leader bin Laden in his hideout outside the capital of Pakistan earlier this month.

US prosecutors say Adel is one of al-Qaeda's leading military commanders and helped plan the bomb attacks against the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998.

They also say he set up al-Qaeda training camps in Sudan and Afghanistan in the 1990s.

An al-Qaeda expert had said on Tuesday that Adel would likely not act as head of the organisation.

"This role that he has assumed is not as overall leader, but he is in charge in operational and military terms," said Noman Benotman, a former bin Laden associate who is now an analyst with Britain's Quilliam Foundation think tank.

Adel was believed to have fled to Iran after the US invasion of Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, and was subsequently held under a form of house arrest there, according to some media reports.

Arab media reports said Iranian authorities released him from custody about a year ago, and he then moved back to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. Some analysts say Adel may have returned to Iran or Afghanistan in recent weeks.

Auto drivers

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under the banner of Dhaka Zila Auto-rickshaw Shramik Union held a rally at the Jatiya Press Club and submitted a memorandum to the communications minister.

The 10-point demand also include punitive measures against the auto-rickshaw owners who collect extra fee from drivers ignoring the government-fixed rate, stopping of police harassment in the name of driving licence checking, adapting a new system so the drivers can obtain licence without hassle, creating parking place for auto-rickshaws at different places.

The organisation's general secretary, Mohammad Zakir Hossain, said if the government does not consider their demands by June 4, they will resort to strike from June 5.

Over 12,700 auto-rickshaws ply the city roads everyday.

Huji operative

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yesterday, Alim denied his involvement with Huji but confessed to dealing in illegal arms.

Commanding Officer Maj Shakhawat Hossain told journalists that they contacted Alim through middlemen a few days ago expressing interest to buy two shutter guns.

Alim, also known as Halim, asked them to go to his timber shop near Aratpur Masterpara outside the town around 8:30pm on Tuesday.

Plainclothes Rab men went to his shop accordingly and engaged in a conversation with him. They arrested him when he produced two shutter guns, said Rab officials.

On information from Alim, Rab men searched his shop and recovered two more shutter guns, a 9mm pistol loaded with one bullet, a revolver and a pipe gun.

The Rab team also recovered two live bombs, half kg of gunpowder, two magazines, cartridge making equipment, bomb making materials, batteries of mobile phones and eight books on jihad.

Alim was taken to the Rab-6 headquarters for interrogation.

About the books on Jihad seized from his shop, Alim said he used to read those for knowledge.