

# Myanmares plane lands safely with no nose gear

AFP, Yangon

A Myanmar pilot saved the day after this aircraft's landing gear failed, forcing the jet into an emergency landing with no front wheels yesterday morning, an official said.

The nail-biting touchdown -- in which nobody was injured -- was the second instance of a malfunctioning flight in less than a week within the country.

The Myanmar Airlines flight UB-103 -- an Embraer-190 model -- was grounded at around 9:00 am in Mandalay, a city popular among foreign tourists, with all 89 people on board including seven crew members, safe.

An unverified video circulated on social media showing a graceful landing before the nose of the jet tipped over and ground to a halt.

Ye Htut Aung, deputy director general of Myanmar's Civil Aviation Department, told AFP the pilot tried repeatedly to drop the landing gear at the front of the plane -- first through its computer system, then manually. "They tried hard twice by flying

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An evacuated passenger records on her phone as firefighters attend to the scene after Myanmar National Airlines flight UB103 landed without a front wheel at Mandalay International Airport in Tada-U, Myanmar yesterday in this still image taken from social media video. PHOTO: REUTERS

# MURDER OF WOMAN Suspect killed in 'gunfight' with police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A murder suspect was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Chattogram city's Bakalia area early yesterday.

The dead -- Shah Alam, 32 -- was one of the three accused in Bhabli Akhtar murder case, Additional Deputy Commissioner (South) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police Md Abdur Rauf said.

Bhabli was shot dead at her home in Bakalia on Saturday night, five hours before Shah Alam was killed in the "gunfight", the police official added.

A police team, led by Nezam Uddin, officer-in-charge of Bakalia Police Station, conducted a raid in Murgir Khamar area near the Karnaphuli river Chattogram on information that Shah Alam and two other accused in the same case -- Nurul and Nabi -- were hiding there, ADC Rauf claimed.

Sensing police presence, the criminals opened fire, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate. At one point of the "gunfight" around 3:30am, Shah Alam sustained bullet injuries. Later, police took him to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where doctors declared him dead.

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# No pay scale in 9 years

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many literally starving as The Daily Star has seen during visits to Khulna and Demra in the capital. Officials and employees of the mills have also not been getting their salaries for two to four months.

Against this backdrop, workers have called an indefinite general strike at all state-run jute mills from today to realise their nine-point demand, including implementation of the new pay scale and clearing of all arrears. This will mean a production loss of about Tk 8 crore a day.

Workers will also block roads and railways across the country, also for an indefinite period, from 4:00pm to 7:00pm every day beginning today.

"We are not getting our wages. We are not getting the new pay scale. Isn't it a human rights and justice issue? We urge the National Human Rights Commission and the High Court to tell the government to clear our dues," said a worker of Latif Bawany Jute Mills in Demra.

Mizanur Rahman, the jute secretary, said, "We could not implement the new wage scale, because we couldn't

THE NINE-POINT DEMAND
Clear provident fund benefits and gratuities of retired workers
Pay arrears of life insurance policies of deceased workers
Reinstate terminated and suspended workers
Pay arrears (6 to 12 weeks) and allowances
Implement the new pay structure
Appoint workers and make their jobs permanent as per the law
Allocate funds to factories to purchase jute on time
Undertake a BMRE (balancing, modernisation, rehabilitation, and expansion) scheme to increase productivity
Remove corrupt officials

Then last month, the BJMC directed all the state-owned jute mills to fix the pay in line with the new pay scale.

A top BJMC official yesterday said the process was likely to be completed by this month and the new pay scale for the workers might take effect from next month.

Under the new scale, workers' minimum pay will double from Tk 4,150 to Tk 8,300, effective from July 1, 2015.

The total arrears till June this year, about Tk 1,600 crore, will be paid in two installments -- one in this fiscal year and another in the next, according to the labour ministry's circular.

But Rita Rani, 40, is skeptical. She has been a casual worker at Latif Bawany Jute Mills for 14 years and heard many such "empty promises".

"The pay of the managers and officers has been hiked. But they did not do anything for us. They do not pay our wages even. How will we eat?" said Rita, who has not been paid for eight weeks like all of her colleagues at the mills in Dhaka's Demra.

Contacted, National Human Rights

not know how to feed her five-member family.

"For Sehri, I took some Panta Bhaat with smashed potato. I had my Iftar with rice and Kolmi Shak, which I collected from a ditch," Anwar, who joined Latif Bawany in 1993, said on Saturday.

Dozens of workers from across the country shared similar experiences.

Some said they were not fasting because they could not afford any food for Sehri. Others go to nearby mosques for Sehri and Iftar. One worker said his son needed an emergency surgery but there was no money to pay for it.

Officials and employees of the state-run jute mills are in a similar situation. Their salaries are due for two to four months.

"I'm a teacher. I cannot even go to people to seek help, you know. My wife asks me why I do a job that cannot feed the family," said a teacher of Latif Bawany school.

He has not been paid for three months.

Salary payments at the BJMC head office in the capital's Motijheel are up-to-date.

Meanwhile on May 6, the jute ministry wrote to the finance ministry asking for Tk 337.87 crore -- Tk 325 crore for unpaid wages and Tk 85 crore for salaries.

"We will be able to clear the dues if we get the money from the ministry. It's under the consideration of the ministry, and we are waiting," BJMC Chairman Shah Mohammad Nasim said yesterday.

Jute mills authorities say they often fail to pay the workers and employees as they cannot make profit because of high production cost.

Last year, the sector incurred a loss of Tk 466 crore.

But why must the workers and employees suffer for the failure of the management to make profit?

The NHRC chairman said they should not.

"Although the jute sector is in bad shape, it is the only income source for the workers. If they don't get money, how would they survive?... The government should pay their wages and ensure that the workers get back to work," he said.

# Wage war on food

FROM PAGE 1

powder, ghee, flour, noodles, crisps and biscuits were also found substandard by the BSTI.

BSTI officials, however, said most of the products are substandard, but not adulterated. And except for a few, those are not harmful to humans.

The BSTI recently collected 406 samples of food items from the market from across the country and tested those at its laboratory. As of May 2, it got results of 313 samples, 52 of which were found substandard.

The 52 samples were of 46 firms that include several leading food processors, including ACI Ltd, Molla Salt (Triple Refined) Industry Ltd, Pran-RFL Group, Meghna Group of Industries, City Group, Bangladesh Edible Oil Ltd, Danish Food Limited and Well Food and Beverage Company.

SM Ishaque Ali, BSTI director of certification marks, said they found that the food items were below its standard parameters.

"We have not found adulteration in these food items. Most of the products are substandard, not harmful to humans. But some items are harmful as heavy metals like lead were found in those at levels higher than the permissible limits," he said.

Market operators say if the products are removed from the market immediately, there may be a supply crunch, which could lead to price spiral of some items, especially salt.

The country requires 2,547 tonnes of edible salt every day. And the ACI and Molla Salt hold approximately 20 percent of the market share for it, said Shameem Ahmed, head of sales of Molla Salt.

"There will be no effect at the consumer level if a certain batch of salt is removed from the market. Prices are unlikely to increase. But if all our edible salt is withdrawn, there will be an impact on the market," he said.

Yesterday, the HC bench of Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif and Justice Razik-Al Jalil came up with the order and observation after hearing a writ petition filed by Conscious Consumers Society, a rights organisation.

The petition sought the court's directive on the authorities concerned to take steps to seize or remove the 52 food products from the market.

The court asked the authorities to take measures to stop production, sale or marketing of these substandard products until or unless those items are found to be of mandatory standards in further tests.

It also ordered the authorities to take legal action against those responsible for production, sale, marketing and supply of the products.

Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSa) and the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection have been asked to take necessary measures to this effect and submit a report to it in 10 days after complying with the directives.

The court also called upon the government to ensure that people are supplied with pure drinking water.

It fixed May 23 for passing further order on the issue, writ petitioner's lawyer Barrister Shihab Uddin Khan told this correspondent.

Talking to The Daily Star, Consumers Association of Bangladesh President Ghulam Rahman said the HC order will send a message to the manufacturers that no one will be spared for deceiving consumers.

"This will have a long-term positive impact.

"If products of certain batches are removed from the market, the impact will not be high provided that the authorities supervise the market," he pointed out.

"These are packaged foods and the maximum retail prices [MRPs] are written on the packets of these items. The authorities will have to scale up monitoring and surveillance so that

no one charges higher than that."

At the same time, consumers need to be conscious. If one sells these products at prices higher than the MRPs, they should file complaints with the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection, he said.

Syed Alamgir, managing director of consumer brand of the ACL, said the company would take steps after getting a copy of the court order.

"Let us see the court order first. We will take steps accordingly," he said.

Kamruzzaman Kamal, director (marketing) of PRAN-RFL Group, said Pran checked its products -- turmeric and fish curry powder and vermicelli -- at its laboratory as well as other labs, and found those to be of the BSTI standards.

He said they wrote to the BSTI, requesting it to re-test the products and give them the results to end all confusion.

"I hope we will get the re-test reports of the BSTI soon, and all issues will be resolved."

On the HC directive, Kamal said, "We are a very much compliant and law-abiding company. We will act as per the court directives after getting the papers."

**COURT OBSERVATION**

While passing the order, the HC bench observed that the BSTI and other regulatory authorities should carry out drives against food adulteration throughout the year, not only in the month of Ramadan.

"We are of the view that the officials of the authorities concerned should not consider themselves as officials only. They should act with patriotism and love for the people of the country. Collaboration and cooperation between the authorities concerned are needed. Otherwise, the drives against food adulteration will not be successful," it noted.

The bench said the HC is not a regulatory authority, and taking action against food adulteration is not a "day-to-day job" of the court. But the HC cannot refrain from passing necessary orders for preventing food adulteration.

Justice Hassan noted that the HC has no authority to prioritise the government's activities. "However, we urge the government to take this issue [prevention of food adulteration] as its first priority."

Earlier at the hearing on the writ petition, BSTI Deputy Director Md Reazul Haque and BFSa Director Sahadeb Chandra Saha appeared before the HC as per its May 9 order to explain their roles regarding the 52 substandard food items.

Reazul told the court that BSTI issued notices to the companies concerned to stop production and sale of substandard food products.

The BSTI doesn't have the authority to run mobile courts against food adulteration. It closed 32 factories for producing substandard water and filed 71 cases in this regard in the last four months, he said.

BFSa's counsel Mohammad Faridul Islam told the HC that Director Sahadeb might not be able to reply to the court's queries as he joined the BFSa only a week back.

Then Justice Hassan said the BFSa director general made a joke of the court by sending an official who joined the BFSa a week ago.

Faridul said the BFSa could not take any action against the producers of sub-standard food products, as the BSTI did not provide it with the test report.

The court then said the BSTI at a press conference made public the test report, and the list of the companies and their substandard food products. And it was published in the media.

The BFSa's wait for the test report is like asking whether police would wait for the post mortem report to arrest the accused in a murder case, it said.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO

After the meeting, the labour department issued a circular saying all dues would be cleared by April 25. But the mill authorities are yet to pay them.

"Enough with the promises. We are not leaving the streets until our dues are cleared," said Sardar Mozahar Uddin, president of Bangladesh Jute Mills Workers League, which represents all state-run jute mills workers.

**THE DISCRIMINATION**

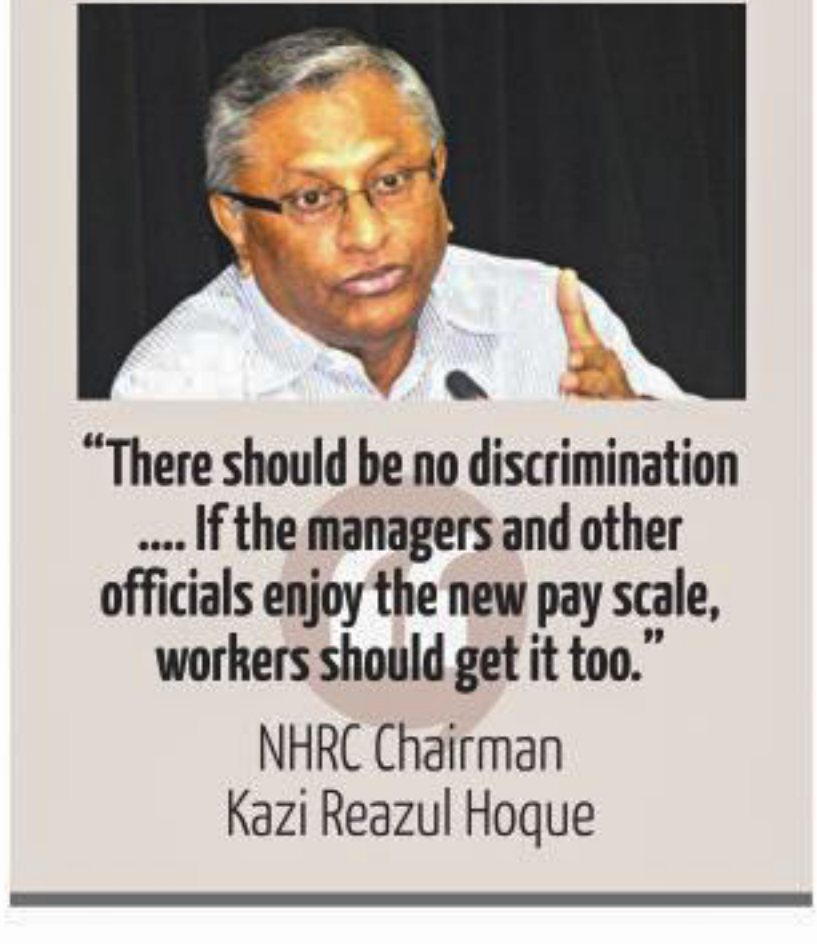
The eighth national pay scale was announced in July 2015, five years after the previous one, as is the rule.

Within months, the new scale took effect for almost all of some 23 lakh government officials and employees, including the civil servants.

But for jute workers, nothing comes easy.

After a series of street protests, the labour and employment ministry finally issued an order to implement the new pay scale in October last year.

It also directed the jute ministry to issue a circular in this regard, but the jute ministry has not done so yet, BJMC sources said.



"There should be no discrimination .... If the managers and other officials enjoy the new pay scale, workers should get it too."

NHRC Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque

Commission Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque said, "There should be no discrimination .... If the managers and other officials enjoy the new pay scale, workers should get it too."

**NO PAY, NO FOOD**

Anwara Begum, 45, has never taken to the streets over wages before. But she has no other choice this time -- she has not been paid for eight weeks and does

# 37 Bangladeshis feared dead

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had left Bangladesh sometime in November last year. New Yeahia Overseas, a travel agency at Raja Mansion of Zindabazar in Sylhet city had charged Tk 8 lakh from each to send them to Italy via Libya.

He said the agency's owner Enamul Haque was a man from Fenchuganj who they trusted but conditions changed as soon as the migrants arrived in Libya.

"They faced a miserable situation during their five months in Libya before finally leaving for Italy," he said, adding that they were kept in a crowded jail-like condition.

"This travel agent must be punished so that no one loses their family members [like this]," Siraj said.

Survivors said the tragedy unfolded after around 75 people, who had left the Libyan coast of Zuwara late Thursday on a large boat, were transferred to a smaller vessel. The vessel sank 65 kilometres off the coast of Sfax, south of Tunisia, according to the Tunisian Red Crescent.

Nationals from other countries -- three Egyptians, several Moroccans, Chadians and some from other African nations -- were also on the boat.

The seven Bangladeshi victims identified so far include Ahsan Habib Shamim, 23, of Bade Bhukshimile village in Kulaura of Moulvibazar; Kamran Ahmed Maruf, 22, and Afzal Mohammad of Kodupur village and

Haortola village respectively of Sylhet's Go-lapganj upazila; Ahmed Hossain, 24, Abdul Aziz, 25 and Liton Miah, 24 of Muyeepur village and Ayaz Ali of Belkona village in Fenchuganj of Sylhet.

Kulaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Abul Layes, Golapganj UNO Mamunur Rah-man, Fenchuganj UNO Ayesha Haque and Manikona Union Parishad Chairman Emran Ahmed confirmed the identities of the victims.

Maruf's brother Masum Ahmed and Abdul Aziz's uncle Ahmed Bilal were

after the tragedy and told him how he had survived by floating in the sea for eight hours but Maruf had passed away after losing hope.

"It's so tragic...difficult to bear," Masum told this correspondent.

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen termed the incident, "very regrettable," expressing displeasure over the risky voyage undertaken by the Bangladeshis. The journey, rife with dangers in the Mediterranean, has seen thousands of migrants going missing or dying on their way to Europe.

The latest tragedy was dubbed the "deadliest migrant boat sinking since January" by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The IOM says as many as 443 migrants either died or went missing in the Mediterranean while trying to reach Europe in boats as of May 8 this year.

The figures were 2,299 in 2018 and 3,139 in 2017.

ASM Ashrafur Islam, labour counsellor of Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli, said yesterday he was scheduled to fly to Tunisia last night to see the situation there and make arrangements to send back the bodies after those were recovered from the sea.

He told The Daily Star over phone from Tripoli that he had talked to the Tunisian Red Crescent and reconfirmed the number of dead or missing Bangladeshis to be 37.

As per the Red Crescent, four dead bodies were recovered. Meanwhile, five of the survivors were undergoing treatment in Tunisia. The other survivors were sheltered in an accommodation managed jointly by the Red Crescent and IOM in Tunisia, Ashrafur said.

Libya, which has been wracked by chaos since the 2011 uprising that killed Muammar Gaddafi, has long been a major transit route for migrants desperate to reach Europe.

There were fears of further migrant crises in the Mediterranean with the escalation in fighting between the UN-backed Libyan government and the Libyan National Army (LNA) since early last month, as the latter has been trying to take control of Tripoli.

Since then, the Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli has relocated some 300 of its nationals from the suburbs of the Libyan capital to other safe places in the city, he said.

The official said some 20,000 Bangladeshis could be living in Libya. In 2014, Bangladesh stopped sending workers there.

Transnational human trafficking gangs in Bangladesh, in cooperation with their counterparts in Libya and other countries, however, continued to send workers to Libya via the UAE, Egypt and Sudan, owing to lax law and order in Libya.

"The allure for them is Europe," Ashrafur said.

**CONTACT THESE BANGLADESH RED CRESCENT**

hotline numbers to help identify victims of the capsized tragedy:

**880249354246 and 01811458521**