

Regulator repeatedly ignored red flags

FROM PAGE 1

Aviation Administration, aviation experts say.

One of the most widespread violations by two training academies – Galaxy Flying Academy and Bangladesh Flying Academy – involved pilots being granted licences without completing their mandatory solo flight hours, the CAAB investigation found.

Solo flights are a critical component of pilot training, designed to ensure that candidates can operate an aircraft independently and handle in-flight challenges with confidence.

Other irregularities involved one pilot certifying himself by signing his own licence and another being made a “check pilot” of a type of aircraft he had not even flown. Several pilots also logged false flight hours to meet licence requirements (Read in Part 2 tomorrow).

Meanwhile, a recent inspection by the Anti-Corruption Commission found that written tests for pilots had been conducted using unauthorised software through a private company, which The Daily Star could not find at its official address.

There are three types of pilot licences – Private Pilot Licence (PPL), Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) and Airline Transport Pilot Licence (ATPL).

A PPL is the first step that certifies a person to fly, while a CPL is an additional licence that a person must obtain to become a professional pilot. The ATPL is the highest level of pilot certification, allowing holders to serve as the pilot-in-command of commercial airliners after meeting extensive flight experience and training requirements.

Of the 144 individuals who obtained licences in questionable manners, 120 are PPL, 22 are CPL and 2 are ATPL. A concrete figure was not available, but some of them are currently employed at various airlines in different capacities, including in Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

RULES OVERLOOKED Galaxy Flying Academy and Bangladesh Flying Academy (BFA) are two popular flying institutions in Bangladesh. Together, they produce dozens of pilots every year.

In the last few years, these two institutions

recommended piloting licences for 144 students even though they did not complete their 150 nautical miles (nm) solo flights and 300nm cross-country flights as pilot-in-command, which are prerequisites for getting the PPL and CPL, respectively, the CAAB investigation found.

According to CAAB’s Civil Aviation Rules and Air Navigation Order, obtaining a PPL requires pilots to complete five hours of solo cross-country flight time, including at least one flight covering a minimum distance of 270km (150nm) with landings at two different aerodromes.

Those seeking a CPL must complete a 300nm cross-country flight as pilot-in-command. To qualify as a commercial pilot, they must also undertake a flight covering at least 540km (300nm) and make landings at two different aerodromes.

An aerodrome is the space in which aircraft flight operations take place – an airport is within an aerodrome.

However, the CAAB investigation found that the pilots graduating from Galaxy and BFA did not follow the planned route, and their flying hours were much less than that mentioned in the syllabus, raising questions as to whether the required skills had actually been tested.

Both academies treat Rajshahi airport as their training base for this check.

Galaxy students seeking PPL licences flew the Rajshahi-Bogura-Saidpur-Rajshahi route.

At least 110 such students flew the 150nm solo flight without stopping at Bogura or Saidpur, which is mandatory, shows a letter sent by Galaxy to CAAB in December 2024.

Explaining this breach to the aviation authorities, the academy said its students did not make stops at the transit airports because, after shutting off the aircraft, a certified aircraft engineer would need to sign a release form before the plane could take off again. “Due to a shortage of engineers [at the academy], we are unable to do so,” said Galaxy.

Galaxy also said since Bogura is a restricted military base, prior coordination is required

with the air traffic controller for landings, and so they do not land there.

In fact, on September 24, 2023, Galaxy had written to the CAAB and sought this exemption citing safety reasons, but the request was turned down.

CAAB officials told The Daily Star that the academy was denied the exemption because there is no compulsion to use this specific route; the students are free to fly any route and stop at any airport in Bangladesh.

In addition, 10 students from Galaxy seeking CPLs were required to fly 300nm on the Rajshahi Saidpur-Jashore-Rajshahi route and make full stops in the transit airports.

The students instead flew

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“We are aware of the problem and we can tell you that it will be resolved soon. Since the details are not finalised yet, I am not elaborating.”

Brig Gen (retd) MUHAMMAD HASAN IMAM FARAZI
CEO, Galaxy Flying Academy

from Rajshahi to Saidpur and then went back to Rajshahi, and did the same with Jashore.

“The students returned to the base after the first leg to refuel as the endurance did not cover for the whole route,” the Galaxy letter explained.

Aviation experts said that this means the students did not learn the route between Saidpur and Jashore. They also said that the academy could have easily sent a barrel of fuel to Jashore or Saidpur airports. One barrel, currently priced less than \$300, would be sufficient to refuel a Cessna 152 or Cessna 172—the planes flown by the students—twice and once, respectively.

Bangladesh Flying Academy (BFA) followed a similar pattern.

Its students also flew

training flights on Rajshahi-Bogura-Saidpur-Rajshahi route; same as Galaxy and, like Galaxy students, they did not stop at Bogura and Saidpur before returning to Rajshahi.

In a letter to CAAB on February 26, 2025, BFA justified this and said, “Bogura is a restricted airport. Therefore, the students flew over the airfield.”

All students were also required to fly solo, not with their instructors accompanying them, yet they did exactly the opposite.

In an explanation to CAAB, the BFA said, “Once an aircraft is switched off Saidpur, a pilot or an engineer needed to sign the documents for transition; therefore, a safety pilot was onboard.”

Aviation experts within the CAAB told The Daily Star that BFA could have simply had a pilot or an engineer present, for only about Tk 60,000 a month, on the ground at Saidpur to sign the documents when the students landed.

The same thing happened with the 300nm solo flight mandatory for the advanced Commercial Pilot Licence.

The students were required to fly on Rajshahi-Jashore-Saidpur-Rajshahi route and make full stops in the transit airports. But they instead flew from Rajshahi to Jashore and went back to Rajshahi, and then flew a round trip to Saidpur, BFA wrote to CAAB.

“Due to shortage of endurance we had to return to Rajshahi for refuelling and restart for the second leg,” it says.

Aviation experts, however, say the academy could have refuelled at either Jashore or Saidpur using barrels of fuel and handpumps.

The students flying the 150nm “solo flights” also had their teachers onboard with them, even though this was supposed to be unsupervised flights, meaning they flew their exam flight with help, documents show.

“From over-cautiousness of avoiding a situation/accident, which may cause suspension of flying training, sometimes solo flights were conducted with safety pilots onboard... The matter is highly regretted and will not be repeated in

the future,” the BFA letter reads.

At least 22 students were given licences by CAAB—10 PPL and 12 CPL—after graduating from BFA even though they flew under supervision and did not follow the route.

A glimpse into a meeting held at CAAB shows how, despite warnings by CAAB’s safety departments, some of these students were given licenses by the regulatory body’s high-ups.

On May 21, 2024, members of CAAB’s Flight Standards and Regulations Department arranged a meeting with the then licensing head to discuss whether they could accept reduced flying durations for two of those 22 cadet pilots from BFA.

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“As this is an ongoing issue, we hope it will be resolved by the civil aviation authorities. So we would not comment on this issue at this time.”

A spokesperson for Bangladesh Flying Academy

The meeting noted that “flight time does not commensurate with the fulfilment of CPL skill test requirement”.

However, the authorities later decided that “considering previous practices” and “unavoidable circumstances”, as stated by BFA and Galaxy, the candidates should be granted the licence, according to CAAB documents.

Both pilots were later granted CPLs, enabling them to be pilots for hire. One of these two pilots are currently employed at Biman in an assisting role, while the other is unemployed.

Speaking anonymously, an official from one of the two academies told The Daily Star that his academy had indulged in these deviations because they did not want to bear the

expenses of maintaining a set-up of engineers, pilots and refuelling facilities at the other airports.

Brig Gen (retd) Muhammad Hasan Imam Farazi, chief executive officer of Galaxy Flying Academy, said, “We are aware of the problem and we can tell you that it will be resolved soon. Since the details are not finalised yet, I am not elaborating.”

The Daily Star spoke to three BFA officials, including its chairman Captain Shahabuddin Ahmed, Bir Uttam, by phone and sent them questions via WhatsApp, but none of them agreed to speak on the record.

However, one senior official, seeking anonymity, said, “As this is an ongoing issue, we hope it will be resolved by the civil aviation authorities. So we would not comment on this issue at this time.”

When cadet pilots finish their flying school and complete all checks, the respective academy applies for licences to CAAB on their behalf. CAAB then verifies the students’ records and flight log, and grants the licence if they deem fit, aviation experts say.

“So the CAAB authorities cannot shrug off their responsibilities if students were granted licences without fulfilling their training requirements,” said a CAAB official, requesting anonymity because he is not authorised to speak to the media.

CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal Md Manjur Kabir Bhuiyan downplayed the training rules violation by the academies, and insisted that such violations do not raise safety concerns.

“This is not really a safety issue. We are carrying out a detailed study. This does not mean they cannot fly safely,” he said.

Asked whether CAAB would be legally liable if one of these pilots had an accident, he said, “It is not really logical that a pilot who did not make a full stop landing in the third airfield in his early life will be involved in an accident.”

Manjur, who assumed the role of CAAB chairman in August 2024, added that there has not been any violation that would constitute “unsafe flying”

and that CAAB always complies with ICAO safety standards.

“Concerns will arise only if misinterpreted, misleading or wrong information is published. So far, we have not found any issue of potential Significant Safety Concern,” he told The Daily Star in a written response.

Significant Safety Concern (SSC) status is a ranking given to a country’s civil aviation by ICAO in case of major deficiencies in aviation safety oversight system. Bangladesh was under the SSC status in 2009-2012.

SUSPICIOUS SERVICE Since 2017, an organisation named A4Aero Ltd has been conducting the written exams for the aspiring pilots. The tests are conducted through a software, which also scores the answer sheet and the CAAB automatically receives a copy of the results.

The full ownership and control of the software remains with A4Aero. Even the data is stored in the cloud server of A4Aero, giving rise to the possibility of fraudulence and cheating, according to a report by a government agency.

The ACC investigators, who visited the CAAB office on March 17, 2025, found that the public procurement rules were not followed when giving the job to A4Aero.

CAAB is designated as a Critical Information Infrastructure by the government, meaning that the software it uses must undergo thorough quality testing by the Bangladesh Computer Council.

Documents also show that the organisation was not even registered in 2017, the year it began taking the tests. It was registered on February 27, 2018. As of April 2024, it has taken 14,084 tests.

The organisation is owned by Captain SM Nazmul Anam, a former flight safety director at CAAB.

Talking to The Daily Star last week, he said that during his tenure at CAAB (2012-2015), Bangladesh came out of a “Significant Safety Concern” status assigned by the ICAO between 2009 and 2012.

“We began developing the software in 2017 because CAAB was struggling with question-paper leaks during its physical tests and we were encouraged to do so by CAAB. CAAB was supposed to formally procure the software but it never did. They have just been using it,” said Nazmul, currently a Regional Officer for flight safety at ICAO’s Asia-Pacific region.

Asked whether CAAB has access to the data and control over the software, he said, “The developers have left the company. I do not have the source code and neither does CAAB. The data is stored in the cloud server of my company.”

Less than 24 hours before going to print – and four days after he was interviewed – he told this paper yesterday morning that he had found the source code and handed the database over to CAAB.

During last week’s interview, he said he pays for the cloud space himself, with expenses going up to \$200 per month, and noted that since the code of the software has not been updated in years, it is a cyber security risk.

“Since we did not have an agreement with CAAB, this software has never been through any quality testing,” he said.

He however insisted that it is not possible to cheat using the software.

The Daily Star visited the office address listed on the company’s website last month, but could not locate the company there. When pointed this out, Nazmul said the company is fully remote, and has no physical office.

CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal Md Manjur Kabir admitted that the software in question was under development and trial when A4Aero offered the service, but he denied that CAAB had no access control over it.

Asked about the risk of using the software in cheating, he said, “We have not so far received any formal complaints or proof of any kind of cheating in exams. However, CAAB is in the process of acquiring new software with full features for taking the test.”

Raise tobacco tax to curb use

FROM PAGE 3

According to the group’s proposal, setting the price of a 10-stick pack of low and medium-tier cigarettes at Tk 90 – up from the current Tk 60 and Tk 80 respectively – could encourage nearly 2.4 million adult smokers to quit. It could also prevent approximately 1.7 million premature deaths, including 9,00,000 among the youth, she claimed.

The group also proposed setting retail prices of high-tier cigarettes at Tk 140 and premium-tier cigarettes at Tk 190 per 10 sticks, slightly higher than the current Tk 185.

Prof Shafiq Nahin Shimul of the Institute of Health Economics at Dhaka University said the current tax measures are ineffective in reducing tobacco use, as the government does not implement recommended

hikes.

He urged that the revenue collected from tobacco taxes be earmarked for specific health services.

Prof Sohel Reza Choudhury, head of Epidemiology and Research at the National Heart Foundation Hospital and Research Institute, said tobacco use is directly linked to four major non-communicable diseases, including heart and respiratory illnesses, which account for about 70 percent of deaths in the country.

“Although tobacco consumption has declined in Bangladesh, the rate of reduction is slower than in many other countries. Increasing taxes on tobacco products is one of the most effective ways to speed up this decline,” he said.

Bangladesh Health Reporters Forum President Rashed Rabbi

and PROGGA’s Head of Programmes Hasan Shahriar also spoke at the event.

Home adviser

FROM PAGE 3

Sub-contractor Md Harun, the adviser said, “I’m not aware of any such restriction being sent to us. I currently have no information on that. Since you’ve brought it up, I will look into the matter.”

He emphasised that the investigation committee will thoroughly examine all relevant issues and ensure accountability. “Those who are guilty will definitely be punished,” he said.

Abdul Hamid left the country for Thailand through Dhaka airport early Thursday. In response, a three-member inquiry committee, headed by the additional inspector general (administration), was formed to investigate the circumstances surrounding his departure.

People suffer

FROM PAGE 4

Sub-contractor Md Harun, who recently took over the work, said the contractor left, leaving the work unfinished. He said around 70 percent of the work has been completed.

“Necessary measures have been taken to speed up the work, and the project will be completed quickly,” he added.

Contacted, Mohammad Kamruzzaman, executive engineer of LGED in Tangail, said steps would be taken to resume the work as soon as possible.

Commission proposes

FROM PAGE 3

said implementation of such a system would reduce reliance on unregulated private pharmacies, increase transparency in the supply chain, and significantly enhance the cost-effectiveness of government expenditure on medicine supply.

The commission also emphasised the need to establish a centrally managed National Ambulance Service Network across the country, which would ensure timely, high-quality, and equitable emergency transport services from urban centres to remote areas.

This network would include GPS-enabled vehicles, a central call centre, and a tiered fleet system, funded through government allocations, corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds, and voluntary contributions, it said.

Coverage could be expanded through public-private partnerships based on a social business model, building a financially sustainable structure, it added.

Referring to success stories in India and Rwanda, the commission said that if such a system is introduced in the country, it would reduce delays in accessing care and deliver emergency services to all segments of the population.

The initiative would lower out-of-pocket expenses associated with private transport – paving the way for a more sensitive and inclusive healthcare system, it added.

Although the

commission recommended establishing a National Diagnosis Laboratory Network and a National Blood Supply Network, it did not provide details about these initiatives.

Two former

FROM PAGE 3

Lakshmipur-2, are also accused in a case filed by the Anti Corruption Commission in November 2020 over laundering around Tk 148 crore and concealing Tk 2.31 crore in assets.

The four other arrestees are: Abdus Sobhan Bhuiyan alias Hasan, former Chaudhagram upazila chairman in Cumilla; Awlad Hossain Liton, three-time mayor of Matlab South Municipality and a leader of Chandpur AL unit; Nargis Akter, president of Madaripur district Jubo Mohila League; and Mahmud Hossain, former joint convener of the now-banned Bangladesh Chhatra League’s Shabbagh Thana unit.

Prioritise

FROM PAGE 4

Highlighting Rajuk’s limitations, she said development authorities alone can’t ensure sustainability. “We must empower institutions and ensure local participation,” she added.

She warned that unplanned development threatens biodiversity and stressed that real accountability lies with the true encroachers of natural areas.

North claims most awards

FROM PAGE 4

This year’s event is being held with the theme “Ensure quality education, Build a Discrimination-Free Bangladesh.”

A total of 150 awards were conferred, including 42 to individuals and institutions, and 108 to students for outstanding performances in sports, cultural activities, and subject-based quizzes.

Officials from the northern districts also dominated the individual

award categories.

Sherpur’s Md Obaidullah was named Best District Primary Education Officer, Muhammad Rafiqul Islam of Tangail PTI as the Best PTI Superintendent, and Md Zakir Hossain Sarkar of Syedpur upazila as the Best Upazila Education Officer.

In the institutional categories, Rajshahi PTI was selected as the Best Primary Teachers’ Training Institute.

Md Kamruzzaman of Rajshahi PTI was awarded

18 years after collapse

FROM PAGE 4

“During monsoon, the situation worsens. Crossing the bamboo bridge becomes dangerous, and transporting agricultural goods becomes extremely difficult,” said Enayet Ali, a farmer from Hatibandha village.

Hossain Ali, another resident of the same village, said, “As this is a frontier area frequently hit by flash floods, a well-planned and durable bridge is essential

to ease our suffering.”

“Farmers often fail to get fair prices for their produce as they cannot easily transport goods to nearby markets. Middlemen take advantage, and many farmers are forced to sell their produce at home,” said Md Jahangir Alam, chairman of Hatibandha Union Parishad.

The chairman said

locals, with support from the union parishad, built a wooden platform bridge

a few years ago, which remains the only way to cross the canal.

Contacted, Shuvo Basak, upazila engineer of the Local Government and Engineering Department, said the 50-foot bridge on the earthen road was not built by LGED.

He could not confirm which agency constructed it.

He, however, said he would look into the issue and take steps to build a new one.

One held for assaulting two girls

FROM PAGE 4

Jihad assaulting two female passengers on the deck using a belt.

Another widely shared video shows several young men beating a woman on the second floor of the vessel. Their identities have not yet been confirmed, the OC added.

When asked about the incident, Nehal told local journalists, “I did this for their own good. Some people were looting on

the launch, so I went there with my friends. When we arrived, I helped evacuate the people I knew. The crowd had become aggressive towards the two girls. At that moment, they asked us to ‘save’ them. As a brother, I intervened by striking them a few times. I respect the law, and to control the situation, I hit them two or three times as a brother.”

Law enforcement officials later intervened and brought the situation under control.

The launch, MV Captain, subsequently departed Munshiganj for Dhaka.

Police said filing of a case against Jihad and others allegedly involved was underway.

Meanwhile, rights group BLAST yesterday condemned the incident. In a statement, it demanded legal actions against the culprits and appropriate safety measures for the young women.