

## PM gets a ‘haor’ treat from president

UNB, Kishoreganj

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was served 16 dishes of freshwater haor fish at a lunch hosted by President Abdul Hamid at his home in Kishoreganj’s Mithamoin yesterday.

The president’s family sources said the PM’s choice was highly considered in choosing the menu that also included local desserts.

The fish items included curry, bhuna, and dopeyeja dishes of Rui, Katol, Chital, Pabda, Golsa Tengra, Kalibaush, Shol, Bain, Chingri, Boal, Grass Carp, Bacha, Ritha, and Pangas, with Rata Boro rice.

Hasina went to the president’s ancestral home for the lunch after opening Bir Muktiyoddha Abdul Hamid Cantonment around 11:00am.

This was the PM’s first visit to Mithamoin in more than two decades.

After lunch, she went to Mithamoin Helipad Ground to address a rally held by the local Awami League.

## ‘DSA is for combatting cybercrime’

Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the Digital Security (DSA) was formulated to combat cybercrimes and not to stifle freedom of expression.

“Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s government has pledged to protect press freedom and freedom of expression. That is why her government will not enact a law that is contradictory to the constitution,” he said.

He made the remark at a seminar organised by Broadcast Journalist Centre (BJC) at International Mother Language Institute in Dhaka.

The law minister said some questions were raised about the DSA, and the government had taken steps to address those.

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A general view shows buildings damaged by a Russian military strike, amid their attack on Ukraine, in the city of Chasiv Yar, in Donetsk region, Ukraine on Monday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Situation ‘extremely tense’

Says Ukrainian commander as Russians tighten noose on Bakhmut; Putin warns of Western espionage

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russian forces yesterday pressed forward their weeks-long drive to encircle and capture the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut where the commander of Ukraine’s ground forces described the situation as “extremely tense”.

Capturing Bakhmut, scene of some of the war’s bloodiest battles, would be Russia’s first major prize in more than six months and open the way for taking the last remaining urban centres in the Donetsk region, one of four Moscow claims to have annexed in its “special military operation” in Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday instructed the FSB security service to bolster security in the four regions - currently only partially controlled by his forces - and also to counter what he described as growing espionage and sabotage operations against Russia by

Ukraine and the West.

He was speaking after a Russian regional governor said a drone had crashed near a natural gas distribution station yesterday in an apparent failed attack near the town of Kolomna, just 110 km southeast of Moscow.

Ukraine does not publicly claim responsibility for attacks inside Russia. If it was behind the Kolomna incident, it would be its closest attempted drone strike to the Russian capital since Russia invaded Ukraine just over a year ago.

Earlier, Russia’s defence ministry also accused Ukraine of launching two attempted drone attacks against two southern Russian regions overnight but said they caused no damage.

Around Bakhmut, Russian troops, including mercenary fighters from the Wagner Group, are trying to cut the Ukrainian defenders’ supply lines and force them to surrender or withdraw.

“Despite significant losses, the enemy threw in the most prepared assault units of Wagner, who are trying to break through the defences of our troops and surround the city,” Ukraine’s Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskiy said in a statement.

Russia’s state-run RIA news agency released a video clip which it said showed Russian Su-25 fighter jets roaring over Bakhmut. “We are glad they are ours,” says a man in the clip identified as a Wagner fighter, adding the jets helped them “psychologically”.

Ukraine’s military said Russia was shelling settlements around Bakhmut, which had a pre-war population of around 70,000 but now lies in ruins after months of intense trench warfare.

“Over the past day, our soldiers repelled more than 60 enemy attacks,” the military said early yesterday, including on the villages of Yadhidne and Berkhivka just north of Bakhmut.

## Putin congratulates President-elect

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday congratulated Md Shahabuddin, Bangladesh’s president-elect.

“Please accept my sincere congratulations on your election as the President of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh,” said Putin in a letter to Md Shahabuddin, according to a post on the verified Facebook page of the Russian Embassy in Dhaka.

Shahabuddin, a retired judge and former commissioner of Anti-Corruption Commission, was declared the president-elect of Bangladesh on February 13.

Putin said Bangladesh and Russia have been maintaining traditionally friendly relations and hoped that the president’s work during his tenure will promote further development of constructive cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh in various fields.

## Injured in SA road crash, Bangladeshi man dies

UNB, Feni

One of the two Bangladeshi citizens who suffered critical injuries in a road accident in South Africa on February 24, died at a hospital there on Monday night.

Anisul Haque Milan, 28, was the son of Bahar Mia, of Ramanandapur village in Feni’s Daganbhuiyan upazila.

The death toll from the accident now stands at six, all of whom are from Feni.

Daganbhuiyan Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Nahida Akter confirmed the information yesterday.

Milan was being treated at South Africa’s George Hospital after the accident.

Milan recently got married and was supposed to come to Bangladesh.

## Man tortures 8-month-old son for dowry

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A Narail court yesterday sent a man to jail for torturing his infant child over dowry.

Mamun Sheikh, 36, was arrested Monday night for hanging his eighth-month-old son by his legs from a tree as his first wife had denied giving him Tk 1 lakh as dowry.

Mamun married Kulsum Begum, around 13 years ago. Since the very beginning, he has been torturing her for dowry, said locals and police.

Mamun later married another girl, Mafuja Akhter Sathi, 25, around a year ago without Kulsum’s consent.

Locals said Kulsum fell under more torture after Mamun’s second marriage.

Photos of the Monday incident went viral on social media.

## Biman paying for hiring unqualified Boeing 777 pilots

FROM PAGE 1

To get the type rating, pilots need to have route training, which comprises a certain number of flights on that aircraft followed by an exam flight.

This test is called an initial route check (IRC) and this examines if the pilot can handle the cockpit independently.

The test records of three of the pilots who failed their IRC show a myriad of alarming irregularities, rules violations and incompetence.

Even if going by the theory that Sadia Ahmed’s high-school results ideally should hold little bearing in later life, a forged certificate was only her first strike.

Sadia had been unable to complete the IRC test within the time set by the law. But the law seems to have little effect on Biman’s training department, a department led by her husband Captain Sazid.

According to CAAB’s Civil Aviation Directive, pilots must clear their IRC within 150 days of beginning their route training.

Should they fail, “the operator shall stop training and notify CAAB for review and disposal” the policy states.

Sadia began her Boeing 777 route training, on May 26, 2022, a letter to CAAB stated. The letter, sent on October 24, 2022, said that Sadia had exceeded her 150-day limit without completing the training and it requested that she gets an extension.

There is no record of CAAB agreeing to this request.

Sadia sat for her IRC test on January 27, 2023, and failed.

Her IRC mark sheet had these comments about her performance: “Difficulty in understanding route training especially taxi instructions in a busy airport. She must continue additional 6 sectors of route training to improve her overall handling and management of the flight.”

Biman insiders state that according to the rules, CAAB should have stopped her training immediately after she failed to pass the IRC in 150 days and then decide whether to commence her training.

But on February 7 this year, the training department of Biman, sent an email to the planning and scheduling department instructing them to give Sadia “6 sectors of route

training followed by immediate IRC”. Her husband, the chief of training, was among those who received the email.

And so Sadia received a second chance to take the IRC which CAAB’s policy does not allow.

Asked whether Sadia’s husband had any role in this, Biman MD and CEO Shafiu Azim said he would look into the matter.

“Sometimes things are not what we hear from outside on different anomalies,” he added.

The training department sent that email in spite of the fact that just two days prior (February 5), Sadia’s one-year contract with Biman expired.

According to Sadia’s contract, her agreement needs to be renewed every year, and this can only be done, after a “satisfactory evaluation” of her skills, honesty, and integrity by Biman.

Sadia was with Regent Airways from which she was fired, allegedly for a botched landing attempt, said a highly-placed source in the carrier requesting anonymity

An agency report sent to the Prime Minister’s Office last year also alleged that because of her “unstable approach” (of the aircraft during landing), the captain had to take over control and land.

Both Sazid and Sadia were phoned multiple times but they did not pick up.

Captain Shah Nasimul Awwal also failed his IRC.

Last year, an agency report said Captain Nasimul was a first officer with Etihad for 13 years and was unable to get promoted to captain even though he sat for required exams multiple times.

However, Nasimul told The Daily Star that he did not fail to become a captain and instead was in the “command upgrade programme” when he was retrenched due to the pandemic.

Biman insiders said a pilot would need on average two and half years to log the flying hours needed to be eligible to become a captain, not 13.

Nasimul was let go by Etihad in 2020 and he, like the rest of his co-recruits, did not have the legally required flying hours in the previous two years.

On December 22, 2022, Nasimul sat for his IRC and failed.

In his assessment, the examiner said he “failed to set up holding in flight management system”, and more worryingly “lacked situational awareness”.

Holding refers to flying in circles as a plane waits for its turn to land.

When questioned about Sadia’s forged certificates, and about hiring Nasimul, the Biman MD said there is a process in Biman for recruitment and the respective department follows it.

Another pilot who failed his IRC is Irfan Ul Haq who was to become a captain.

His assessment sheet claimed, “Candidate is not eligible to fly in command for B777-300ER [Boeing 777-300ER] with multiple issues.”

The issues included setting the wrong power settings, setting the wrong speed during turbulence, missing three cautions of the plane’s annunciator panel, and missing clearance from the air traffic controller and more.

This correspondent contacted Irfan who refused to comment because he strongly disagreed with the remarks of his instructor.

During his IRC test flight from Jeddah to Dhaka on January 15 when Irfan was at the helm, a passenger had a heart attack.

A doctor onboard the plane, who spoke to this paper, said the cockpit crew took four hours to land the plane and the patient died.

Captain Tufail Ahmed was asleep in the cockpit crew rest area and the instructor monitoring Irfan in the cockpit did not have a valid licence to fly the plane.

CAAB Chairperson Air Vice Marshall Mafidur Rahman said, “We have asked Biman to investigate what happened during the flight when the pilot was reportedly sleeping.”

Captain Nasim Ebne Ahmed’s training was stopped by higher authorities, according to a Biman document dated February 12, 2023. Highly placed sources said that it was because of security concerns.

Question remains as to why he was not vetted before being hired.

MONEY DOWN THE DRAIN

A Biman invoice shows that it spent Tk 44 lakh on flight simulators for eight of the recruits at Thai Flight Training Centre in Bangkok. This excludes the cost of flying them there

and their accommodation.

While pilots faked certificates and failed tests, Biman continued to pay some of them grossly inflated salaries of up to seven figures, all of which would be money wasted if they fail to become fully-fledged pilots of the Boeing 777.

High officials of Biman said since the pilots under training are still not fully-fledged pilots, they are paid a pittance.

Accordingly, Sadia’s contract states that she is to get full salaries from the date of her first flight, not her first training flight.

However, Sadia and some of her co-recruits have been getting salaries of fully-fledged pilots from the date of their first training flight, a document from Biman reveals.

The document, signed by former Biman managing director Zahid Hussain and several directors, lists out eight of the pilots from this batch (including Sadia) and states, “Following pilots have done their first training flights as follows. It may be mentioned here that they have huge contributions to our Biman Hajj flight operation and without their participation it would not have been possible. Though they were under training, they have operated flights as regular pilots’ strength. Considering their contributions their salary may be considered from the date of their first training flight.” [sic]

Sadia’s pay slip shows that her total earning in July 2022 was Tk 12.63 lakh.

Not only the contracts of the new recruits were ignored to give them huge salaries, they were also given benefits and perks which pilots hired in 2017, 2019 and 2021 did not get.

All pilots are pledged a minimum number of flying hours for which they are given a basic salary.

However, the 2022 recruits are being given an extra allowance of Tk 3,500 per flying hour, which the other pilots do not get. Biman also pays the 2022 recruits for a minimum of 40 hours even if they are grounded.

These recruits also get a productivity allowance, or overtime, of Tk 4,500 per hour if they fly over 80 hours. This figure is between Tk 2,500 and Tk 3,000 for the pilots recruited earlier.

## Hall admin was indifferent

FROM PAGE 1

before the High Court bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil during hearing of a writ petition.

The bench fixed today for passing an order on the petition. It also asked the DAG to place the university’s rules and regulations before it today.

Speaking to The Daily Star, writ petitioner Gazi Md Mohsin said the IU probe failed to say anything about the negligence by the proctor, provost, and house tutor.

Phulpori on February 14 alleged that Chhatra League leader Sanjida, activist Tabassum Islam and several others tortured her on the night of February 12 for staying at the Deshratna Sheikh Hasina Hall without their “permission”. They allegedly tortured her from 11:00pm until 3:30am.

Mohsin filed the writ petition on February 16 and the court directed the Kushtia deputy commissioner to constitute a three-member committee to investigate the incident and submit a probe report to it.

TORTURE PLANNED

DAG Tushar yesterday read out parts of the probe reports before the court.

According to the report, the university probe body found involvement of six students, including Sanjida.

The five others are: Halima Akhtar Urmi of Fine Arts; Ishrat Jahan Mim of Law; and Tabassum Islam and Mabia Jahan of Finance and Banking, and Lima.

Physical and mental torture was inflicted on Phulpori as per the directives of Sanjida, it mentioned.

“From the confessional statement of Tabasum, it appears that Urmi and Mim on the night of February 12 recorded video during the brutal torture of Phulpori at the dining room of the hall. But no video record was found,” the DAG quoted the report as saying.

NEGLECT OF PROVOST

While reading out parts of the probe report filed by the DC office, Tushar yesterday said Tabassum asked Phulpori to meet her on February 8. Phulpori met her on February 10 instead, which angered Tabassum.

Under the leadership of Tabassum, Phulpori was harassed in the common room in presence of other girls at 8:00pm on February 11. Around 9:00pm, Phulpori in presence of Sanjida was taken to room-306 which is “gono room”.

Phulpori was mentally tortured and abused in front of the other girls. At one stage, she was forced to hold Sanjida’s feet. The victim broke down

mentally, said the probe report.

Under pressure from Sanjida, the provost ordered Phulpori to leave the hall.

Sanjida, Tabassum and others were seen grabbing the hands of Phulpori forcefully in presence of the hall provost. Later, she was forced to sign a letter to Provost Prof Shamsul Alam.

During the submission of her statement on February 20, Phulpori was reported to have a black spot on her left cheek.

According to the report, Provost Shamsul, Assistant Registrar Abdur Razzaq, official Hamida Khatun, Dining Manager Sohail Rana, House Tutor Moumita Akhtar and Assistant Professor Ishrat Jahan appeared to have grossly neglected their duties.

It said that Proctor Prof Shahadat Hossain showed indifference to his duties.

WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

Contacted, the provost said he didn’t neglect his duties.

Asked about showing indifference to his duties, Proctor Shahadat said, “No one from the hall authorities or students informed me about the incident. I only came to know about the incident on February 14 when Phulpori’s father came to me to lodge a complaint.”

Pro-VC Prof Mahbubur Rahman said they would abide by the directives of the HC.

“We will take steps according to our rules and regulations if anyone is found guilty,” he said.

Meanwhile, Phulpori yesterday said she was considering filing a case against her torturers. She said she was waiting for the HC order on this matter.

## Homelessness in England soars by 26pc: official

AFP, London

The number of homeless people in England soared by more than a quarter last year on fallout from the cost-of-living crisis triggered by soaring inflation, official data showed yesterday.

A total 3,069 people were recorded as sleeping “rough” on a single night in autumn 2022, according to an annual count undertaken by local authorities and published by the government.

It marked the first increase since 2017 and a 26-percent jump from 2021, the department for housing said in a statement.