

Check fuel switches on Boeing jets

India orders its airlines

REUTERS, New Delhi

India yesterday ordered its airlines to examine fuel switches on several Boeing models, while South Korea said it would order a similar measure, as scrutiny intensified of fuel switch locks at the centre of an investigation into a deadly Air India crash.

The moves by India and South Korea came despite the planemaker and the US Federal Aviation Administration telling airlines and regulators in recent days that the fuel switch locks on Boeing jets are safe.



The locks have come under scrutiny following last month's crash of an Air India jet, which killed 260 people. A preliminary report found that the switches had almost simultaneously flipped from run position to cutoff shortly after takeoff.

The report noted a 2018 advisory from the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which recommended, but did not mandate, operators of several Boeing models including the 787 to inspect the locking feature of fuel cutoff switches to ensure they could not be moved accidentally.

India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation said it had issued an order to investigate locks on several Boeing models including 787s and 737s, after several Indian and international airlines began making their own inspections of fuel switches.

ON THIS DAY LAST YEAR

Chhatra League attacks quota protesters

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confined to the campus.

Later in the evening, a group of BCL activists stormed the emergency department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), where injured protesters were receiving treatment. Their presence sparked panic among doctors, nurses, patients, and attendants. Medical services were severely disrupted.

According to police sources, 297 people were treated at DMCH and six more at the Sarkari Karmachari Hospital.

"We don't know the exact figure, but we estimate that over 200 of our fellow demonstrators were injured, and many are in serious condition," said Nahid Islam, one of the movement's coordinators.

The wave of violence extended far beyond the capital. Students from Jagannath University, Jahangirnagar University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, and Eden Mohila College also came under attack by BCL activists during quota reform protests. The attacks came just hours after Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader warned of a "fitting reply" to student leaders who referred to themselves as Razakars.

At a government function earlier in the day, then prime minister Sheikh Hasina also expressed outrage at the protesters' slogans. "They don't know how the Pakistan occupation forces and Razakar Bahini tortured people. So, they don't feel ashamed to call themselves Razakars," she said at the signing ceremony of Annual Performance Agreements for FY 2024-25.

On the Jahangirnagar University campus, members of the Anti Discrimination Student Movement began a march around 6:30pm. By 7:00pm, at least 50 students



PHOTO: FILE

Students carrying an injured female student to safety after Chhatra League activists attacked quota reform protesters on Dhaka University campus on July 15, 2024.

were injured in an attack allegedly carried out by BCL activists from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall. Twenty of the injured required referral to private hospitals due to their worsening condition.

That evening, students staged a sit-in in front of the vice-chancellor's residence. Around midnight, BCL activists began hurling brick chunks at the protesters. Some students scaled the wall of the compound and opened the gates to allow others inside for safety.

In Chattogram, violence erupted around 3:30pm near the Sholashahar Railway Station after BCL activists attacked quota reform activists. Earlier, they had seized the key to the Chittagong University shuttle

train and halted it. Talat Mahmud, a student leader, was beaten up and forcibly taken to the proctor's office.

Meanwhile, 20 students of Jagannath University who had joined the protest at DU were injured and treated at DMCH. "We were peacefully protesting when BCL activists attacked us with weapons and sticks," said JnU student Junayed Islam.

At Eden Mohila College, four students were reportedly beaten up by BCL activists around 11:30pm.

At Rajshahi University, at least four students were injured in an attack by BCL activists around 6:20pm. "They started beating us and ordered us to go back to our halls. I barely escaped," said one student, Nasim.

Talks stall over women's seats, upper house

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repeatedly during the reform talks.

Initially, the commission had proposed increasing the number of reserved seats for women from 50 to 100 and suggested direct elections to these seats.

Facing disagreement over that plan, the commission floated the new model.

The commission's Vice-President Prof Ali Riaz said that despite prolonged discussions on women's representation and the formation of a bicameral legislature, consensus had not been reached.

"These two issues have been discussed multiple times. While there has been some support initially, procedural disagreements have prevented all from reaching a consensus."

He said the commission had previously proposed

forming a 400-seat lower house and a 100-seat upper house. "Nearly two-thirds of political parties supported this idea ... Disagreement persists over how the upper house would be constituted."

"We want to continue the discussions and hope to agree on an acceptable mechanism," said Riaz, adding that these two topics will remain on the agenda for today's meeting as well.

ROLE OF UPPER HOUSE

The commission's proposal also detailed the role of the upper house.

It said the upper house would not have authority to initiate new legislation. However, all bills passed by the lower house — except money bills — must be placed before both houses.

The commission proposed that the upper house review and analyse

bills from the lower house and approve or reject them within a legally stipulated two-month window, after which they would be considered automatically approved.

If approved, the bill would be forwarded to the president for assent. If rejected, the upper house may return it to the lower house with suggested amendments for reconsideration.

The lower house may then choose to accept or reject those amendments, in whole or in part.

However, if the upper house rejects the same bill in two successive sessions and the lower house passes it again in a subsequent session, the bill may be sent to the president without the upper house's approval.

WHAT PARTIES SAY

At a press briefing following

the talks, BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed said his party supports increasing women's representation in parliament.

While backing the commission's earlier proposal to raise reserved seats from 50 to 100, BNP believes these should be filled through the existing mechanism rather than direct elections.

After independence, the 1972 constitution initially reserved 15 seats in parliament for women. Over time, this number gradually rose to 50. These seats are currently allocated to political parties in proportion to their share of the 300 general seats. "Designating or delimiting 100 new constituencies specifically for directly elected women's seats is not realistic," he argued.

Regarding the commission's suggestion for nominating women in 33 percent of parliamentary seats, Salahuddin said parties have yet to implement the existing Representation of the People Order provision of 33 percent women in their own committees. "The reality is, due to religious and social factors, many women in our society are still hesitant to engage in politics. Therefore, we prefer a gradual increase in women's participation over a sudden revolutionary shift."

On the upper house formation, he said BNP had already included its suggestions in its 31-point reform proposal.

He criticised the idea of directly electing upper house members from 64 districts and 12 city corporations, comparing

it to a district council or provincial government system.

Jamaat's Naye-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher said they presented two key points. "One is raising women's seats in parliament to 100, and the other is adopting the PR system for upper house formation."

He added that his party also supports using the PR system to elect 100 women MPs. "In our social reality, it is nearly impossible for a woman to contest directly in a large constituency formed by merging three parliamentary seats ... Our women still adhere to religious principles, social contexts, and cultural traditions."

About the upper house, Taher said, "If the upper house simply mirrors the lower house, it will serve no purpose. Without PR, it

cannot ensure a system of checks and balances."

He also dismissed the idea of electing members from 64 districts and 12 city corporations. "This proposal is not even worthy of discussion. It is misleading and could derail the main dialogue."

National Citizen Party Member Secretary Akhtar Hossain said they too proposed the direct election of 100 women MPs, aligning with the commission's suggestion.

He added that his party supports the PR system for allocating upper house seats and does not endorse electing members from all districts and city corporations. "We've noticed in some proposals a tendency to weaken the upper house... We want a structure where even a party receiving just one percent of votes can still

secure representation."

Meanwhile, leftist parties like the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, and Biplobi Workers Party rejected the proposal to abolish reserved seats for women.

CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said they support raising the number of reserved seats to 100 from the existing 50, with all members elected through direct vote, and rejected the idea of a bicameral parliament, calling it unnecessary.

Biplobi Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque also called the abolishment of reserved seats "unjust" and said his party supports increasing the number to 100 with direct elections.

He too favoured the PR system for upper house formation.

Dhaka gears up for 3rd round

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The development came after the US last Monday announced a plan to impose a 35 percent trade tariff on Bangladeshi imports, a slight reduction from the 37 percent rate initially proposed. The tariffs are expected to come into effect on August 1.

Adviser Bashir described the previous two rounds of talks with USTR, as well as meetings with economists, exporters, and business leaders, as "constructive and encouraging."

USTR is the chief trade negotiation body for the US government.

However, both the adviser and the secretary refrained from answering journalists' queries on the details of the talks, citing a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) signed between Bangladesh and the USA in May to protect sensitive information related to the negotiations.

For example, the adviser did not respond to a question about whether a framework agreement would be signed with the USA before the negotiations conclude. He also declined to disclose the demands made by the USA during the ongoing negotiations.

Former Bangladesh ambassador to the US M Humayun Kabir told The Daily Star that a framework agreement outlines the basic principles of bilateral relations, based on which more specific agreements may follow. However, he noted that it would be

difficult for Bangladesh to sign such an agreement in a short period without thorough consultations ahead of the August 1 tariff implementation.

Adviser Bashir Uddin expressed optimism about a positive outcome, saying the local exporters have been doing business with the USA at competitive prices for many years.

Before the press conference, the adviser held a consultation meeting with economists and trade body leaders to gather opinions and plan the next steps. He added that more stakeholder meetings would take place before the third round of negotiations with the USTR.

He also said the government would not hire lobbyist groups to negotiate tariff rates with the Trump administration, despite earlier demands from private sector entrepreneurs.

On behalf of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), its president Mohammad Hatem said businesses are satisfied with the government's handling of the tariff issue.

The commerce secretary clarified that the draft tariff agreement does not include a 40 percent value addition requirement, as claimed by some reports. It also does not mandate reducing dependence on China for industrial raw materials as a condition for securing lower tariffs from the USA.

In his introductory remarks, the secretary

acknowledged that the reciprocal tariff would negatively impact Bangladesh's exports to the USA. He said the government is committed to minimising these effects by negotiating a reduced tariff rate.

Mohammad Abdur Razaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development; Masrur Reaz, chairman of Policy Exchange Bangladesh; Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling; and Mostafa Abid Khan, a former member of the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission, participated in the consultation meeting with the adviser.

Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association; Syed Nasim Manzur, president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh; Kamran T Rahman, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Md Hafizur Rahman, administrator to the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry; Anwar-Ul Alam Chowdhury, president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries; A Matin Chowdhury, former president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA); and Razeed Haider, director of BTMA, were among others who participated in the consultation meeting.

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2,211 kilometres, with 961km lying in the south. During the tenure of ex-mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, DSCC spent Tk 360 crore to tackle waterlogging. Of the amount, around Tk 100 crore was invested in drainage system for Shantinagar and its surrounding areas, yet severe waterlogging occurs there.

Contacted, Air Commodore Md Mahabubur Rahman Talukder, chief waste management officer of DSCC, said, "We are aware of all the vulnerable areas... Drains, box culverts, and sewerage lines are being

cleaned under a project."

The project was launched during Taposh's tenure. No new projects have been taken up since the change in DSCC leadership in August last year.

Talukder said around 35 percent of the ongoing project has been completed, and they hope to finish the rest by November.

DSCC has blamed the persistent waterlogging in New Market on the new structures built in Pikhana area, blocking drainage lines. Waterlogging on Green Road has been attributed to the construction of the elevated expressway,

which disrupted part of the Hatirjheel drainage system.

Asked about the DSCC's initiatives, Talukder said, "It will require around Tk 250 crore to address waterlogging in New Market area alone. It's not possible to spend such a big amount immediately."

He further said DSCC is preparing a project proposal involving Tk 700-800 crore for inclusion in the Annual Development Programme. "We will submit the Development Project Proposal to the authorities concerned as early as possible."

"At this moment, it's not possible to implement

a long term project, which will take at least two to three years. We currently have six small water pumps and plan to purchase six more.

"In late May, we managed to drain stagnant water from the affected areas within 24 hours by using these pumps," he added.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Describing unplanned urbanisation as the root cause of persistent waterlogging, urban planner Prof Adil Mohammed Khan said, "The destruction of natural waterbodies, canals, and flood-flow zones has made the city increasingly vulnerable."

"A livable city should have

at least 35 to 40 percent open green space and waterbodies, whereas Dhaka now has only 10 percent," said Adil, also the president of Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP).

According to BIP data, in 1995, waterbodies covered 20.57 percent of central Dhaka, which dropped to only 2.9 percent by 2023. Green space, once at 22 percent, now stands at just 9 percent.

Adil pointed out that artificial drainage systems can reduce the duration of waterlogging but they cannot eliminate the problem if natural drainage channels are destroyed.

Govt at it again, plans to promote retirees

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eventually be promoted, a senior official at the public administration told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

Public administration experts have raised questions about the government move, saying the government must explain to the public why these retired officials are now being rewarded with retrospective promotions.

Firoz Miah, a former additional secretary, said, "There are no explanations as to why certain individuals are being promoted while others are excluded. The authorities must be held accountable for spending public money in such a manner."

Retrospective promotions

mean officials are granted new rank and increased salaries effective from past dates, regardless of whether they are in service. Retired officials receiving such promotions are awarded financial benefits from public funds without serving a single day in the promoted roles.

According to Finance Division data, the government is incurring an additional expenditure of Tk 42 crore to cover the benefits of 764 officers promoted retrospectively last December. They will also receive enhanced pensions for the rest of their lives.

"A political government may use such promotions as a tool to create sycophant bureaucrats.

But why is this government following that path? Such decisions weaken the administration," said a former official from the information cadre on the condition of anonymity.

"It's unbelievable how former cadre officials are being promoted. This interim government is outdoing even the past political regimes in terms of retrospective promotions," said an official from the Cabinet Division.

Echoing the official's opinion, a senior assistant secretary said, "The move to promote a large number of former officials is unjustifiable. Offering such benefits exclusively to cadre officials does not serve public interest. This kind of decision will only deepen

people's mistrust of cadre officials."

Former secretary and writer Abdul Awal Mazumder said that if the previous government had deprived competent and qualified officials, then it's obvious that many unqualified people were promoted.

"Has this government taken any steps to demote those unqualified individuals? If they are demoted and public money they received as benefits is recovered, only then retrospective promotions can be considered," he told The Daily Star.

"In the past, governments occasionally allowed retrospective promotions for one or two individuals. But the current government is

turning that exception into practice. This will stand as an extremely bad and controversial precedent for the future."

Responding to a query, Mazumder said the term "public interest" should not be cited in a government gazette to justify retrospective promotions, as such decisions have nothing to do with public interest.

Contacted, Mokhles Ur Rahman, senior secretary at the public administration ministry, said, "During the past government's tenure, many deserving officials were deprived of promotions while unqualified ones were promoted. This government is considering retrospective promotions to address that injustice."

‘BNP now a protector of Mujibism’

Says Nahid in Patuakhali



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Nahid Islam, convener of the National Citizen Party, yesterday accused the BNP of becoming a "protector of Mujibism", aligning themselves with what he called a "fallen fascist regime".

Speaking at a rally organised by the NCP on Circuit House Road in Patuakhali in the afternoon, Nahid said, "BNP is now protecting the ideology of Mujibism like the previous government. They are involved in corruption, extortion, and criminal activities just like the previous government."

He added, "In July last year, we did not only fight against Sheikh Hasina — we fought to uproot extortion, terrorism, and corruption. We cannot unite with those who stand in the way of building a new Bangladesh free from these evils."

Highlighting internal threats, Nahid said, "Earlier, we believed our enemies were outside the country. Now, we see that the enemies are within. There's a conspiracy against us because we are speaking against this ongoing system. There's an effort to keep us divided so we cannot unite. But with public support, we will respond to

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