

Hasina flies commercial, talks to passengers

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday surprised passengers as she boarded a regular commercial flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines on her way back home from an official visit to Geneva, Switzerland.

She roamed around the flight deck and exchanged pleasantries with the passengers.

Passengers on the fully packed commercial flight of Biman were pleasantly surprised when she went to their seats and greeted them.

"Many of them were surprised and astonished having their prime minister sitting just next to their seats on the flight," PM's speechwriter M Nazrul Islam told UNB.

Hasina spoke to children with great affection and took several of them on her lap. She also obliged their requests for photographs.

Some of the passengers expressed their opinions to the premier on various issues, including the country's development in the last 14 and a half years.

Hasina returned home from Geneva, Switzerland, after attending the "World of Work Summit: Social Justice for All" held on June 14-15.

A regular flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying the PM and her entourage landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka at 01:55am.

Army soldier dies after IED explosion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A soldier died at Chattogram Combined Military Hospital (CMH) yesterday, a day after he was injured in explosions of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted by the group Kuki Chin National Front (KNF) in a remote village in Bandarban's Ruma upazila, said a statement of the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate.

The deceased was identified as Monnaf Hossain Raju, 21.

The IEDs went off around 1:30pm on Friday when a patrol team reached Chhilopi Para, 400 metres off its Temporary Operating Base, on its way to Painum Para to distribute drinking water and oral saline among the people.

Soldiers Monnaf and Md Rezaul, 24, suffered serious injuries to various parts of their bodies. They were taken to the Chattogram CMH, the ISPR statement said.

Army Chief General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed expressed deep shock at the death of the soldier. He also offered sympathy to the bereaved family members.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina exchanges pleasantries with surprised passengers of a commercial Biman flight on her way back home from Geneva.

PHOTO: PTD

‘Russia has more nuclear weapons than NATO’

Putin warns; African leaders arrive in St Petersburg; Moscow says repelled drones targeting oil refinery; 2 killed in missile attack in Ukraine’s Kharkiv

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned there is a “serious danger” of NATO being drawn further into the Ukraine war if members of the alliance continue to supply military weaponry to Kyiv.

“NATO, of course, is being drawn into the war in Ukraine, what are we talking here,” Putin said at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum on Friday, reports CNN.

During his speech to the forum, Putin also suggested Russia's large number of nuclear weapons would “guarantee” its security – noting that Russia had more such weapons than NATO countries.

Meanwhile, Putin yesterday told African leaders that Russia welcomed their balanced approach to the conflict in Ukraine and was open to discussions, according to Reuters.

“We are open to a constructive dialogue with all those who want peace based on the principles of justice and consideration of the legitimate interests of the parties,”

Putin said.

Elsewhere, Russian air defence units repelled a Ukrainian drone attack overnight on a pumping station on the Druzhba oil pipeline in the Bryansk region adjoining Ukraine, the region's governor said yesterday.

“We are open to a constructive dialogue with all those who want peace based on the principles of justice and consideration of the legitimate interests of the parties.” – Putin

Three Ukrainian military drones were destroyed in the attack in the Novozybkov district, Alexander Bogomaz wrote on Telegram.

In Ukraine, Kharkiv regional governor Oleh Synchubov said a Russian missile strike on a small Ukrainian village in the east killed two people yesterday.

Ukraine liberated many villages and towns in the Kharkiv region last autumn

but since then the Russian military has frequently shelled the area, destroying critical infrastructure and injuring and killing residents.

In St Petersburg, the leaders from South Africa, Senegal, Egypt, Zambia, Uganda, Congo Republic and the Comoro islands were meeting Putin at the government's 18th-century Konstantinovsky Palace after visiting Kyiv on Friday.

Russia has a total stockpile of around 6,250 nuclear warheads as of January 2021, according to the Arms Control Association. The US has more than 5,500 while two other NATO member states, Britain and France, have about 220 and 290 nuclear warheads, respectively, CNN reports.

“Nuclear weapons are created to guarantee our security in the broader sense and the existence of the Russian state,” Putin said in his speech on Friday.

“But first of all, there is no need and secondly the very fact of talking about it reduces the possibility of the threshold for using these weapons being reduced.”

US sanctions complicate payment in yuan

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That became unfeasible after Russia invaded Ukraine in February last year as some of the largest banks of the Soviet nation were expelled from the SWIFT financial system, which handles the vast majority of cross-border payments.

The Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Affairs (VEB), a Russian state-owned institution handling transactions for the Rooppur project, was among those expelled.

After that, Russia has been pushing for payment in roubles from Bangladesh.

Under the current monetary policy, Bangladesh can only deal with the SDR currency of the International Monetary Fund, Khan told the Russian delegation at the meetings.

“Bangladesh is not in a position to repay the Russian credits for the Rooppur project in rouble,” she said, while pushing for yuan as the preferred option for payments.

In 2016, the IMF added the yuan to the basket of currencies that make up the Special Drawing Right (SDR).

Russia agreed to the proposition.

Weak planning to blame for power crisis

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Prof Ali Riaz said there was a lack of integrated planning in the energy and power sector.

“The planning was not participatory. Experts had been talking for long about the problems of their planning, but nobody bothered,” he said.

In 2010, the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act was introduced. A clause in the act gives the government an indemnity to award rental and quick rental power plants without any tendering process. This was a necessary move to address massive power cuts in the context of the early 2010s. But in 2021, the Act, along with the indemnity, was extended till 2026.

Referring to the Act, Prof Riaz said, “A short-term indemnity solution should not be a perpetual process.”

Energy expert Mohammad Tamim said though the government claims

that the country has the capacity to generate 27,000 MW electricity a day, it actually has the production capacity of 18,000 MW to 19,000 MW per day.

“We have some plants which produce only five to 10 percent of its capacity a year. Then why do we still count those?” he said.

The “faulty” power sector masterplans and the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provisions) Act 2010 – which was amended several times later – are responsible for the current crisis in the sector, he pointed out.

“We had supported the indemnity clause in the 2010 Act, as it was necessary to increase power generation capacity within a very short time. But that time has passed and even now no power plants are being built with a tendering process,” said Tamim, dean of the Chemical and

Materials Engineering Faculty at Buet.

Referring to government-to-government deals on importing fuel and LNG, he said these deals were not signed following due process. “As a result, there is scope of overpricing.”

In his keynote paper, researcher Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb focused on the country's electricity generation on April 12, when the country recorded its highest generation in recent times – 15,154 MW.

“Even on April 12, there was 776 MW load-shedding. On that day, of the 153 power plants, only 35 percent ran at its full capacity,” he said, adding that 31.4 percent faced engine related problems, 22.2 percent faced fuel shortage and 7.8 percent were under regular maintenance.

“That means the substandard power plants, which have engine related problems, also contribute to power crisis,” he added.

Mirpur livens up to pace barrage

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bouncer from Taskin, with the innings folding for 115.

Afghanistan, who were without their champion leg-spinner Rashid Khan, scored 146 in their first essay.

The home team made 382 in their first innings and then piled up 425-4 declared, thanks to back-to-back centuries from flamboyant left-hander Najmul Hossain Shanto.

But it was the new-found pace battery of the Tigers that has instilled a more telling impact beyond the result itself.

The last time Bangladesh pacers took more wickets than spinners on a typically slow and spinning Mirpur pitch was way back in February 2008, when lanky right-arm pacer Shahadat Hossain took a match haul of nine wickets including a six-for in the first innings against South Africa. The Tigers lost that game by five wickets.

Since hosting the first Test match in 2007 against India, the home of cricket in Mirpur has never been welcoming to pacers. Barring a few exceptions, it has been touted as a pacers' graveyard in 25 Tests it hosted before the Afghanistan game.

For the records, the home side did not field a single pacer in the 19th Test match at the venue in November 2018 that they won by an innings and 184 runs against the West Indies, thanks to Mehdy Hasan Miraz's match haul of 12 wickets including 7-58 in the first innings.

In the 15th Test at Mirpur in October 2016, the Tigers fielded one pacer in Kamrul Islam Rabbi. He bowled only three overs in the first innings and also in the match in that famous win against England by 108 runs, where off-spinner Miraz took 12 wickets – six in each innings.

The introduction of pace bowlers by Bangladesh at Mirpur has often been regarded as more academic than from serious concern about dictating the game. In the last 10 Test matches at the venue, the match against Ireland in April this year was the first

time Bangladesh fielded three pacers in a Test. And that too was without much purpose.

In that context, when the curators as Mirpur presented a green-top on Wednesday morning, the opening day of the one-off Test, many were apprehensive considering their years of experience.

However, the wicket was refreshingly sporting for both the batsman and bowlers, especially for the seamers who enjoyed rare field days under the sun.

The bounce, seam movement and nice carry behind the wicket also dispelled the age-old notion that Mirpur could never be a good wicket for pacers.

However, it was all about a bold decision from the team management that cricket experts hailed as a step forward for Bangladesh in building a good pace attack so that the Tigers could be more competitive away from home.

Dhaka jail's chief hangman walks out of prison

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lessened by a little more than 10 years according to regulations. And since Shahjahan never had any visitors, the prison authority decided to pay his fines of Tk 10,000 for the two cases.

“Shahjahan will walk out from the jail tomorrow (Sunday) around 10:00am. He spent a large part of his life in jail. He is happy that he will be released but at the same time he is concerned too as he has no home to go to,” Ghosh said.

He said that the prison authorities would try to rehabilitate Shahjahan so that he can live the rest of his life decently.

Never having married, the septuagenarian has lost his parents but still wishes to visit his village home when he gets out. “He (Shahjahan) told us that he wants to spend the rest of his life in his ancestral village.”

3 held over attempted rape on moving bus

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police arrested three bus staffers for attempting to rape a garment worker in a moving bus on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Mymensingh's Bhaluka upazila on Friday night.

The arrestees – bus driver Rakib Mia, 21, his helper Arif Mia, 20, and supervisor Ananda Das, 19, – were interrogated at Bhaluka Police Station.

Md Kamal Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station, said the 45-year-old woman was returning home in Bhaluka upazila town from work at a garment factory in Gazipur's Mawna.

As the bus reached Seedstore area in Bhaluka around 11:00pm, all passengers except the woman got off. The vehicle started moving again. All of a sudden, the bus staffers attempted to rape her, the OC told The Daily Star quoting the victim.

The woman tried to resist the staffers and screamed for help. At one stage, she jumped off the moving bus. She sustained injuries to her head.

Hearing her screams, some locals rushed to the scene and took the victim to a local hospital.

On information, a patrol team of Bhaluka police seized the bus and detained the three with the help of locals.

The woman was moved to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital early yesterday.

Later, the brother of the victim filed a case with Bhaluka Police Station accusing the three of attempted rape.

Student found dead at BM College

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Police yesterday recovered the hanging body of a student of Government Brojomohun College from an abandoned room near its Flight Sergeant Fazlul Haque Hall in Barishal city.

The deceased, Mainul Islam, was a fourth-year student of social science. He hailed from Barishal's Muladi upazila.

The college principal, Mohammad Golam Kibria, said he called in police after some students reported a bad smell coming from an abandoned tin-shed room in front of the dormitory.

Police later recovered the body of the student.

Mainul Islam, sub-inspector of Kotwali Police Station, said he went to the abandoned room and found the body hanging from the ceiling.

“There were no injury marks on the body. It seemed to me that the student died by suicide,” he added.

One killed in clash

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

A Jubo League activist was killed in a clash between two factions of the ruling Awami League in Chandpur's Matlab upazila yesterday.

The deceased is Mobarak Hossain, 48. His son Imran Hossain, 18, also sustained bullet injuries in the clash.

The victim's elder brother Amir Hossain said Mohonpur union unit AL organised a rally in the upazila's Mathavanga area around 3:00pm.

Followers of Mohonpur union parishad chairman Kazi Mizan carried out the attack, triggering the clash between the two groups, he alleged.

Chandpur's additional superintendent of police Sudipta Roy confirmed the incident and said a person was arrested from the spot in connection with the incident.

Mango prices

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selling for Tk 2,200-3,000 per maund, down from Tk 2,500-4,000 last year and Langra mangoes were selling for Tk 1,200-2,000 per maund, down from Tk 2,500-4,000 the previous year.

Badsha Ali, a trader from Sonamasjid, said Amropali mangoes were selling for Tk 2,000-2,400, down from Tk 3,000-3,200 last year and different kinds of Guti mango varieties were selling for Tk 700-1,200 per maund, compared to Tk 800-2,000 the previous year.

Imam Ali, a trader at the town's Puration Bazar mango market, said prices this year are lower than usual because of an abundance of the fruit and a lack of refrigeration facilities in this hot weather.

Munjer Alam, secretary of the Chapainawabganj Krishi Association, said, “Mango production has become more expensive as a result of rising costs for irrigation, labour, and transportation, as well as fertilisers, pesticides, and fungicides.”

“The heatwaves have made things worse for mango farmers and they won't have any profits left this year because of the low prices,” he added.

Farmers and orchard owners said the summer fruits have all ripened roughly around the same time thanks to the prolonged heatwaves this season. A large number of mangoes of different kinds have hit the local markets owing to good production. Consequently, prices are lower this year compared to that of last year.

Aminul Islam, a mango orchard owner in the town's Alinagar, said, “Because mango prices are lower than they were last year, farmers will make little profit with most losing money.”

Palash Sarkar, deputy director of the district Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), said there are more than 2.8 million mango trees on 37,588 hectares in the district.

“The production target in this region has been set at 425,000 tonnes this season. If the weather remains favourable the production will meet the target,” he added.