

Flight debacle

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with all Bangladeshi passengers and take Biman to the UK court for damages."

Most flew from Sylhet on Tuesday to catch the London flight early Wednesday and little did they know about the trouble that waited for them in Dhaka.

They complained to The Daily Star that they have been left in the dark about possible date and time of their flight, which is making their lives more difficult.

"This is inhuman," said Nazrul, a British citizen, who came to Bangladesh in November and was returning to London for an emergency business meeting. Hotelier Nazrul said his wife is calling him frequently from London and asking him to get to London quick since he has to sign a deal that has a deadline.

"We have just been dumped by Biman," he said.

While Nazrul impatiently waited for his flight to London, more Biman passengers joined in the wait as the national flag carrier's Thursday flight to London had to return to Dhaka following apparently a fire onboard.

FLIGHT DEBACLE

On Wednesday, Biman did not carry any London passengers from Dhaka. The scheduled London flight was cancelled and the aircraft was sent to Dubai to offload passengers there and then sent to Amman, Jordan, to pick up stranded Biman passengers. An earlier Biman flight to London had made an emergency landing in Amman and its 198 passengers were there waiting to get to London.

Things went even worse for Biman Thursday when its scheduled Sylhet-Dhaka-Dubai-London flight returned to Dhaka with 221 passengers after the crew discovered smoke coming out of the cargo bay of the Airbus. The crew had to use the onboard fire extinguishers. The plane had taken off from Sylhet at 12:20pm Thursday after a couple of hours' delay.

Biman MD and Chief Executive Officer Muhammad Zakul Islam, however, said, "Hopefully, the backlog will be over as an Airbus with the 221 passengers will fly early Saturday."

Biman sources said the flight will carry mostly stranded passengers of Wednesday's and Thursday's flights.

Biman failing to manage its flight schedules with its aging fleet has become a frequent phenomenon, passengers say. Only a few days ago Biman passengers heading for the middle-east had to endure delays as long as 40 hours.

Speed up

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Mostafa after a rally in Indian enclave Dashiir Chhara in Kurigram.

An agreement on exchange of enclaves was signed between the two countries during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's recent visit to Dhaka. The deal, however, did not stipulate any time frame for its implementation.

Md Moynul Haque, chairman of Phulbari union parishad said, "The people in these enclaves do not have any access to health, education, communication or any other facilities. Agitation will continue until the implementation of the 1974 Indira-Mujib pact."

He said they have long been pressing for establishing human rights in all the enclaves in the two countries.

Md Ishaq Ali, a middle-aged farmer in Dashiir Chhara enclave, said, "We do not get any facilities here."

He said they are even deprived of emergency medical services for living in an Indian enclave that lies inside Bangladesh territory.

The farmer said four members of a family in the enclave got injured in a clash over lands. They were taken to the Kurigram Sadar Hospital. But the doctors there refused to treat them as they were residents of an Indian enclave, not Bangladeshi citizens.

Committee General Secretary Mostafa said, "A total of 111 Indian enclaves are located in Panchagarh, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Kurigram, while all 51 Bangladeshi enclaves lie in Cooch Behar of West Bengal in India."

Run solo if BNP

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difficult position, Quader continued."

"If the BNP boycotted, the Awami League should do what it can to keep Jamaat engaged in the democratic process," the cable quoted Quader as saying. "One option for the Awami League would be to refrain from challenging strong Jamaat candidates to ensure Jamaat won at least a few seats in Parliament."

At the November 16 meeting with the then US ambassador, the AL chief, Sheikh Hasina, also echoed the same view of Quader about defection of many leaders from BNP-led alliance to polls.

"She [Hasina] predicted that many potential BNP and Jamaat Islami candidates would defy a boycott call and stand for election. Hasina confided that some BNP candidates had even approached her asking to join the Awami League," the cable said.

As she told the ambassador, Hasina reiterated that it was in BNP's own interest to participate in elections. Hasina was confident that there would be a large voter turnout even if BNP boycotted, it continued.

Speaking about making electoral alliance with Jatiya Party, the cable said, Hasina acknowledged that former president HM Ershad desperately wanted to be president again. "However, she could not promise this since it would be up to the Parliament to elect the next President" the cable said.

Two leading caretaker government officials negotiating the terms of parliamentary elections -- communications adviser Ghulam Quader and education adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman -- came amid great uncertainty over BNP's demands for participating in the election, Moriarty wrote in the cable sent to Washington on November 13, 2008 after holding meeting with the two.

"Both men expressed exasperation over mixed signals from the BNP over its bottom-line; Quader said he thought the party would likely boycott the vote because it simply was not ready."

The cable reads "Zillur expressed frustration over Khaleda Zia's failure to indicate her bottom-line demands. He gave four possible explanations: She was determined to be a spoiler and boycott the elections; she was playing a game of brinkmanship to wring maximum concessions from the government; she was in the midst of finalizing her negotiating position; or, she was uncertain about what to do."

"Many BNP leaders contacted by Embassy officers in recent days suggested indecisiveness was the reason behind the lack of clarity of what the party really wanted," said the cable.

The US embassy said recent conversations with BNP leaders suggest there may be flexibility in at least a few party demands. Although some BNP insiders have suggested delaying the elections until February, the party has not raised this demand publicly, it said.

The BNP also may be flexible in its demand that convicted party leaders receive permission to run for parliament.

The then BNP's Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan told US embassy's political officer on November 10 that Khaleda Zia asked him to come up with a list of alternative candidates for constituencies formerly represented by BNP politicians in jail on corruption convictions.

"[Khaleda] Zia Adviser Hannan Shah ran through some scenarios under which the party might contest the election even if the convicts remained barred from running. Still, several close advisers to Zia insisted the ban on convict candidates was designed to disadvantage the BNP and

continued to demand it be lifted," the cable said.

Wrapping up the discussion with the two advisers, Moriarty in conclusion wrote that the advisers stressed the caretaker government and its military supporters would not back down from holding elections on December 18. That means BNP must decide within a matter of a few days whether to participate, he wrote.

"Embassy officers have met with virtually all leading BNP officials this week to urge participation, and the Ambassador is seeking a meeting with [Khaleda] Zia to stress the case against a boycott," Moriarty wrote adding, "Whatever the BNP decision, the Embassy will continue to support the election timetable and to insist the Government do everything it can to ensure a free, fair and credible vote."

Around a week before meeting with Quader and Zillur, Moriarty met another leading adviser Major General (ret'd) MA Matin on November 6 and urged the government to do everything in its power to persuade Khaleda Zia to compete in the elections, said another cable.

The cable sent to Washington on November 12 said Gen Matin expressed dismay with BNP for making continuous new demands for participating in Parliamentary elections scheduled for December.

"Matin appeared preoccupied by the BNP's recent negotiations with his colleagues in the Caretaker Government. He said [Khaleda] Zia was continuously making new demands and changing agreements previously made," said the cable quoting adviser Matin.

The adviser, according to the cable, said for example, Khaleda Zia was insisting on the government's allowing BNP members convicted of graft to run in the parliamentary elections.

"Matin asked the Ambassador what the Government should do if the BNP decided to boycott the elections," said the cable, adding, "the Ambassador said the BNP would look foolish were the election to be held without it and international observers declared the vote free, fair and credible."

Criminals

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body was sent to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Babu worked for a brick trader, said Alamgir. His son left the house Thursday night around 11:00pm to go to his workplace near Keraniganj Model Town.

The next time he heard of Babu was when a youth identifying him as Manik told him over the phone that Babu's body was found with his throat slit open at Mintu Miah's garage, Alamgir added.

Police detained Manik and Babu's another friend Jalil for interrogation.

Police suspect that Babu was a drug addict and got killed following an altercation with some youths over sharing money to buy drugs, said Sajjad Rummon, sub-inspector of Keraniganj Model Police Station.

Meanwhile, some people found Joy Mondol, 18, lying with severe injuries at Chunkutia Chowrasta of Keraniganj around last midnight. They took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead at about 1:00am.

Hospital sources said Joy's body bore stabs in the neck and shoulder. The body was sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

Family members said some friends of Joy, a carpenter of Khejurbagh Pukurpar area, called him to come outside around 10:30pm on Thursday. They, however, could not tell any names.

The reason behind the killing could not be known immediately.

Rabbani's funeral held in Kabul

AFP, Kabul

Thousands of mourners buried slain Afghan peace negotiator Burhanuddin Rabbani yesterday, in chaotic scenes that undercut calls from President Hamid Karzai to pursue reconciliation with the Taliban.

Angry Rabbani supporters threw stones at government vehicles at the burial site in Kabul, and chanted "Death to America, death to Pakistan, death to Karzai" before being dispersed by guards who fired warning shots into the air.

PM addresses

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Al-Nasser, also the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to UN, at the UN meeting room Thursday evening (local time).

She thanked Qatar as it has already extended support to Bangladesh's candidature at the Security Council. The election will be held on October 16-17.

Abdulaziz Nasser also sought Sheikh Hasina's cooperation in making the World Trade Organization conference to be held in Qatar a success.

The prime minister and the UNGA president discussed various issues of development and democracy, said PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad. Foreign Minister Dipu Moni was also present.

Hasina said she believes that democracy can free people from poverty which is the common enemy of all South Asian nations.

She underscored the need for educating people to strengthen the foundation of democracy and reaffirmed her strong stand against terrorist acts.

The prime minister said terrorists have no border or religion. "We'll never allow our land to be used for terrorists' acts."

Today, Sheikh Hasina is expected to seek support of the world body to Bangladesh's annual flagship resolution, "A Culture of Peace," which she had launched for the first time in 2000 as the prime minister.

Besides, the PM is likely to focus on empowerment of women, attainment of MDGs, eradication of poverty and hunger, reduction of inequality, acceleration of human development, and elimination of terrorism.

Move to stop

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hassle and by paying proper fees -- Malaysian Ringgit 102 (RM= Tk 25)," said Begum Shamsunnahar, joint secretary of the expatriates' welfare ministry.

It will take only a week to issue passport to workers after they apply for that, said Shamsunnahar, who was on a six-member Bangladesh delegation that visited Malaysia from September 12 to 17. Khurshed Alam Chowdhury, Director General of the Bureau of Manpower Export and Training, led the team.

Contacted yesterday, Shamsunnahar said some people from other countries like Burma, India or Nepal reportedly managed to get Bangladeshi passport. "We must check such irregularities."

Issuing passports to the registered irregular workers is now a prime task for Bangladesh, as Malaysia's amnesty allows them to legalise their stay in that country and their jobs or to return home without facing any arrest, she said.

An estimated three lakh passports are required by the Bangladesh mission by December, Shamsunnahar said. "One lakh passports are already there and one lakh more are ready to be sent. Another one lakh will be arranged soon."

Responding to the Bangladesh delegation's request, the Malaysian authorities agreed to allow registration of around 50,000 irregular Bangladeshi workers who have not yet got registered, she said.

During its visit, the delegation met officials of Malaysia's home and labour ministries.

Mamata was never

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details were finalised, but obviously something else must have happened which made her change her mind.

Sources close to the negotiations said all drafts of the Teesta treaty were shown to Mamata, but it was unclear if the drafts mentioned the proportion of shares.

They said Bangladesh was in constant touch with Mamata considering her state's stake in the Teesta river, and she was invited several times to visit Dhaka.

The sources said Bangladesh and India reached a consensus on Teesta water sharing and exchanged draft agreements during the 37th ministerial-level Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) meeting held in New Delhi on March 17-20 last year.

Another round of water secretary level JRC talks were held in Dhaka on January 10 this year, which also discussed sharing of common rivers, and a Teesta deal was on the top of the agenda.

Finally, the water secretaries of Bangladesh and India met in New Delhi on June 6 this year to finalise the framework of an interim treaty for sharing the Teesta water.

Bangladesh Water Resources Secretary Sheikh Wahiduzzaman and Indian Water Secretary Dhruv Vijay Singh, meeting after a gap of five months, finalised the draft of the Teesta river water sharing agreement, and put it for signing during Manmohan's visit to Bangladesh on September 6-7.

A highly placed source at the Bangladesh foreign ministry said the proportion of water sharing which was fixed at JRC and water secretary level meetings remain unchanged till today, so the allegation that Mamata either was not aware or not consulted about the sharing formula is unfounded.

Diplomatic sources said Bangladesh, from the very beginning, proposed equal sharing of the Teesta water after keeping 20 percent for the river flow. India initially wanted 55 percent, and finally agreed on sharing the water on the basis of equity, which the officials said is as good as equal.

"The solution that we are looking at is based on the principles of equity and fairness," said the Indian External Affairs Minister SM Krishna during his visit to Dhaka on July 7 this year.

Earlier on June 7, Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said an agreement to this effect would be signed during Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka. She referred to water resources secretaries' meeting at New Delhi on June 6 and said there was enough positive development in the meeting.

The officials said Mamata, then a central cabinet minister from Paschimanga, was duly informed about the outcomes of all JRC meetings and the proposed water sharing formula.

They said since the JRC

meeting in March last year, Mamata did not oppose or disagree with the proportion of water to be shared, but surprisingly her objection came at the last moment and just a day before Manmohan's arrival in Dhaka on September 6.

The sources said Mamata had earlier assured that she would back the central government in the Teesta deal at the official talks between Bangladesh and India, during Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's New Delhi visit on January 10-13 last year.

Back then, the official talks, led by the prime ministers of the two countries, were also attended by Indian Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Home Minister P Chidambaram, External Affairs Minister SM Krishna, Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee, Commerce Minister Anand Sharma, and others.

During that round of talks Mamata was so emotionally charged that she delivered her speech in Bangla and recalled Bangladesh's father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and lauded Hasina, categorically promising to give Bangladesh a just share of Teesta water and to conclude a deal soon, according to the sources.

An agreement on sharing Teesta water was envisaged in the joint communiqué issued on January 12 last year after Hasina's visit.

Sources at the Bangladesh ministries of foreign affairs and water resources said Dhaka did not disclose the proportion of water to be shared, since after the ministerial-level JRC meeting in New Delhi on March 17-20 Mamata requested not to disclose the matter on the plea that a disclosure might influence the state elections in Paschimanga in April.

Manmohan, who was also due to visit Bangladesh in April or May, deferred his visit due to the state assembly elections in Paschimanga in which the Congress Party supported Mamata's Trinamool Congress.

The sources said the Bangladesh side kept its promise and did not disclose anything about the proportion of Teesta water sharing at the request of Mamata and Manmohan.

The Bangladesh government took all out efforts and even went beyond protocol to please Mamata so the signing of the Teesta deal goes smoothly.

BANGLADESH GOVT'S EFFORTS FOR MAMATA

After Mamata's landslide victory in the state elections, the Bangladesh prime minister and the foreign minister called her immediately after the final result of vote counting on May 13 this year. Mamata herself told her cheering supporters about the calls at the victory rally at her Kolkata residence, which was being telecast live on television. In a telephonic conversation, Hasina invited her to visit

Bangladesh. "Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina just called me and congratulated us on behalf of the people of Bangladesh," Mamata told the gathering and said she told Hasina that relations between the two countries have been cordial since the time of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and announced that she would work together with Bangladesh.

On May 18 this year, Hasina sent Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi Tariq Ahmed Karim to meet Mamata and congratulate her with a bouquet on behalf of the PM. He was the first foreign diplomat to meet the Paschimanga chief minister-designate.

The sources said the Bangladesh high commissioner extended an invitation to Mamata to visit Bangladesh. Mamata accepted the invitation instantly and agreed to visit Bangladesh before or during Ramadan.

On July 5, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sent her two advisers -- Economic Affairs Adviser Mashiur Rahman and International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi -- to formally invite Mamata to visit Bangladesh.

The two advisers met Mamata a day after the official announcement of the Indian premier's visit to Dhaka.

The sources in Dhaka said initially Mamata was ready to visit Bangladesh alone, but after announcement of Manmohan's visit schedule, she hinted that she might visit as a member of the Indian PM's entourage.

And later Mamata and four other chief ministers of Bangladesh's neighbouring Indian states were included in Manmohan's entourage.

A highly placed source at the Bangladesh foreign ministry told The Daily Star that Foreign Minister Dipu Moni wrote a formal letter to Mamata sometime in August inviting her to visit Bangladesh.

Mamata's dramatic opposition to the Teesta accord left diplomats both in Dhaka and New Delhi wondering what had caused her change of mind.

In a written reply dated September 1, just five days ahead of Manmohan's arrival in Dhaka, Mamata told Dipu Moni that she was keen to visit Bangladesh. "I am eagerly counting the days to go to Bangladesh," a Bangladesh foreign ministry official quoted Mamata as saying in her letter.

The Teesta river originates from the northeastern Indian state of Sikkim and flows through Paschimanga before entering Bangladesh.

India built a multi-purpose barrage at Gazoldoba upstream from Bangladesh, obstructing the flow into Bangladesh which badly needs the river's water to operate its Teesta irrigation project in the northern districts of Nilphamari and Rangpur.

Seven civilians killed by Afghan bomb

AFP, Kandahar

Seven Afghan civilians were killed and four others were wounded by a roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan yesterday, police said.

They were travelling in a minivan in Maywand district, Kandahar province when the blast happened at around 3:00 pm (10:30 GMT). Kandahar police chief Abdul Raziq said.

AL revs up

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December. AL has over 45,000 ward committees and 5,000 union committees.

Councils for thana [police station] and upazila units will be held in January-March and district and metropolitan units in April-June.

For over 500 upazila and 72 organisational district units, councils are long overdue. Most of the district units had their last councils in 2002 when the party was in opposition.

At yesterday's meeting--attended by AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam and other central leaders--seven committees were formed to monitor councils in seven divisions.

Sajeda Chowdhury, Matia Chowdhury, Syed Ashraf, Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim, Kazi Zafrullah, Sahara Khatun, Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju, among others, have been assigned to monitor the councils in Dhaka division. Obaidul Quader, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Ahmed Hossain, Dipu Moni and Faridunnaheer Laily will oversee the councils in Chittagong division.

Hanif and BM Mozammel Haque are among those picked up for monitoring councils in Khulna division, while Abul Hasanat Abdullah, Yusuf Hossain Humayun, AFM Bahauddin Nasim and Afzal Hossain are chosen for Barisal division.

Those given the responsibilities for Rajshahi division include Mohammad Nasim, ASAM Swapan and Khairuzzaman Liton. Misbah Uddin Siraj, Nurul Islam Nahid and MA Mannan will be in charge of Sylhet division, while Satish Chandra Roy, Asaduzzaman Noor, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury and HN Ashiqur Rahman of Rangpur division.

Ahmadinejad

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again turned to abhorrent anti-Semitic slurs and despicable conspiracy theories," said US mission spokesman Mark Kornblau.

And German and French spokesmen called Ahmadinejad's attacks "unacceptable."

The Iranian president caused a UN walkout last year when he alleged the US government could have been behind the September 11 attacks. He has also used speeches in the past to call for the destruction of Israel and cast doubt on the existence of the Holocaust.

Israel and Canada were among countries which had no diplomats in the assembly even for the start of Ahmadinejad's latest speech.

Ahmadinejad told the UN summit that the United States and its allies use the Western media to "threaten anyone who questions the Holocaust and the September 11 event with sanctions and military action."

The Iranian leader said he had been threatened by the US government after he last year alleged American government involvement in the attacks and called for an independent investigation.

Moving to the US operation to kill bin Laden, Ahmadinejad said the al-Qaeda leader should have been brought to trial "in order to identify the elements behind the safe space provided for the invading aircraft to attack the twin World Trade Centre towers."

In a general blast at the West, Ahmadinejad said: "Hypocrisy and deceit are allowed in order to secure their interests and imperialistic goal."

"Drug trafficking and killing of innocent human beings are also allowed in pursuit of such diabolic goals," he added. "Weakened countries through military intervention and destroy their infrastructures, in order to plunder their resources by making them all the more dependent."

Western diplomats said they had expected a tough speech by Ahmadinejad and had prepared walkout plans in advance.

Palestine makes history

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Palestinian bid would be "quickly" handled.

Despite the warm welcome by many countries, the US ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice sat stony-faced during Abbas's speech and did not applaud.

In a Twitter message she said only direct talks could lead to peace.

"When the speeches end today, we must all recognise that the only way to create a state is through direct negotiations. No shortcuts," she said.

In a sign of the tensions, a Palestinian was shot dead in clashes with Israeli troops that erupted after settlers attacked a village near Nablus on the West Bank.

Israeli officials have warned of harsh retaliatory measures if the Palestinians succeed in their bid, including a halt to funding for the Palestinian Authority. Right-wing members of the government have gone so far as to call for annexation of the West Bank.

Besides dealing a blow to Israel's position in future peace negotiations, some fear UN recognition of a Palestinian state could allow

memberships demand he had personally handed to UN chief Ban Ki-moon.

But fearing a spurt of violence, some 22,000 Israeli police and border police were on high alert with forces deployed along the Green Line between Israel and the West Bank, in annexed east Jerusalem, and around Arab Israeli towns.

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Palestinians to launch legal action against Israeli military action.

Last-minute bargaining to divert the Palestinians from their course resumed Friday with a meeting of negotiators from the Middle East Quartet -- the United States, Russia, the European Union and United Nations.

They are trying to hammer out a possible statement which could bring the two sides back to direct talks which have stalled since September 2010.

The United States has vowed to veto the bid at the UN Security Council, with the Palestinians needing to win the backing of nine of the 15 council members.

If that bid fails, they may well seek to be admitted as a non-member observer state by the General Assembly.

Abbas was to leave New York after giving his UN speech to return to the Palestinian territories for consultations on the next step forward.