

‘Gave shelter to AL leaders whose lives in danger’ Says Army chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Army Chief General Waker-Uz Zaman yesterday said they gave shelter to some influential people from the ousted Awami League government as their lives were in danger.

He also said they gave shelter to people irrespective of their party affiliation, opinion and religion.

“If there is any allegation against them, any case is filed, they will be punished. But of course, we don’t want any attack or extrajudicial action [against them]. We have given them shelter because of the threat to their lives,” he said replying to a query.

Waker-Uz Zaman was speaking at Rajshahi Cantonment where he met with officials of army, police, and the civil administration.

Asked about any possibility of a counter-revolution, the army chief said he had no knowledge of it.

Enquired about any pressure from foreign nations regarding the prevailing situation, he replied in the negative.

“... this is a unique situation. Everyone understands it. There has been some discussion over the minority issue. A total of 30 minority-related attacks have taken

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Border Guard Bangladesh has stepped up patrol near the Naf river in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila to prevent Rohingyas from crossing into Bangladesh. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BGB

117 govt officials elevated to rank of deputy secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the latest reshuffle in the public administration, the government has promoted 117 government officials to the rank of deputy secretary.

The Ministry of Public Administration issued a notification to this effect yesterday.

The promotions that these officers received are retroactive, meaning that they take effect from the date they became eligible. This also means these officers are entitled to retrospective financial benefits.

According to the notification, the promoted officers can submit their joining letters to the public administration ministry in person or by e-mail.

If an officer's place of employment has changed from the one specified in the promotion order, the officer in question must mention it in their joining letter.

The notification further states that the authority reserves the right to modify or revoke the order if any contrary or unfavourable information is found against any officer in future.

No national holiday on Aug 15

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the state level with the national flag flying at half-mast all over the country and at Bangladesh missions abroad.

But on August 8, 2002, then BNP-led four-party alliance government issued an order cancelling the observance of National Mourning Day and a public holiday on August 15.

However, a High Court order in July 2008 revoked the order of the immediate past government and the day has been observed as National Mourning Day since.

At the meeting held at the State Guesthouse Jamuna yesterday, the advisory council also decided to abolish the provision of Bangladesh Bank Order 1972 that set the highest age limit for the appointment of the central bank governor at 67 years.

The age limit creates obstacles in appointing a person with expertise and experience for the post. In many Asian countries, including neighbouring India and Sri Lanka, there is no mention of the maximum age limit for the post of central bank governor, the press statement said.

The decision was made to pave the way for Ahsan H Mansur to become the next BB governor. Mansur, the executive director of the Policy Research Institute, is 72 years and eight months old.

The advisory council of the interim government adopted a condolence motion in honour of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the mass uprising of students and the public.

A committee will be formed under the initiative of the Health Services Division, comprising representatives from the Anti-discrimination Student Movement, the Finance Division and the relevant ministries and departments, to provide medical treatment to the injured and support to the families of the martyrs.

The committee will draft a policy for providing medical treatment to the injured and support to the families of the martyrs.

Additionally, it will prepare a comprehensive list identifying the martyrs and the injured individuals.

More than 400 people, including students and police personnel, were killed in the violence centring the students' quota reform protests that later took the form of a mass uprising. Several thousands of protestors were injured, too.

Hasina sued

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The complainant was not the relative of the victim, he filed the case voluntarily, he added.

In his complaint, Shatil mentioned that Sayed was killed around 4:00pm on July 19 when police were firing indiscriminately on the protesters, following the accused's directives.

Former home minister Asaduzzaman ordered police to open fire on the demonstrators, read the complaint.

The victim's family members, who are very poor, live in Boda upazila of Panchagarh. They do not have the ability to file the case, he mentioned in the complaint.

Meanwhile, leaders and activists of AL and its associated bodies yesterday took out a procession in Gopalganj town to protest the filing of the murder case against AL President Hasina and other leaders.

Several thousand AL men joined the procession that started from the district AL office in Bankpara area. After parading different roads in the town, the programme ended in Chowranghi area.

Biman syndicate hiked ticket prices

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it to the southeast Asian country in time before the gate closed, as their recruiting agencies could not manage their tickets.

“During that period, Biman's website showed that all tickets were sold out. However, at that time Biman's sales counters were not selling any tickets for any of the flights other than the special flight scheduled for May 31, 2024,” said the report.

Travel agents book tickets from a platform called the global distribution system (GDS) – a system that links reservation inventory under one computer-based network.

When a flight is opened for booking on the system, all travel agents registered with it get a notification alerting them so they can start booking tickets.

The ministry report, however, found that even before the notification was sent out, Biman officials blocked seats – often all of them on a single plane – to favour 14 specific travel agencies. These agencies then sold those tickets at exorbitant prices, several times higher than Biman's official prices, and kept the difference for themselves.

The travel agencies are Gemini Travels Ltd; Safar Travels & Tourism; East West Travels & Tours Pvt Ltd; Kazi Aid International Pvt Ltd; Valencia Air Travels & Tours Ltd; Xpress Travel Holidays; Travel Zone; Seri Mechan Travel; Triplover Ltd; Sunshine Travel Air International; Flyover Tours & Travels; Sadia Travels; Globe Travel Service (Bangladesh), and Travelchamp Ltd.

A total of 480 travel agencies are registered with Biman.

All of the seats of BG9087 and BG382 flights, which flew from Dhaka to Kuala Lumpur on May 27, 29 and 30, were blocked out for these travel agencies.

“A total of 1,146 out of 2,150 seats from five of the seven flights conducted were blocked from Biman's central reservation department, and the PNRs [booking reference numbers] were distributed to certain travel agencies,” said the report.

“As a result, the other travel agencies were deprived of equal access to those tickets. This also meant the selected travel agencies got the chance to artificially increase the ticket prices of those seats.”

Only two tickets were sold from Biman's ticket counters until May 30, said the report.

During the investigation, the committee also came across a snapshot showing 91 tickets were booked with the reference of former minister Lt Col

Muhammad Faruk Khan and Biman's former managing director Shafiu Azim. The MD's official phone number was used for the booking.

The committee included the snapshot in the report.

A group booking reference for 90 seats for flight BG9086, slated to fly on May 27, 2024, was generated in their names by Golam Mostafa, a manager of Biman's Revenue Management System Department, at 5:28am on May 26, 2024.

However, no tickets were generated, found the investigators. Instead, one more seat booking was added, and then the seats were distributed to two travel agencies called Gemini Travels Ltd and Flyover Tours & Travels Ltd, who got 51 and 40 seats respectively. Biman's Deputy Director (commercial) Tabibur Rahman distributed the seats.

Former Biman MD Shafiu Azim expressed shock that his and the former minister's names and his phone number were used to block tickets in bulk. “The minister had asked us to take steps to ensure that migrant workers trying to go to Malaysia could get tickets. I had instructed the marketing director in good faith to ensure that workers get tickets. I didn't realise the staffers would do this,” said Azim, currently the Election Commission secretary.

Former civil aviation minister Lt Col Faruk Khan was contacted via phone and text message but was unreachable as of the filing of this report around 9:30pm.

The ministry-led committee also detailed how Biman officials logged in together at the dead of the night to manually block seats.

The flight information of BG382, which was scheduled to fly on May 30, was published at 12:04am on May 24.

By 12:15am, Mohammad Hasan Ahmed, an operation controller from Biman's Revenue Management System Department, had manually blocked 206 seats.

He was joined by Manager (commercial) Golam Mostafa and Assistant Manager (commercial) Farhana Akhter, and by 2:21am, 329 seats were blocked.

Between 7:04am and 7:08am, Md Tabibur Rahman blocked 63 more seats, the report stated.

Golam Mostafa claimed the rules and policies were followed to the dot and nothing abnormal happened.

The report added that if Biman had sold the tickets for the two May 30 flights from its own sales counters, instead of blocking them for the chosen travel agents, the airlines could have saved Tk 8.23 lakh just on this one

flight.

The ministry also scrutinised two more such flights, including one where the booking reference was created using the MD's phone number, and found that the national flag carrier could have saved Tk 14.2 lakh on these flights if their officials did not block the seats.

The committee found that Biman officials also overbooked the entire flight up to one and a half times to favour the aforementioned travel agencies.

The overbooking of tickets is an internationally accepted practice. This is done to avoid empty seats in case of passenger no-shows and last-minute cancellations.

The number of tickets to be overbooked depends on the historical trends of the number of seats that go empty on that particular flight.

However, as many as 100 seats on the BG382 flight on May 29, 2024, were overbooked, according to the report. A total of 373 tickets were booked manually by Biman officials against 271 seats.

In spite of this level of manual overbooking, the plane flew with eight empty seats even in peak season, implying that they did not find customers willing to pay the inflated prices of the tickets.

The same thing happened on May 30, 2024, when 392 seats were manually blocked by Biman against 298 seats, and the plane flew with several empty seats.

The ministry found that complaints were filed about Farhana and Tabibur multiple times and they were proven guilty of ticket syndicating in the past by Biman, but the airlines took no action against them.

Instead, Tabibur was even recruited contractually after his retirement.

Contacted, he denied the allegations. Farhana said that in her rank, she does not even have the system access needed to overbook such flights. She expressed shock at the ministry's findings. When relayed specific examples of how chunks of tickets were blocked by her ID, she said she has no idea how it happened because she does not have the necessary permissions to do so.

The ministry led committee's report also found that the marketing and sales head Mohammed Salauddin did not intervene when his direct subordinates were blocking tickets and overbooking every single day.

“He supported the corruption of his team and it is mandatory to take disciplinary action against him,” it said.

Salman, Anisul arrested in Sadarghat

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Police did not say where Salman and Anisul were headed for.

The duo were arrested on the charges of instigating the killing of Dhaka College student Sabuj Ali, 26, on July 16, said sources.

Sabuj's elder brother Nurnabi filed the case on July 17, accusing unnamed people after he identified Sabuj's body at Dhaka Medical College morgue.

According to the first information report (FIR), Nurnabi learned around 3:00pm on July 17 that his brother Sabuj was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with serious injuries.

Nurnabi then went to the hospital and found Sabuj's body.

The FIR mentioned that Sabuj's classmates told Nurnabi that BNP-Jamaat activists had beaten up Sabuj near Dhaka College around 4:15pm on July 16.

The students demanding reforms to quotas in government jobs were joined by BNP-Jamaat men carrying sticks and iron rods near the Science Lab and were setting fire to different establishments, said the FIR.

The BNP-Jamaat men beat him up near the Globe Shopping Centre, leaving him seriously wounded.

Passersby took Sabuj to the DMCH where doctors pronounced him dead

around 5:15pm, the FIR added.

Over 550 people, including students and police personnel, were killed in violence during the student protests that turned into a mass uprising which toppled the Sheikh Hasina-led government last week.

Salman was a lawmaker from Dohar and vice chairman of the Beximco Group. He is also the chairman of IFIC Bank and holds key positions in many business associations.

He was considered as one of the influential figures among the policymakers in the Awami League government.

Anisul, a reputed lawyer, was the law minister for three consecutive terms after 2014.

Before that, he was the chief counsel and special prosecutor for the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the chief prosecutor for the Pikhana carnage case.

His father Serajul Huq was a prominent organiser of the Liberation War in 1971. Anisul was the chief special prosecutor for both the Bangabandhu Murder Case and the Jail Killing case.

He was one of the few cabinet members of the immediate past government who tried to diffuse the student protests for quota reform.

Major shakeup in the police

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Almost all the DCs and OCs had been serving in “lucrative” commanding positions in the capital for many years. Many of them were transferred to different districts far away from Dhaka, said police sources.

The home ministry and the PHQ issued separate circulars in this regard, transferring the 58 officials ranging from the ranks of additional inspector general of police to inspector.

The PHQ in a press release said a total of 634 out of the 639 police stations across the country resumed operations until yesterday.

Md Shah Alam, DIG of Railway Police, was made the chief of SB. Additional IGP Mohammad Ali Mia, chief of CID, was transferred to the PHQ and another Additional IGP Tawfiq Mahbub Chowdhury was made the chief of Police Bureau of Investigation.

Additional IGP Anwar Hossain, who was serving as DIG (operations) at the PHQ, was transferred to the specialised training centre of Armed Police Battalion in Khagrachhari.

Earlier, the interim government changed the IGP, director general of Rapid Action Battalion and Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner. The interim government, led by Prof Muhammad Yunus, took office on August 8 following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's government.

Sources in the police said the officers transferred were known to be close to the previous Awami League government. The force was heavily politicised during the tenures of the three successive governments led by Hasina.

A section of opportunistic and ambitious police officials extensively

used the force to implement AL's agendas.

These officials played roles in excessive use of force, reckless firing on the quota reform protesters, and persecution of opposition leaders over the years. That is why police came under widespread attacks from mobs after the fall of the Hasina government, the sources added.

More than 400 people, including 42 police personnel, were killed in clashes during the quota reform protest.

Amid such a situation, anger gripped different levels of the police, particularly the force members from the ranks of constable to sub-inspector. They claimed that police personnel used excessive force during the recent student movement following the orders of the senior officials. This triggered anger among the people, leading to the cops coming under mob attacks.

Police personnel even called strike demanding punishment for the senior officials responsible for issuing orders, and formation of a commission to run the force. They also called for changing police's uniform and logo due to the mistrust that has grown among people for the forcer's recent activities.

Yesterday, the PHQ formed a 10-member committee to change police's uniform and logo.

Hearing the news of DIG Baten being sent into forced retirement, people of his village home in Sunamganj's Madhyannagar upazila celebrated yesterday by distributing sweets among the villagers, reports our Sylhet correspondent.

Many villagers alleged that they had been oppressed by the family members of Baten for long.