

Maiden cargo flight departs Sylhet airport

RASHIDUL HASAN and SHIMUL NAZRUL

Sylhet's Osmani International Airport sent off its first-ever cargo flight to Spain last night, becoming the second airport in the country, after Dhaka, to currently offer freighter services.

A chartered Airbus A330-300 freighter of Galistair Aviation carrying around 60 tonnes of readymade garments intended for Inditex, a Spanish multinational clothing company and the world's largest fast fashion group, departed for its European destination at 8:00pm.

The consignment also included RMG goods exported by MGH Group.

Biman provided cargo and ground-handling services for this maiden flight.

Civil Aviation and Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin inaugurated the flight, alongside Bangladesh's Ambassador to Mexico M Mushfiqul Fazal Ansarey and Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Nasreen Jahan.

This is a historic moment as Sylhet becomes operational for cargo flights, Sk Bashir Uddin told the inaugural ceremony.

Earlier, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) Chairman Air Vice Marshal Md Monjur Kabir Bhuiyan said that explosive detection systems, X-ray scanners, and additional security arrangements had been installed to meet international freight handling standards at the Sylhet airport.

Authorities have decided to operate two cargo flights per week initially and urged businesses to avail themselves of this facility so that the number of flights could soon be increased.

This move to launch cargo flight services at Sylhet airport is part of a race to expand air cargo capacity after India suspended transshipment facilities it had previously provided to Bangladesh earlier this month, upending a logistics route for garment exporters.

The decision, announced without warning on April 8, cut off a vital land-air corridor that allowed Bangladeshi goods to move overland to Kolkata and Delhi airports and onwards to global markets. The disruption has forced Dhaka to fast-track efforts to diversify export channels and reduce dependence on India.

To that end, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) is also actively working to resume cargo flight services at Chattogram's Shah Amanat International Airport, which have remained dormant since 2022.

China Eastern Airlines, a major Chinese carrier which operates an extensive network with 1,031 routes and serves 223 destinations worldwide, has expressed interest in operating cargo flights via the airport, Md Ibrahim

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This aircraft being loaded with goods for export departed for Spain last night, inaugurating cargo flight services from the Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

FAILURE TO SEND 17,777 WORKERS TO KL Recruiting agencies to blame

Expat ministry tells HC; workers' frustrations grow

MD ABBAS

The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment has told the High Court that recruiting agencies are responsible for the failure to send 17,777 Bangladeshi workers to Malaysia.

During yesterday's hearing, the HC sought details from the government regarding the action taken against the agencies involved.

It also enquired whether the affected workers had been refunded and whether there had been any progress in resolving the issue.

The court directed the expatriates' welfare ministry secretary and other relevant authorities to submit a report by August 27. The bench of Justice Fahmida Quader and Justice Mubina Asaf passed the order.

On June 24 last year, the HC issued a rule asking why the authorities' negligence and inaction, which put burden on the affected workers, should not be declared illegal.

It also asked why the workers should not be refunded their money with interest.

Lawyers Md Tanvir Ahmed and Biplob Kumar Poddar represented the petitioners during yesterday's hearing.

Earlier in January, Prof Asif Nazrul, adviser to expatriates' welfare ministry, assured the workers on several occasions that they would be sent to Malaysia in phases, starting in March or early April. Following the assurances, the workers suspended their several-month long protest on February 22.

However, their frustration is now growing.

They could not leave the country before deadline imposed by Malaysia despite securing visas and clearances from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training after paying hefty sums to recruiting agencies.

The situation was triggered by a shortage of airline tickets, their overpricing and "negligence of the recruiting agencies" ahead of the May 31 deadline last year.

In some cases, workers who had tickets were unable to travel because the Malaysian government blacklisted the companies that had hired them.

"I have given the money after taking loans at high interest rates. Every month, I'm paying that interest," said Alamgir Hossain from Narsingdi, who along with his cousins Rakib Miah and Md Bashedur, paid two recruiting agencies Tk 10 lakh.

The aggrieved workers warned that if their demands were not met, they would launch tougher protests from May 18.

Asked, Neyamat Ullah Bhuiyan, senior secretary to the of expatriates' welfare ministry, said, "Nothing will be effective unless the Malaysian labour market opens again.

"We held a joint working group meeting with the Malaysian government last year. We have another meeting scheduled for mid-May," he said and hopes that a solution might come from that meeting.

People suffer amid service disruptions

FROM PAGE 1

Ebadul Haque, a resident of Char Sirta union, said he had to wait for 10 days to get a succession certificate. Rokon Hossain from the same union shared a similar experience.

Seeking anonymity, a UP secretary in Gouripur upazila said panel chairmen often struggle to run parishads due to a lack of leadership experience. In the unions where administrators have taken charge, service delivery has slowed down because they are burdened with too many tasks.

A UP member in the same upazila said many documents are pending, as the administrator usually visits the office twice a week.

In Rajshahi, 41 out of 72 UP chairmen are absent with 24 panel chairmen and 17 administrators playing their roles.

Parvez Rayhan, director of Local Government in Rajshahi Division, said, "Those who remained absent since August 5 without taking leave have been replaced by administrators."

In Sylhet, 18 of the 105 UP chairmen remain absent, with panel chairmen

and administrators managing parishad activities.

Talking to this newspaper last week, Talukder A Hossain, a resident of Dargapasha Union, said, "Our chairman has been absent for months ... I applied for a succession certificate over a month ago. I finally got it a couple of days back."

At least 17 of the 88 union parishads in Barisal are running without chairmen.

Acting chairman of Charbaria union parishad Md Al Mamun said beneficiary lists for VGF and VGD programmes have not been updated, causing delays in providing support to new recipients.

Contacted, LGRD Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan said, "In the unions where UP chairmen have been suspended or absent, government officials are carrying out administrative duties. This arrangement will continue for the time being."

The government refrained from removing any UP chairmen (elected between 2021 and 2022 during the Awami League government's tenure), considering the potential sufferings this could cause to people, he told The Daily

Star on April 17.

Earlier at the DCC Conference on February 18, Asif said, "In the absence of elected representatives, government officers are forced to multitask, making it difficult for them to provide services properly."

"No matter how diligently government officers work, it is nearly impossible for them to fully manage a ward's responsibilities. They don't know the people there, nor are they familiar with the area's infrastructure."

Asked, Rezaul Maksud Jahedi, secretary of the Local Government Division, said, "The absence of chairmen in different unions caused some temporary problems but the local administration is resolving them through alternative measures ... Administrators have already been appointed in many UPs."

He further said the development of an app for birth registration is nearing completion. It'll allow citizens to submit applications by following a few simple steps on mobile phones.

[Our correspondents in Chattogram, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet contributed to the report]

Family faces double blow

FROM PAGE 1

The man, who worked as a driver for a private company, was shot by police in Dhaka on July 23 last year during the uprising. He succumbed to his injuries two days later at the same hospital where his daughter was declared dead.

"My husband's death was a blow to us. We were worried about how would we survive with three children? Now, it's a double blow," the woman said.

After the man's death, the family received support from different sources, including political parties, the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation and the company where the man worked.

They had promised that her eldest daughter would be given a job after completing her Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations.

The dream was shattered as the family found the girl hanging from the ceiling fan of her room at their house in Adabor's Shekherlek on Saturday night.

"I used to tell her to study hard so that she could take care of the family," the mother said. "Now, everything is ruined!"

The girl's body was handed over to the family yesterday after an autopsy at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue. An unnatural death case was filed with Adabor Police Station in this regard.

She was buried yesterday beside her father's grave in Patuakhali's Dumki upazila.

The family said that she used to live with her grandparents in Dumki and was preparing for her HSC examinations.

In the evening of March 18, she was allegedly gang raped near the Munshibari area of Dumki while returning to her grandparents' house after visiting her father's grave, according to the statement of a case filed over the incident with the local police station.

Suspects Sakib Munshi, 19, and Sifat Munshi, 20, forcibly took her to a secluded area and raped her in turns. The suspects also allegedly took photos of the victim and threatened to spread them online if she reported the incident, added the case statement.

Police later arrested the two suspects,

Ask Interpol to issue arrest warrant against Putul

Dhaka court orders authorities

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered authorities to take steps to get an arrest warrant issued through Interpol against Saima Wazed Putul, daughter of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, in connection with charges of irregularities in plot allocation in Purbachal New Town.

Judge Md Zakir Hossain of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order following an application by the Anti-Corruption Commission, said its Public Relations Officer Md Aktarul Islam.

On April 10, the same court issued arrest warrants against 18 people, including Hasina and Putul, after accepting the charges against them over the plot allocation irregularities.

The court, on that day, directed officers-in-charge of over a dozen police stations in Dhaka and other parts of the country to submit progress reports on the execution of the arrest warrants by May 4.

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Truck runs over, kills SSC examinee in Uttara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An SSC examinee was run over by a truck in Uttara yesterday, shortly after he came out of the examination centre.

Nayeem, 17, was crossing the road near Azampur BNS Centre around 1:30pm when a truck hit him, said OC Shamim Ahmed of Uttara East Police Station.

Nayeem's classmate Pallab Kumar Shil said they were Uttara High School students and were sitting for the SSC exams this year. Their exam centre was at Uttara Rajuk School and College.

Nayeem, a commerce student, had appeared for his Finance and Banking exam earlier in the day.

"We first took Nayeem to a private hospital and later to DMCH, where he was declared dead around 3:15pm," he added.

The OC said locals seized the truck but the driver fled. Inspector Md Faruk, in charge of the DMCH police camp, said the body was kept at the morgue.

No place to heal

FROM PAGE 1

support for rape survivors in Bangladesh.

Last June, a schoolgirl from Patuakhali's Galachipa upazila died after a suicide attempt just a week after she was raped by a stalker. Overcome with shame and guilt, she tried to hang herself and, despite being rescued, died in hospital days later.

Similarly, in 2017, a female constable in Mymensingh set herself on fire after her complaint of being raped by a sub-inspector was ignored.

Between January 2020 and March 2025, Bangladesh recorded 5,104 reported rape cases, with three out of every five survivors being children.

During this period, 44 females, including 33 children, died by suicide following rape. An additional 49 such deaths were linked to sexual harassment, reports Ain O Salish Kendra.

Behind these numbers are survivors whose lives are forever shaped by trauma, like Helen.

A 2016 rape survivor, Helen was recently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She left her hometown to escape stigma, taking up a low-paying job at a microcredit organisation in a remote district, despite her qualifications for better positions.

"During holidays, my colleagues visit their families, but I have no one to go to."

She also faces frequent questions about marriage. "When I say I'm single, many don't believe me. Some even bring marriage proposals, but I'm too afraid to trust anyone."

"I live in constant fear. If my employer finds out [about my rape], I could lose my job. The fear doesn't leave me, even in my sleep."

Helen's experience is far from unique, and mental health professionals stress

the urgent need for accessible counselling services.

Dr Sunjida Shahriah, a psychotherapist working with rape survivors, emphasised the importance of counselling for maintaining a survivor's sanity.

"Without mental support, survivors can sink into deep guilt and primal shame, which can lead to PTSD or even suicidal tendencies," she explained.

"Recognising suicidal tendencies is challenging, particularly when individuals mask their feelings. Survivors may feel 'ruined' and worthless, wishing to erase themselves from the world."

Dr Shahriah further highlighted that victim blaming and social stigma only worsen the trauma for survivors. "Support systems need to be promoted and made accessible 24/7, especially during critical times when people are at their most vulnerable."

Despite the essential role of state support, significant challenges remain.

The National Trauma Counselling Centre (NTCC) and Regional Trauma Counselling Centres (RTCCs) were established by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) in 2009 under the Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women. However, they face severe funding and manpower shortages.

Of the 22 sanctioned clinical psychologist positions at NTCC and RTCCs, only six are filled. Survivors in many areas can access help only through phone counselling, said Ismat Jahan, clinical psychologist and head of NTCC.

"After Covid-19, the project [NTCC] faced a funding crisis, which forced us to shut down our counselor training programmes, through which we used to train a pool of counselors. Now, we do very little publicity, promotion or advertising

-- we're simply trying to keep the service running."

Since its inception, the NTCC has served 7,516 clients, including 2,249 children. Meanwhile, RTCCs, established in the one-stop crisis centres of eight divisional medical college hospitals, have served 27,982 victims of violence, including 9,400 children. They mainly receive referrals from NGOs, hospitals, and schools.

Of the eight RTCCs, only three -- in Dhaka, Chattogram and Rangpur -- are functional. Moreover, in divisions where there is no RTCC, survivors usually have to receive counselling over phone.

However, none of these centres track data specifically on rape survivors.

Meanwhile, the 24/7 National Helpline Centre (109), launched in 2012, has provided counselling to 17,776 victims of violence.

At Dhaka Medical College Hospital's One-Stop Crisis Centre, medical officer Dr Tayeba Sultana explained that continued counselling is offered only when survivors or psychologists feel it is necessary.

"Not everyone needs long-term support. Those with severe trauma receive our contact and can return if needed."

Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, noted that recognising rape as a criminal offence took years of activism, as society often blamed victims.

"Rape can destroy a woman's life. Rebuilding survivors' mental strength is crucial," she said, adding, "Counsellors also need counselling and specialised training."

Moslem also criticised project-based interventions: "While many initiatives exist, most are project-based. Once a project ends, the focus fades. This practice must change."