

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 142 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 142 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.

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

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 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.

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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."

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 licences 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 licencing head to discuss whether they could accept reduced flying durations for two of those 22 cadet pilots from BFA.

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.

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.

Asked whether CAAB was 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.

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.

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 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.

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