

JP lawmakers walk out of Sangsad

Demand removal of Biman chairman over gold smuggling

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Jatiya Party lawmakers and an independent MP staged a brief walkout during the parliamentary session last night protesting government's inaction against the Biman board chairman after the arrest of five from a gold smuggling racket, including three high-ups of the national flag carrier.

Along with the JP MPs, MP Mayeen Uddin Khan Badal from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, an ally of the ruling alliance, and two independent MPs -- Hazi Selim and Tahjib Alam Siddique -- demanded that the government remove Air Marshal (ret) Jamal Uddin Ahmed immediately to save the airline.

Tahjib walked out of parliament for two minutes following the JP MPs who returned after a few minutes.

A heated debate on the Biman boss was initiated by JSD MP Badal. Taking the floor on a point of order, he said various irregularities and corruption, in which Jamal Uddin had been

involved, were responsible for Biman's bad shape now.

In the ninth parliament, the parliamentary standing committee on civil aviation formed a sub-committee to look into Biman's corruption and suggest ways to save it. "Headed by me, the sub-committee submitted its report in parliament after intensive work for six months. But the government did not take action against anyone identified by the committee," Badal lamented.

"Three ministers were changed at the civil aviation ministry in the last several years but Jamal Uddin remained untouched.

"Has he become a super citizen of the country? Why did the sub-committee work so hard if the government would do nothing about our findings?"

Badal also said allegations were raised by different quarters that the Biman board chairman was not capable of running the airline.

He alleged Jamal Uddin had been

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Accountability absent in Biman

Menon, GM Quader at TV talk show on gold smuggling

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Civil Aviation Minister Rashed Khan Menon yesterday said he felt bad that neither the Biman chairman nor any of its officials informed him about the recent arrest of Biman officials for alleged links with a gold smuggling racket.

At a talk show of a private TV channel, the minister said he thought that the Biman chairman would brief him on the entire situation. As it didn't happen, he tried to communicate with the Biman authorities through his ministry's secretary.

Both Menon and ex-civil aviation minister GM Quader, also present at the show, stressed the need for making Biman accountable to people through the aviation minister, a representative of the people.

"Biman is a public institution owned fully by the government. The problem is that we cannot ensure its accountability. It is very important to establish that," said Menon.

Quader said there is serious lack of accountability in Biman.

According to the rules, the Biman board's job is to make policies while the managing director supervises the day-to-day work, he said.

"The chairman is not supposed to interfere in day-to-day activities." The authority to hire or fire staff is vested in the ministry since Biman is a state-run organisation, he said.

Sharing his experience as the aviation minister, Quader said, "When the ministry tried to perform the responsibilities for hiring and firing, it could not do so for different reasons."

The ministry had no control over Biman, and there was no accountability in the national carrier, he said.

The issue was taken up with the prime minister, who holds the authority to appoint or sack the Biman chairman and board members.

But the PM didn't make any change in the Biman board might be because she still had faith in the chairman and the board members, said Quader.

When he was aviation minister, many allegations were raised over lease of aircraft by Biman. Some of the

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Arrestees put blame

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Biman captains saying they may have links with gold smuggling rings.

Biman insiders said the two officials whose names came up in the confessional statements are very influential in the national carrier for their close relations with the Biman chairman.

The two control recruitment of pilots, promotions and even lease of aircraft in exchange for huge commission, they alleged.

The duo also had close relations with Biman chairman's "godson" and influential Biman contractor Mahmudul Haque Palash, who is among the five arrestees.

The other arrestees are Capt Abu Mohammad Aslam Shaheed, chief of planning and scheduling, Emdad Hossain, deputy general manager (flight services), and Tozammel Hossain, manager (scheduling) and Harunur Rashid, owner of "Farhan Money", a money exchange firm in Uttara.

The magistrates sent them to jail after recording their statements.

In a 12-hour operation at Shahjalal International Airport, Uttara and Bashundhara since November 18 evening, detectives arrested the five for their alleged links with a gold smuggling racket.

Talking to The Daily Star on Thursday, Biman Chairman Jamal Uddin Ahmed denied having any relations with Palash. He, however, said Palash had approached him for help on several occasions, and he told him that he wouldn't do anything beyond the rules.

Sources said some influential people have links with the gold smuggling syndicate.

Investigators said they have got names of around 200 people who are involved in gold smuggling, and there might be more.

Of the 200 suspects, three are of the status of general manager at Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

other suspects. Wishing anonymity, a DB official said a quarter is lobbying them for the arrested people and also for those whose names came up as suspects.

Another investigator said they were trying to unmask all culprits behind the smuggling syndicates. This will take some more time.

The detectives are also probing the claims that the money obtained from sale of smuggled gold is used in militant financing. But they have no specific information about it.

Another official involved in the probe said they were focusing on the arrestees' links, and might recommend freezing bank accounts of the suspects.

PROBE COMMITTEE FORMED
The civil aviation ministry yesterday formed a one-member body to investigate the recent incident involving the national carrier.

Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Munim, additional secretary of the ministry, would run the committee, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon told The Daily Star.

"Not all officials and employees of Biman are corrupt. There is nothing to be worried about," he said.

The committee has been asked to submit report in 15 working days.

2 BIMAN STAFFS ARRESTED
Four people, including two motor transport operators of Biman, have been arrested in the capital's Uttara area for possessing tiger skin.

Acting on a tip-off, Uttara Model Police arrested Biman staffs Iqbal Kabir and Mohammad Ali Zinnah along with smugglers Abdullah and Ainul Huq from a house at sector-4 in Uttara around 2:00pm yesterday.

Abdullah told police that he had given Zinnah the tiger skin to have it smuggled out of the country, said Ali Hossain Khan, officer-in-charge of Uttara Model Police Station.

Police later seized the tiger skin from Zinnah's locker at Shahjalal International Airport.

A case was filed with the Airport Police Station in the afternoon in this connection.



Detective Branch of police yesterday shows the media the alleged Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh operatives captured in raids in Sadarghat area in the capital. The female on the right is the wife of Sajid, who is suspected of carrying out the Burdwan blast in India in October.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Sajid's wife'

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meetings with officials in Dhaka recently.

Meanwhile, law enforcers also detained five suspected militants, including a Pakistani citizen, from Lord's Inn Hotel in Chittagong around 12:30pm yesterday.

The detainees -- Mohammed Alam, 44, Abdul Majid, 30, Md Amin, 53, Salamat Ullah, 45, and Shafullah, 40, -- checked into the hotel on Saturday, said Sub-Inspector Ripon Sarker of Detective Branch of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP).

Alam, a citizen of Pakistan, claimed to be the director of a voluntary organisation, Global Rohingya Centre, he said.

According to his passport, he arrived at Shahjalal International Airport from Jeddah on Friday. Earlier, he had come to Bangladesh on March 20 and left on March 24.

Born in Karachi on June 30, 1970, Alam visited different countries, including Saudi Arabia, Myanmar, Bahrain and Sudan, over the last one year.

Shafullah, human resources secretary of ruling Awami League's Naikhangchhari upazila unit in

Bandarban, is also a businessman. Salamat, a madrasa teacher of Cox's Bazar, allegedly had involvement in the arson attacks on Buddhist monasteries in Ramu in 2012, according to sources.

A DB official told The Daily Star yesterday evening that they are investigating whether Shafullah and Salamat have connection with Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO).

The JMB and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji), another outlawed Islamist outfit, had connections with the RSO, sources told this newspaper in 2012. Some JMB operatives received training from RSO arms experts in camps in remote areas of Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Another arrestee, Majid, is also from a Rohingya family, said sources.

BURDWAN CONNECTION
Fatema and two other women gave arms training to at least 25 women, including five to six Bangladeshis, at the madrasa, said Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam during a press briefing at the DMP Media Centre.

"They sought members from the poor and middle-income group," he added.

Fatema, who hails from Bagerhat, intruded into India through Hilli border a few years back and stayed at Burdwan with her husband. Three days after the arrest of Sajid by Indian police on November 8, she along with some other operatives came back, Monirul said.

During interrogation, Fatema claimed she was near the spot when the blast took place, the official added.

Two suspected JMB militants were killed in the accidental blast at a house in Burdwan's Khagragarh area on October 2. It was a den where the outfit was storing explosives to launch attacks, Monirul said replying to a query without going into details.

Abdullah, Isharat and Shawkat, the three arrested on Saturday, had taken part in the 2005 Brac Bank heist in Gopalganj along with Sajid and another JMB member Abdun Noor, detectives said.

They were arrested later. After their release on bail in 2011, they all went into hiding and continued their militant activities. Abdullah, Isharat and Shawkat used to maintain contact with Noor and Sajid before their arrest.

Fire ravaged their lives

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strenuous work. To save herself from the fire, which rocked the country's \$25 billion garment sector, she jumped from the second floor of the nine-storey building that night.

"We all screamed on top of our lungs to open the door as the smoke was spreading thick and fast. But the general manager and the production manager kept it firmly bolted," she said, while recounting the events of that fateful night.

Frantic for an escape route, a few of the workers managed to take out the exhaust fan from one of the walls. Many jumped through that small hole in the wall, including Hena. And in the process, she broke her backbone.

The single mother was rushed to the hospital that night and was released after two months. She has been fitted with an artificial backbone and the doctors have strictly forbidden her from doing any heavy-duty work.

Her back hurts all the time, due to which she has failed to become gainfully employed yet and understandably, is struggling to make ends meet.

"I do not have the money to even buy my medicine," Hena said, adding



Hena and Reba

that her medication costs Tk 1,500 a month.

Unable to afford the basic living costs, she has now moved in with her daughter and son-in-law -- and sent her two young sons to an orphanage in Sirajganj.

"I do not know how my little sons are doing -- they live so far away from me. My life is beyond miserable now," said a tearful Hena.

Desperate to get her family life back on track, she is now earnestly pleading for her rightful compensation. So far, she got only Tk 1 lakh from the govern-

ment.

Unlike the Rana Plaza tragedy, this industrial accident did not receive as much global attention, so a neutral body never fixed compensation for the Tazreen fire victims.

The permanently injured from the Rana Plaza collapse are due to get Tk 42 lakh, according to the International Labour Organisation conventions. Although they are yet to receive that amount, at least the Rana Plaza victims have a rough sum to hold out for.

While not as dire as Hena's, Reba Khatun's situation is bad too. Like

Man killed in Ctg clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man was killed and 10 others were injured in a clash between two groups of people in Elsha village of Banshkhal Upazila yesterday.

The dead is Abdul Khalek, 60. There had been a longstanding conflict between Delwar Azim and Md Delwar over a piece of land, said Kamrul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Banshkhal Police Station.

Around 10:00am, supporters of Azim attacked Delwar men when they were cutting paddy on the disputed land. Later, the two groups, equipped with local weapons, attacked each other several times, leaving 11 people injured, said a local journalist.

Khalek, a man of Md Delwar, was rushed to a clinic where on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Five of the hurt were admitted to Banshkhal Upazila Health Complex.

Police detained 17 people in connection with the incident, the police official added.

Nizami appeals

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crimes, including murdering intellectuals. The 71-year-old was also awarded life imprisonment on the other four charges.

Citing from the appeal, Shishir Manir, a lawyer for Nizami, told The Daily Star that the tribunal had failed to consider that Nizami was never associated with any auxiliary force controlled by Pakistan army in 1971.

Findings of the tribunal about Nizami were manifestly perverse and therefore the conviction and sentence given to him were liable to be set aside and the appellant was liable to be acquitted, he said, quoting the appeal.

Shishir said Nizami in his 121-page appeal mentioned 168 grounds to establish his innocence.

Total 6,252 pages of documents were annexed with the appeal, he said, adding that the Supreme Court would now fix a date for hearing the appeal.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam yesterday told reporters that the government would not file any appeal with the Supreme Court against the tribunal verdict on Nizami, as it was satisfied with the verdict.

He also said his office would place arguments before the apex court to defend the tribunal verdict.

Tribunal-1 in the verdict said it was well-proved that the accused being the chief of Islami Chhtrata Sangha and Al Badr force wholeheartedly resisted the War of Liberation and also actively participated in the crimes against humanity in 1971.

Hitler painting Verdict in Mobarak

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authorities to produce Mobarak before the court by 10:00am today.

Mobarak, as a commander of the Razakar force, substantially "participated in", "contributed to" and "facilitated" the commission of crimes in different parts of Brahmanbaria in 1971, the prosecution says.

The prosecution believe they have been able to prove all five charges "beyond any reasonable doubt," while the defence claim their client is "innocent" and would be acquitted by the tribunal.

Twelve prosecution witnesses including the investigation officer of the case have testified against the war crimes accused, while two -- Mobarak himself and his son -- testified as defence witnesses.

On April 23 last year, the tribunal indicted Mobarak for his alleged war crimes.

Khodeja Begum, daughter of Abdul Khalek, filed a case against Mobarak with a Brahmanbaria court in 2009. The case was later transferred

to the Tribunal-1.

An investigation agency, designated to probe war crimes, on January 23 last year completed the probe into Mobarak's alleged involvement in crimes against humanity.

The prosecution submitted formal charges against him on February 25 last year and the court took the charges into cognisance on March 12 that year.

CHARGES
On August 22, 1971, Mobarak and his accomplices called a meeting of locals at the house of Noor Bokhsa at Tanmanday and around 130 people showed up.

As part of a plan, they kept the locals confined and raided their homes, abducted villagers and took the people they confined to a Pakistan army camp near Ganga Sagar Dighi.

Later, Mobarak and his associates selected 33 people and confined them to Terojhuri Hazat Khana. The Pakistan army and Razakars took them to the west bank of Ganga Sagar Dighi, compelled them to dig a ditch, then they gunned them down and

buried them there the next day.

During the war, Mobarak and other anti-liberation elements captured Anandamoyee Kalibari, a Hindu temple, which was renamed as Razakar Manzil, looted the temple of valuables and damaged its idols.

On October 24, 1971, Mobarak abducted college student Ashu Ranjan of Shimrayal village and shot him dead four days later.

On November 11, 1971, Mobarak and his armed associates abducted Abdul Khaleque of Satian village, took him to the Razakar camp of Suhilpur Union Parishad and tortured him there.

The accused shot him and charged bayonet to confirm his death.

On November 24 or 25, a Razakar team led by Mobarak abducted Khadem Hossain Khan of Kharampur and brutally tortured him.

On November 28 or 29, Mobarak along with the Pakistan army abducted Abdul Malek of Kharampur and Mohammad Siraj of Amirpara and shot them dead on December 6.