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Unruly behaviour with governor

BB axes 10 unionists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The central bank yesterday axed 10 employees, including presidents and general secretaries of Bangladesh Bank Officers' Welfare Association (BBOWA) and Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA), in its first-ever stringent action against unruly behaviour with the bank governor.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) listed for termination some other employees, who are accused of breaching bank rules by confining Governor Fakhrudin Ahmed to his room during a demonstration for a charter of demands Tuesday.

Tuesday's siege was the latest in a series of untoward incidents,

including smashing the car of a BB board director and kicking the door of the governor, in the last two years.

The employees who lost job were paid a one-month salary under section 13/2 of the Bangladesh Bank Staff Regulation that says if any staffers act against regulations, the governor can instantly terminate their appointments on pay of a one-month salary.

The terminated top four employees who have ruling alliance backing are BBOWA President and officer in the foreign exchange department Abdul Majid Sarkar, BBOWA General Secretary and officer of BB Mujibul office Alamgir Hossain, CBA President and mechanic

Mohammad Trail Hossain and General Secretary Joyal Abedin.

The others are caretakers Harunur Rashid, Mohammad Solaiman, Jalaluddin Chowdhury, Abul Kalam, Jahangir Hossain Khan and driver Harunur Rashid Chowdhury.

Bankers and government high officials viewed the action as a corrective step.

BB Executive Director Nazmul Hasan told BBC Radio last night that the bank took the step to ward off anarchy.

"They (union leaders) have violated discipline and misbehaved with the governor. The Bangladesh Bank would like to signal that no anarchy would be accepted in

future," he said.

But Joyal, speaking to BBC, described the decision as illegal and undemocratic, adding: "We did not create any anarchy. Rather, we tried to negotiate with the authorities democratically."

"We will take our next step in consultation with our party," BBC quoted the CBA general secretary as saying.

A CBA scheduled rally at the bank gate fizzled out yesterday, as union leaders stayed off the bank premises and were milling around at the CBA office of Sonali Bank Headquarters.

Security was tightened around the BB with deployment of addi

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JUDGE'S 'BAIL FIXING' SJC may sit tomorrow to decide probe terms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) is likely to sit tomorrow to decide its terms of reference to probe the allegation of misconduct against an additional judge of the High Court.

The law ministry yesterday sent the presidential directive to the chief justice to inquire the matter and report the finds and recommendation to the president.

However, the constitution does not stipulate any time limit for such

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WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM REPORT

Bangladesh slips in competitiveness

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is losing out in global competitiveness, having slipped to 79 in 2003 from 77 the previous year in the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) of the World Economic Forum (WEF) that assessed 80 countries.

On the Business Competitiveness Index (BCI), the country has also performed poor, going down from 74th position in 2002 to 75th position in 2003.

The survey identified corruption as the most inhibiting factor of

doing business in Bangladesh. Inefficient bureaucracy, inadequate infrastructure, poor law and order, policy instability and poor access to financing also affect the country's business environment.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), an independent think-tank, yesterday released the index following a survey on 81 big companies during March-May 2003. The survey was part of the CPD's contribution to the WEF's Global Competitiveness Report.

Ninety-six percent of the respon-

dents in the survey were 'most emphatic about absence of public trust in the honesty of the politicians'.

"It seems over the years, trust in the honesty of politicians is experiencing secular decline (91.1 percent in 2001 and 95.6 percent in 2002)," the survey report, launched together with the WEF's report released in Washington, said.

More than two-thirds of the companies (68 percent) stated that judiciary is not independent of

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JS body blames price surge on extortion

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The parliamentary standing committee on the food ministry yesterday blamed the price spiral of essentials on the government's failure to stop extortion on the highways and other places.

The committee comprising members of both the ruling alliance and opposition Jatiya Party (Ershad) also blasted Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman for failing to check prices of essentials and said he cannot shrug off his responsibility.

Meeting sources said Noman

defended himself saying it was not possible to bring market prices down unless the government succeeded in stopping extortion and reducing transportation cost.

The minister noted rice price varies in different markets. Although there is sufficient stock of rice, some unscrupulous businessmen are selling it at higher prices, he said.

Earlier on Wednesday, the parliamentary standing committee on the commerce ministry disagreed with the ministry on the prices of essentials. The committee also decided to hold a special meeting on November

5 on the issue.

Ruling BNP lawmaker Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury initiated the discussion on the price hike although it was not on the agenda of yesterday's meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. The former state minister for relief and disaster management said the government should have controlled market price on time.

"Now people criticise us more because remuneration of ministers and lawmakers has increased but their income has not," he remarked.

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Khosru tags spiral to int'l price hike

STAR REPORT

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury says price hike of some essential items on the international market had its knock-on impact on the local market leading to the price spiral.

"In two weeks, onion price increased from \$150 million to \$200 million in India, one of the major exporting countries," Khosru told The Daily Star yesterday. "Import price of onion from China is even higher because of shipment charge."

"When prices on the international market go up, the commerce ministry has nothing to do," he added. "In fact, rain damaged onion production in both India and China, making supply scarce."

Khosru reasoned that when prices are already at a higher level, this even gets ballooned when tariff and other charges are added.

The minister said the other essential item that witnessed wild spiral -- soybean oil -- also became dearer on the international market.

"From around \$200 to \$355 a



Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury

tonne, soybean price shot up to \$650 today," he said. "Even in India, the current soybean price is 62-68 rupees a litre." Only on September 10, the price was \$516 a tonne.

"While soybean price increased 80-85 percent on the international market, the increase was only about 22 percent on the local market," Khosru said. "Isn't it a success of the commerce ministry?"

On vegetable price, he said it is very much linked to the demand-supply.

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Food prices peak four times: ADB

STAR REPORT

Food price index curved up four times in July 2003 compared to the same month last year, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said yesterday.

"The food price, which has a weight of 58.8 percent in the overall index, increased to 5.9 percent in July 2003 from 1.5 percent in July 2002. Inflation is likely to pick up further in the coming months," Purnima Rajapakse, head of economics unit of the ADB, told a press briefing in Dhaka yesterday.

As in the recent past, food prices continue to be the driving force behind rise in inflation, he added.

"The annual average rate of inflation, on the basis of a new base year (FY96=100), increased steadily to 4.5

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Notice

The Daily Star continues to publish the list of plot allottees in Rajuk's Purbachal project. Find today's list on pages 21, 22, 23 and 24.

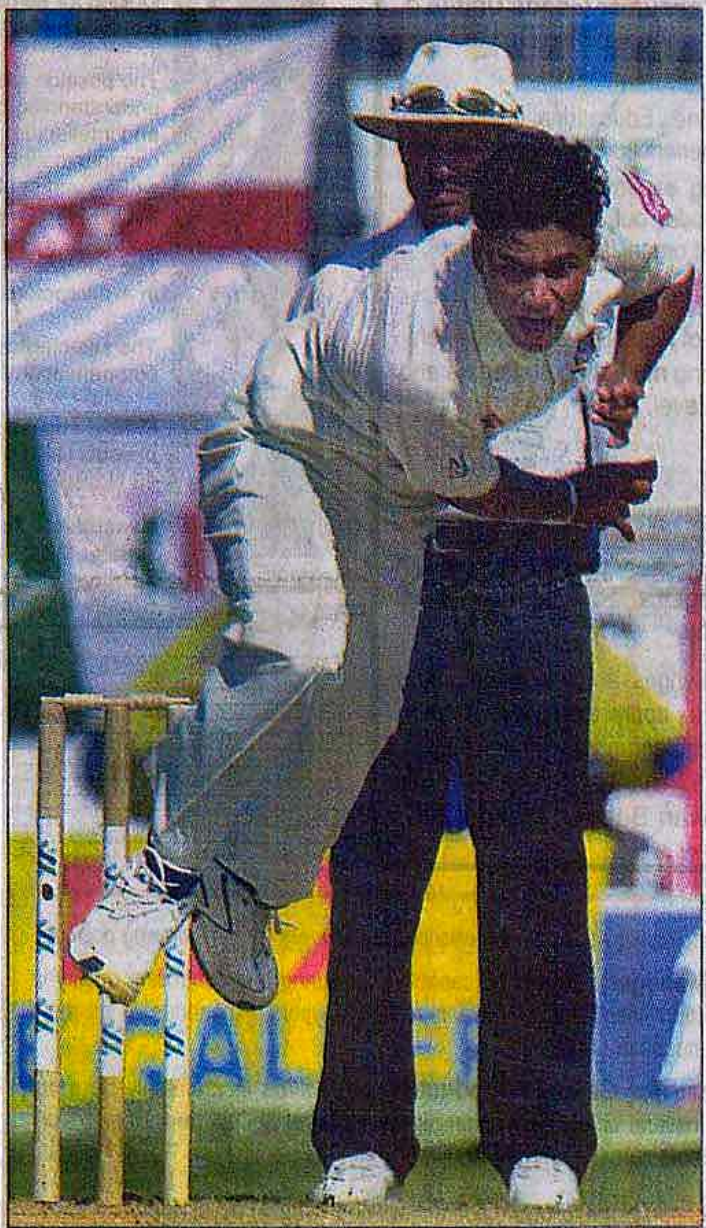


PHOTO: AFP

AIRBORNE! 'Narail Express' Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza sends down a thunderbolt on the second day of the Chittagong Test yesterday. Mashrafe returned career-best figures of 4-60.

Tigers in trouble

RABEED IMAM from Chittagong

Bangladesh were in deep trouble at 93 for four in their first innings when stumps were drawn on day two of the second Test against England at Chittagong yesterday.

The hosts trail the tourists by 233 runs.

After a commendable bowling effort to dismiss the tourists for 326 after lunch, the Tigers found themselves at the receiving end thanks to some inexplicably loose batting when caution and common sense could have helped them fare better.

First to go was Javed Omar who tried to flick seamer Richard Johnson against the swing and holed out to England skipper Michael Vaughan at cover to leave Bangladesh on six for one.

Habibul Bashar, at his favourite ground, was stroking the ball in his usual fluent manner. But having reached 18 off 26 balls, Bangladesh's highest run-getter in Tests drove

rather casually a delivery that flew off his bat to third slip where Mark Butcher took a smart catch.

Opener Hannan Sarkar was the next in line. He made a confident 28 but then shuffled too far across, leaving his leg stump exposed and Rikki Clarke trapped him lbw. But TV replays suggested that Hannan's bat might have had a touch on it. The ruling came from Ashoka de Silva.

Alok Kapali left Bangladesh in all sorts of bother when his uncertain backfoot defensive technique resulted in another catch to Butcher at third slip. The all-rounder got a first ball duck and Bangladesh were 63 for four.

But just as the tourists were looking to skittle the Tigers out, Rajin Saleh and Mushfiqur Rahman showed the way to go about under trying conditions. Rajin (24 not out) in particular took a number of blows on his body but hung in to steer Bangladesh to the close. Mushfiq (16

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Govt believes in free flow of information, says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has reaffirmed that the government believes in free flow of information and people's right to know.

"Even in the changed world scenario, we have taken steps to relax the Official Secrets Act," she said, adding that the media were now working in a complete independent environment.

The prime minister was addressing a function marking the handing over of audiovisual vans and multimedia projectors to the Mass Communications Department at the International Conference Centre yesterday.

She handed over to district information officers the keys and allotment letters of 24 vans and 64 multimedia projectors received under 'Advocacy on Reproductive Health and Gender Issues Through Department of Mass Communications' programme of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).

Documentaries, spots and films will be projected with the projector-mounted vans in remote areas of the country to make people aware of reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and the negative aspects of early marriage.

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Pneumonia takes fatal turn in city

29 children die at two hospitals in 9 days, patients overcrowd treatment facilities

SHAMIM ASHRAF and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Twenty-three children died of pneumonia at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in the last six days as the scourge broke out across Bangladesh in the first week of this month, hospital sources said.

At least six others died at Mitford Hospital in only three days up to October 26, as other medical facilities including Dhaka Mahanagar Shishu Hospital and Dhaka Shishu Hospital struggled to cope with a rising tide of patients, who captured 70 percent of their accommodation for children.

"As the patients are pouring in from across the country at the eleventh hour after the disease turning into Bronchitis, we can do very little," Dr Tahmina Begum, senior consultant at the DMCH paediatrics department, said yesterday.

Caused by infection of pneumococcus and himophilus

influenza bacteria and RSG virus, the disease, characterised by high fever, cough, respiratory problems and even heart attack, spreads fast among children, she said.

At the DMCH, 11 patients have died in the special care unit (SCU) since October 25. On October 28, 22 patients were huddled in the 10-bed unit earmarked for emergency patients from Ward Nos. 11 and 12.

In Ward No. 11, five patients died between October 25 and 29 and the 20-bed room was cramming with 40 patients on October 26.

In Ward No. 12, seven children died of pneumonia -- one each on October 25, 26, 27 and two each on October 28 and 29. The 23-bed ward was teeming with 43 patients on October 26.

"Patients began to arrive in gushes early this month," a DMCH ticket seller at the outpatient department (OPD).

Although a day averaged 150 children, 223 patients came on October 22, 297 on October 23, 325

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