

Biman plane returns to Dhaka as pilot falls sick

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Biman plane returned to its departure airport after the pilot fell sick one hour into the flight to Doha on Friday.



With 419 passengers on board, the plane left Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 5:15pm, said Tahera Khondoker, general manager (public relations) of Biman.

But Capt Maqsood Ahmed, the pilot-in-command, felt severe back pain when the plane was over Nagpur, India, she told The Daily Star.

Since Capt Maqsood was unable to move and it would take a long time to reach Doha, the other pilot flew the plane back to Dhaka.

After the plane landed, Capt Maqsood was taken to the Combined Military Hospital.

The plane eventually left for Doha around 10:15pm with another pilot in the cockpit, Tahera said.

According to sources, as there is a shortage of cockpit crew, Biman authorities asked Capt Maqsood to fly even though he felt unwell.

However, Public Relations Manager Al Masud Khan said the allegation that pilots were forced to fly despite their unwillingness and poor health was nothing but propaganda against the flag carrier.

As the pilot-in-command, Capt Maqsood made a prudent decision and returned to Dhaka.

According to him, no pilots are ever asked to fly for more than 120 hours a month.

"Biman strictly follows Pilots' Flight Duty Time Limitation set by the International Civil Aviation Organization and Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh regulations. The limit was not exceeded in the case of Capt Maqsood," he also said.



A staffer employed by a transport association has hung a rope on the road to stop traffic near the Sergeant Ahad Police Box in Dhaka's Gulistan area yesterday. Traffic police members and their helpers control traffic manually in this busy area of the city as the traffic lights are out of order.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Somali piracy: Years of terror and ransoms

AZMIN AZRAN

In April 2005, MV Feisty Gas—a Hong Kong LPG tanker—was sailing the Indian ocean, close to the coast of one of the world's most politically unstable nations. Earlier that year, Somalia faced tremendous unrest when a police chief was shot dead in the capital, and the newly minted cabinet had to flee the country.

The pirates who attacked MV Feisty Gas would originally have been part of the communities who lived along the coast of Somalia, living off the fishing industry. With the country's abundant fishing resources left undefended due to a lack of stable authority or a navy, foreign fishing vessels started exploiting the situation with technology like underwater lights and illegal nets.

Some Somali fishermen took matters into their own hands, and since the early 90s, started conducting small-scale pirate activities to protect fishing resources. By

the mid 2000s, however, amid continued political instability, piracy increased in the region.

MV Feisty Gas from Hong Kong was one of the most ambitious attempts at piracy in the region until then, fetching a ransom of USD 315,000. In 2005, a total of eight vessels were captured.

Attacks continued through 2006, with another eight vessels captured and ransomed.

Between 2006 and 2009, Ethiopia intervened in the Somali civil war against the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a political organisation who had taken over the government in 2006 and enacted effective steps against piracy. As the war raged on, piracy gained strength again.

In 2007, a Danish vessel named MV Danica White fetched 723,000 dollars, as the attacks increased in profile and number, rising to 11 captures that year.

Piracy increased dramatically in

2008, with a total of 22 hijackings. Ships from Spain, Malaysia, Japan, Germany, Thailand, and France were captured and released for ransoms that often exceeded the million dollar mark.

One of the notable piracy incidents at this time was the capture of MV Faina, a Ukrainian vessel carrying 33 tanks, alongside ammunition and arms. The pirates demanded an eye-watering USD 14 million, but eventually settled for 3.2 million dollars.

Piracy along the Somali coast and in the Indian ocean became a major headache for the international community between 2009 and 2011, with 95 hijackings in three years, according to data by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and World Bank. Ransoms rose sharply, with cumulative revenue reaching around USD 300 million during these years. On average, a ship fetched USD 2.20 million.

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Jobseeker held for using hearing device at recruitment test

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A jobseeker was held for using a hearing device during a recruitment test for the post of health assistant at the exam centre at Thakurgaon Polytechnic Institute yesterday.

The arrestee, Md Rokonuzzaman, 24, is a resident of Kachubari Kestapur in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

Quoting witnesses and officials of the exam centre, Thakurgaon Police Station OC ABM Firoz Wahid said hearing sound from a communications device in Rokonuzzaman's ear, several other candidates complained to the investigators.

The authorities then held the jobseeker for receiving answers from outside the exam hall over the device in his ear and handed him to police.

A case was filed with the police station in this connection, the OC said.

Indian navy intercepts Somali pirates

REUTERS

An Indian navy warship has intercepted the hijacked cargo ship Ruen and demanded the Somali pirates on board surrender, a navy spokesperson said yesterday.

The pirates who allegedly hijacked the Maltese-flagged bulk cargo vessel on December 14 opened fire on the navy ship in international waters on Friday, the spokesperson said without providing further details.

The navy had called on the pirates to surrender and release the vessel and any civilians they may be holding.

Somali pirates who seized the vessel in December may have used it in the takeover of a Bangladesh-flagged cargo ship off the coast of Somalia this week, the European Union naval force said on Thursday.

Until the Ruen was seized, there had been no successful hijacking of a merchant ship by Somali pirates since 2017.

At least 17 incidents of hijacking, attempted hijacking or suspicious approaches have been recorded by the Indian navy since December, Indian officials have said.

India deployed at least a dozen warships east of the Red Sea in January to provide security against pirates and has investigated more than 250 vessels.

More power plants than needed

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which is the amount of unused available capability of an electric power system (at peak load for a utility system) as a percentage of total capability, is 20 percent, according to experts.

The PSMP 2016 says that the reserve margin would be brought down to 20 percent by 2025 when the peak demand would be 21,903 MW.

In reality, the reserve margin is more than 35 percent and will increase more in the upcoming days.

"It is true that to make the power supply smooth and healthy certain percentage of reserve margin is essential, but unplanned and aggressive increase in generation could make reserve margin more than optimum limit resulted into extra pressure in the economy of the country," said the PSMP 2016, which was revised in 2018.

increasing the capacity without considering the rise in demand, the CPD said in a study last week while presenting a comparative supply-demand picture.

Until 2018, the power generation capacity increased proportionately, but later, the power demand and generation capacity went in different directions, the study said.

Due to the excess capacity, the government needs to keep a good number of power plants idle daily, which is costing the exchequer in capacity payments.

Last fiscal year, the PDB had to pay more than Tk 26,000 crore as capacity payments.

Despite increasing the electricity prices in the first quarter of last year, the PDB reported a loss of Tk 43,539 crore for fiscal 2022-23 while the government allotted a subsidy of Tk 39,534 crore to them,

increased tariffs to cut subsidies in the sector," he added.

The power generation cost increased as a result of faulty systems, wrong policy and overcapacity, said M Shamsul Alam, vice-president of Consumers' Association of Bangladesh.

None of the power distribution companies made a loss but the PDB did, he said.

"When the government brought the private power producers into the business, they didn't create any competition. How much money have they spent, how much they are making as profit, nobody knows."

When demand increased by only 3 percent, the government increased the capacity by 12 percent, he said.

"This is injustice," he added.

The government counts many abandoned or old power plants in calculating the capacity, said Mohammad Hossain, director-general of Power Cell.

"It's for showing the government's success at a bigger scale. Ultimately, there is more or less 20 percent reserve capacity, not more than that," he added.

Rice prices shooting up too

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Millers blame the price surge on the "paddy crisis".

"The price of paddies is soaring. This is contributing to the rise of rice prices," said Chitta Majumder, adviser of Bangladesh Rice Mill Owners Association.

He said the staple prices will go down next month when Boro paddies will likely hit the market.

The situation at wholesale markets is similar.

In some northern districts, prices of various varieties of rice, including coarse varieties, have surged by Tk 2 to Tk 3 per kg.

The hike occurred in just three days in Dinajpur and its adjoining districts.

The price of a 50kg bag of Gutti Swarno rice was Tk 2,150 a few days ago, but now it costs Tk 2,300, said traders at Gudri Bazar in Dinajpur.

A local resident of Dinajpur, Ariful Islam, expressed his frustration at the rising prices, saying he now has to pay an additional Tk 3 per kg. "Nothing seems to be affordable anymore," he said.

Ever at ease among the masses

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According to a report published in the Daily Ittefaq the next day, at least 50,000 people—some holding garlands, some birthday cakes, others carrying sweets and gifts—had come to Bangabandhu's residence to wish him.

On that day, there were hardly any restrictions for the president to meet general people. And so, Mujib met all those who had been waiting for hours to wish him, the report said.

A video clip uploaded last year by his grandson Sajeb Wazed Joy on his social media handle showed Mujib, clad in a white panjabi, at the gate of his house, exchanging greetings with the people. Many gave him flowers, some put garlands around his neck and some were seen giving him a warm embrace.

This was how the then president observed his final birthday before being assassinated, along with most of his family members, in the early hours of August 15.

"It was a busy day for the president," Joy wrote on the post.

Mujib then attended the Bangabandhu Award-1974, which was given to those who made contributions for the country.

After a meeting with foreign diplomats, he rushed to the school children who had come to wish him. They sang songs and recited poetry, expressing their admiration for Bangabandhu.

Today, the country celebrates Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's 104th birth anniversary. The day is also celebrated as the National Children's Day.

However, when it came to such celebrations, Mujib, the larger-than-life figure and epitome of true patriotism, maintained a low profile and utmost simplicity.

During his lifetime, Mujib, who devoted his whole life to his country and people, would celebrate his birthday in silence in a jail cell or, when out of jail, with his beloved people, especially children.

Other times, he would be busy with state affairs or negotiations with Pakistani rulers.

"I have never observed my birthday; at most my wife would give me a little gift on this day. I would try to stay at home on these days," Mujib wrote in his diary on March 17, 1967, while he was in Dhaka Central Jail.

The diary, which was later turned into a book called "Karagarer Rojnamcha [Prison Diaries]", contains his memories of his time in jail.

"I found in the newspaper that

the Dhaka City Awami League is observing my birthday. Must be, because I am in jail! That I am someone whose birthday is even worth observing and is a news feature made me smile."

Mujib thought it would be nice if his wife Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib and their children visited him that day. But he felt perhaps they would not get permission to as they had come just a few days before on March 14.

However, around 5:00pm, the head constable came to him and said, "Come. Your wife and children are here!"

Mujib's youngest daughter Sheikh Rehana and son Sheikh Russell were standing there with a garland of flowers in their hands. Mujib playfully put it around Russell's neck.

The City Awami League had sent a cake for Mujib. "I had Russell cut it although I put a hand in too," he wrote.

Bangabandhu had also written that receiving wishes, morning greetings and flowers picked from the garden from his fellow inmates had made his day.

Even on Sheikh Mujib's 52nd birthday in 1971, he remained immersed in work.

It was when the non-cooperation movement of Bangalees was at its peak, just ahead of Mujib's declaration of independence on March 26.

He remained busy with meetings with the then Pakistani president Yahya Khan to resolve the ongoing crisis.

Veteran AL leader Tofail Ahmed wrote in an article that Mujib that day was asked by a foreign journalist about his expectations for his birthday.

His response was, "Total freedom of the people."

Even after the country's independence and becoming the unparalleled leader of the freedom-loving people, Bangabandhu's birthdays were celebrated with simplicity.

On March 17, 1972, media reported that Mujib's birthday coincided with the arrival of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Bangladesh.

After Mujib received Gandhi, they both addressed a public rally in Suhrawardy Udyan.

"Today is an especially auspicious day because it is the birthday of the leader of your nation, who is not only Bangabandhu but a brother to all people suffering from injustice or tyranny," Gandhi said, according to the book "Bangladesh Documents".

Dhaka keeping

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that out of the 44 registered political parties in Bangladesh, 29 participated in the polls on January 7. He asserted, "The government cannot be held responsible if any specific party chooses not to participate in the election."

"The party in question had advocated for obstructing the elections and resorted to violence for that purpose. Those involved in the violence were subsequently apprehended," Hasan added.

Regarding Bangladesh-US relations, the foreign minister noted that both countries are collaborating to enhance their multidimensional partnership, both domestically in socio-economic development and on the international stage.

Addressing the recent rescue operation of 23 sailors from Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean, Hasan stated that the government is tirelessly working to secure their release. However, he urged the media to act responsibly.

"The hijackers have access to Bangladeshi television channels via satellites. Observing the reactions of the hostages' families broadcasted on television provides them with additional leverage during negotiations, which is impacting adversely," he warned.

He further added, "Our primary objective is to ensure the safe return of the sailors and the vessel. So, we all need to play our parts responsibly in order to facilitate a swift resolution to the crisis."

If not for India

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bridges minister. He said the Bangladesh-India relations have reached a new height under the leaderships of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

Different problems, including border issues, were solved through discussions with India, the minister said. "Positive progress has been achieved over the Teesta water-sharing agreement, but we have to keep patience."

He said it is not possible to solve those problems by creating any bitterness.

Everyone, including Hindus, Buddhists and Christians, had contributed to Bangladesh's independence struggle.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Kumar Verma inaugurated the conference.

Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumdar, Health Minister Samanta Lal Sen, and State Minister for Chattogram Hill Tracts Affairs Kujendra Lal Tripura, among others, addressed the event, with Bangladesh Puja Udyan Parishad President JL Bhowmik in the chair.