

Stuck in lower-rung

SSB dilemma keeps 1620 civil servants in six-month wait for promotions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 1,620 bureaucrats are now stuck in a six-month backlog, as the Superior Selection Board (SSB) remains undecided on promotions to positions of deputy secretary.

According to Secretariat sources, the entire process has come to a halt because of interference from some junior civil servants, stationed at important ministries and offices, including the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

They have influenced the SSB to hop from one decision to the other without plausible explanations, resulting in erosion of the board's credibility and discontent in the administration.

Allegations are there that this section of bureaucracy wants the promotion process to remain suspended until one particular assistant private secretary (APS) to the prime minister becomes eligible to be a deputy secretary.

Earlier, the prime minister asked the SSB to create more vacancies at the deputy secretary level to diffuse rancour in the administration.

She also ordered that the minimum mark for promotion be upped to 85 avoid any legal tangle.

While 1,620 senior assistant secretaries, who have joined the civil service between 1983 and 1991, queue up for promotion to deputy secretary, there are only 379 vacant posts, the Secretariat sources said.

After a series of meetings, the SSB finalised promotion of 379 senior assistant secretaries from 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 batches.

The board also selected some others, who have joined the service much later, are currently serving in important offices such as the PMO and have strong connections with the ruling alliance.

The SSB had set 83 marks in the advancement examination as a criterion for promotions while preparing the list.

However, some junior officials demanded that the requirement be increased to 85 marks. The demand irked the 1983 batch officials, most of whom risked exclusion should higher marks be set for promotion.

According to the sources, there would be 660 vacancies in total by the yearend with nearly 300 deputy secretaries gone into retirement.

There are suggestions to fill the vacancies with 500 senior assistant secretaries to diffuse discontentment in the administration.

Of late, on the instruction of the PM, the board has taken initiative to resolve the promotion backlog. However, many doubt whether it would be successful, given a record of interference by a certain section of the bureaucracy.

Upon assumption of office, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led alliance government announced that merit and competence would

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ON WRONG SIDE OF THE LAW



Customs officials check foreign currency notes, equivalent to Tk 1.74 crore, they seized from a London-bound Biman flight at the ZIA Monday night. The notes -- 852,500 in Saudi riyal, 51,400 in Euro, 40,000 in UAE Dirham, 3,000 in Qatar riyal and 2,000 in franc-- were found in a toilet of the aircraft.

Abed protests indemnity ordinance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of BRAC, has expressed his deep concern at promulgation of the Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance, 2003 and appealed to the prime minister not to place a bill in parliament to convert this 'undesirable' ordinance into law.

"It is my hope that a democratically elected government will show respect to the views and sentiments of the people across the country against this ordinance," he said in a statement.

He said this ordinance will "not only tarnish our image as a country and a nation but will also convey a clear impression about our endorsement of use of undesirable methods and actions in enforcement of law".

This ordinance will arouse suspicion among the people that in certain cases, wrongdoing, torture and murder are being condoned, even encouraged, he said in the signed statement issued on Monday.

A law that conveys such an impression in the minds of the people can, under no circumstances, be conducive to cohesion and discipline in our society, he said.

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WASA bleeds in meter muddle

M AMINUL ISLAM

The Dhaka WASA suffers a systems loss of 46 per cent, as over 60,000 subscribers in the city do not have water meters, and thousands of installed meters are out of order.

The WASA is suffering the huge annual loss amounting to crores of taka, as it is unable to provide water meters to its customers.

Against an estimated current demand of 190 crore litres of water, the Dhaka WASA supplies about 152 crore litres of water every day in the capital. Pilferage accounts for 38 crore litres of water, and another 32 crore litres is wasted owing to

leakage at several points in the pipeline network, said the sources.

Out of a total of 200,000 subscribers, the WASA is billing 60,000 subscribers against their holding tax or an amount fixed by the WASA, as these subscribers do not have meters. Though these subscribers have to pay only 30.45 per cent of their annual holding tax for water, they can use an unlimited quantity of water. On the other hand, for the thousands of subscribers whose meters are out of order for years, the WASA has fixed an average bill -- against unlimited use of water.

The situation has encouraged widespread corruption in the whole

water supply system of the city. Subscribers using an unlimited quantity of water for a fixed price have developed a nexus with a section of unscrupulous WASA inspectors, and they are even selling water.

Officials said that the WASA has been giving new water connections since last year without installing the meter. WASA imports between 100 and 200 meters from time to time, but the number is inadequate.

WASA Officials said the revenue earning from water supply was well below the expected level.

A resident of the city's Mirpur

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Cold, high irrigation cost dampen boro hopes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Persisting cold and fog coupled with increased irrigation cost have dampened hopes for a boro bumper this year.

Though the biting cold wave waned significantly in the central districts including the capital over the past week, the mercury continues to be around 5 to 7 degrees Celsius in the rice-rich northern region. This is causing serious damage to boro seedbeds and young plants.

Official sources and our corre-

spondents confirmed that persisting cold resulted in growth of frail and yellowish plants in some areas under boro cultivation.

The Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) has launched campaigns advising growers to save their seedbeds from the crunch of prolonged cold wave.

Moreover, increased irrigation costs would cause the per unit rice production cost to accelerate, field reports suggest.

Reports from various northern districts suggest that for irrigating every bigha of boro land farmers are

now being charged between Tk. 1800 to Tk. 2000 as opposed to Tk. 1200 last season.

Following the recent rise in diesel price, irrigation services providers have been charging much higher prices. Moreover, the tariff hike in power has also posed as a problem. There are about one lakh electricity-fired irrigation pumps across the country.

The drawbacks came when farmers were hoping to recoup the loss they incurred in bad aman harvest.

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 22		5-37 pm
Jan 23	6-42 am	

Prayer Timings		
Jan 22		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-43	5-48
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Criminal cases Ex-DMCSU VP granted ad-interim bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has granted ad-interim bail to Dr Javed Ahmed, vice president of now-dissolved Dhaka Medical College Students Union (DMCSU) in connection with two criminal cases.

A Bench comprising Justice Khademul Islam Choudhury and Justice N E M Shamsuddin Choudhury granted the bail on Monday and asked the government to reply why Javed would not be given a permanent bail.

The two cases were lodged against him for allegedly ransacking

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BCP cadre shot dead in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A Biplobi Communist Party (BCP) cadre was shot dead allegedly by his rivals in the party at village Chandmari under sadar upazila of the district yesterday.

The victim was identified as Kalimuddin, 25, son of Afiuddin of village Alampur in the same upazila.

Police said eight BCP cadres abducted Kalimuddin at gunpoint from his house in the early hours of yesterday. They took Kalim to Chapaigachi beel (waterbody) and shot him point blank. Kalim died on the spot.

Police recovered the body at around 12:30 pm and sent it to Kushtia sadar hospital morgue for autopsy.

No case was filed in connection with the murder till writing of this report at 6:25 pm.

Arsenic-free water still piped dream

NAIMUL HAQ

Even more than six years after the declaration of groundwater arsenic contamination a national emergency, the government could not provide safe drinking water to affected areas.

According to an estimate, about eight crore people in 61 districts out of 64 are now exposed to arsenic contamination.

Some of the districts have arsenic more than the permissible level. In many districts, both hand-pump tubewells and production wells or deep tubewells were contaminated.

Laboratory-tested water samples showed that more than 50 per cent of the tubewells -- both private and government-owned -- were found contaminated.

Four million tubewells have been

installed in the country since the late 1970s.

The government and the World Bank (WB) have so far spent Tk 43.91 crore, a portion on mitigation on the priority basis in some most affected villages. Still, a large number of people have no access to safe drinking water.

Of the 714 mitigation schemes, as identified by the government, less than 100 have been completed.

Until now, the project could not initiate action programmes on 11 municipalities where arsenic was found in production wells above the permissible level of 50 parts per billion.

However, alternative measures have been taken in Gopalganj, Faridpur and Chuadanga municipalities.

Despite repeated requests, the government has not yet taken any

step to supply safe drinking water to Chapainawabganj, one of the most affected municipalities, where four out of 16 production wells have been shut down due to high levels of arsenic. The rest also affected beyond the permissible level keep supplying water.

In February 1999, the WB and the government implemented a 44.4 million dollars project -- Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply (BAMWSP) -- exclusively for safe drinking water.

But less than 23 per cent of the funds could not be utilised due to bureaucratic tangles, mismanagement and corruption. A large portion of the money was spent on consultants, goods, training, salaries etc.

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Cultural activists slam police harassment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable discussion yesterday condemned harassment of cultural activists by the law enforcers.

The roundtable on "Role and position of artists in society today" was organised in the city by the daily 'Prothom Alo' and 'Abhinoy Shilpi Sangha' - an organisation formed to protect the interests of cultural activists.

Some stray incidents should not lead the government or the law enforcers to behave rudely with people from the cultural field, said the speakers.

Murder of model Tinni initiated the process of harassing the artists, they added. Performers -- apparently having no connection with the murder -- are being interrogated and harassed in an unfriendly manner. They pointed out the case of Shuvro Dev who is under detention and not getting bail. "A common man would have obtained bail under similar circumstances," a speaker said.

"It has been projected in such a way as if all the people in the cultural arena are criminals," said Mamunur Rashid. Toukir Ahmed said the incident affected the profession badly. The speakers also complained about the strict rules and regulations for the artists going abroad. "We should have the right to travel like common people," said Shakila Zafar.

The speakers expressed their frustration for not getting the honour they deserve. "We always worked for society out of our sense of responsibility, but now we feel our services are not appreciated," said an artist.

The speakers urged the media not to exaggerate the issues concerning cultural artists. "The hyperbolic reports carried by the press blur our image and affect personal life," they added. "The media should focus on our screen

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