

# DOWN TO EARTH

## Baisakhi Melas in City

By A S M Nurunnabi

Melas or fairs form an important element of Bengali culture. They have, however, lost much of their pristine charm and colour, because the villages which used to be the cradle of such assemblies, have undergone many changes. The villages have changed because the entire gamut of their economic activities have changed. Such changes have had their impact on the Bengali character.

There are some characteristic elements of a *mela*: Visitors find pleasure in free movement within its precincts, in getting to meet many of their acquaintances and in making small purchases of sundry items for family use. Another important element is the propensity of the visitors in letting themselves go in fulfilling their gastronomical desires by consumption of varieties of food, such as many kinds of *pithas* and sweets. These foods are not normally available in our day-to-day existence. Besides these, an atmosphere of easy relations between different classes of people in a community prevails in such places.

Nowadays such basic purposes seem to have been lost, the *melas* have now become bizarre centres of recreation and entertainment of questionable nature. We seem to have forgotten that a *mela* is not a thing dissociated from our social ethos, but a reflection of an integrated approach to life.

**Baisakhi mela** in particular is part of our rich cultural heritage. It is estimated that all over the country more than two hundred *Baisakhi melas* are held every year. The main features of such *melas* are flamboyant displays of handicrafts and products of cottage and handloom industries, varieties of household items ranging from kitchen tools and earthen wares, wooden furniture to low-priced children's toys and earthen playthings.

The village *melas* have made an impact in urban areas also. On the occasion of the new Bengali year, *melas* are held in Dhaka as well as in other urban areas. In Dhaka, such *Baisakhi melas* have several venues such as:

(i) **Mirpur mela**: This *mela* is inaugurated on the first of Baisakh. The visitors, buyers and sellers at this *mela* mainly come from the low-income groups of Mirpur and its adjacent areas.

(ii) **Golartek mela**: The *mela* is held for one day only on the first of Baisakh. The main items of trade at this *mela* are, as usual, handicrafts and cottage industry products and also various food items and sweets which attract people of low financial strata in local areas. With the spread of urbanisation, the *mela* has been gradually losing much of its past lustre.

(iii) **Badda mela**: The *mela* is held in the precincts of the Badda bazar. The process of urbanisation also has limited the area of the *mela*. Earthen wares, items of daily family necessities made from bamboo and cane, small items of wooden furniture, merry-go-rounds, circus, cinema shows, glan bangles coloured spectacles for children, puffed rice, various edible items fried in oil form the main ingredients of the *mela*. No definite information is available about the time of origin of this *mela*. But some old timers of the locality are of the opinion that the *mela* had originated more than fifty years ago.

(iv) **Baishakhi mela** at Bangla Academy: The Bangla Academy authorities arrange this *mela* which lasts for seven days from the first Baisakh. As elsewhere, products of cottage industries and handicraft items, earthen wares of various shapes and designs painted with colour take a predominant place among the displayed items for sale. Nowadays, the city traders also participate in this

## Fighting in Lebanon continues

### Israel, Hezbollah ignore UN call for truce

TYRE, Lebanon, Apr 19: Israel and Hezbollah today ignored a UN call for an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon as Israeli air strikes and shelling killed four fighters and the Shi'ite guerrillas pummeled galled with rockets.

Both sides said it was up to the other to initiate any ceasefire, after world horror at Thursday's bloodbath at a UN base in Cana, southern Lebanon, when Israeli shelling killed at least 97 refugees.

In the latest attacks, three Iranian-backed Hezbollah fighters were killed and two others seriously wounded during fighting.

Garments workers at a rally yesterday demanded bonus for Eid-ul-Azha and salaries, including all arrears dues and overtime, by April 25, reports UNB.

Otherwise, they threatened agitation, including *gherao* of the garment factory owners, to realise their demands. The management would have to bear all the consequences, they said.

Organised by the Jatiya Garments Sramik Federation, the rally was addressed by Alamgir Sikder, Sabana Rahman, Lovely Biswas, Safia Parveen, Mojibur Rahman Pintu, Wahiduzzaman and Kamal Hossain.

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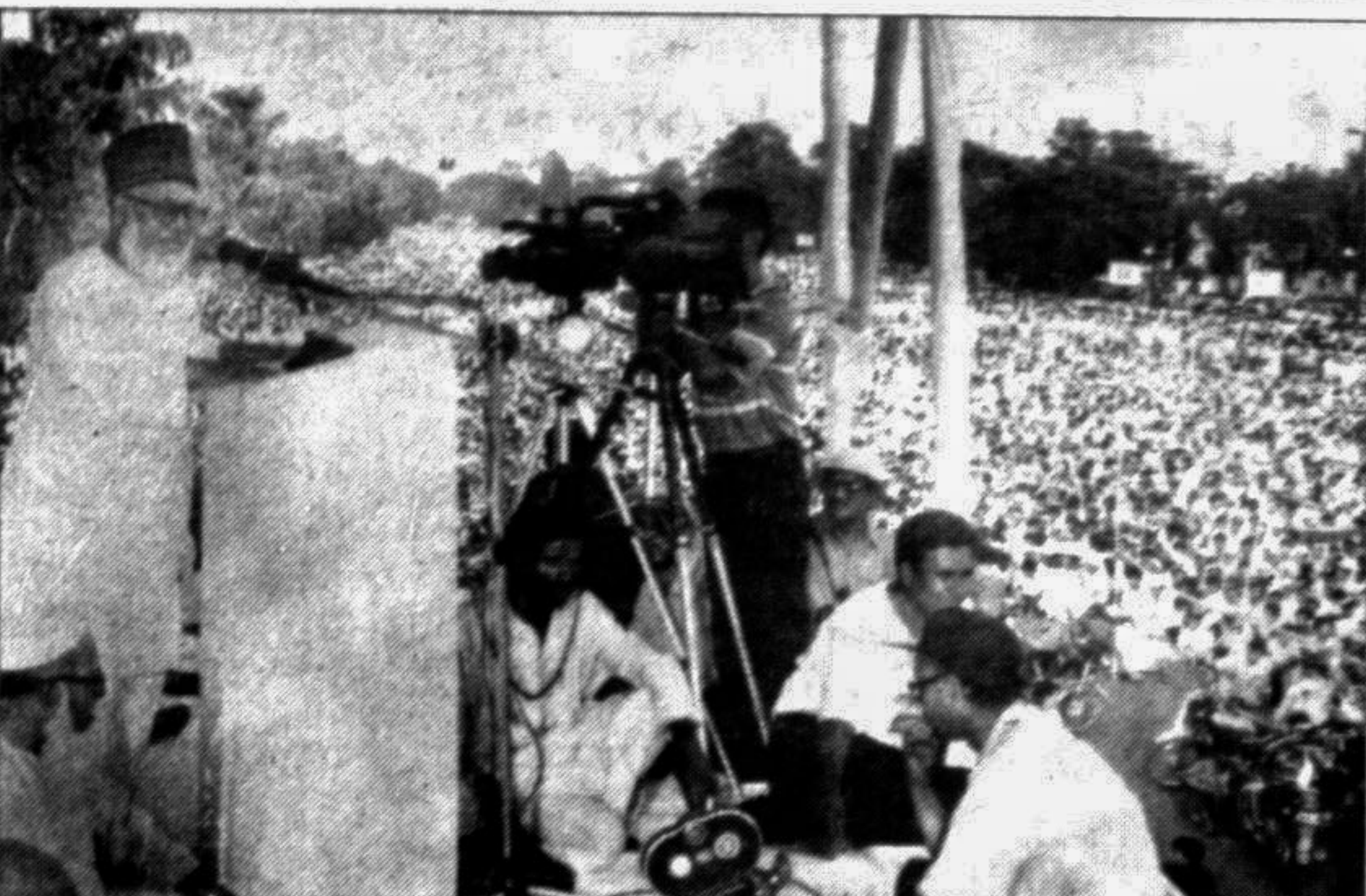
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Jamaat Secretary General Matur Rahman Nizami addressing a public meeting at the Manik Mia Avenue in the city yesterday.

## AL to ensure fair prices of agri products: Hasina

President of the Bangladesh Awami League Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated her party's commitment to provide required subsidy and inputs to the agriculture sector with a view to rejuvenating the main lifeline of the national economy, reports BSS.

"We will also provide agricultural loans on easy terms under specific policy guidelines to the farmers who are the main players in the national economy," she said while inaugurating a month-long member collection drive of the Bangladesh Krishak League at the party's Dhanmondi office.

The programme is being held marking the founding anniversary of the Bangladesh Krishak League which was established by country's founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman 24 years ago for the development of agriculture sector and farmers of the country.

The inaugural function was presided over by Krishak League President Alhaj Rashed Mosharrar. Its General Secretary Mizanur Rahman Manu gave a brief resume about the establishment of this wing of the Awami League.

The Awami League chief said her party, if voted to power, would stabilise the prices of essentials and ensure fair prices of agricultural products for the greater benefit of the farmers.

"We will introduce a welfare oriented management system for marketing agricultural products so that farmers are not deprived of fair prices," she added.

She said, farmers are contributing a larger part to the national economy and the Awami League will do its best for providing all possible support to this section of the people in the greater interest of the nation.

Sheikh Hasina said, the main objective of the Bangladesh Awami League is to ensure development of farmers in all respects including education, health, providing land

## One more AK rifle found in Purulia

PURULIA, Apr 19: One more AK 56 rifle was recovered by the police from Jhalda-Joypur area in Purulia district last night, according to P. Niranjayn, superintendent of police, said here today, reports PTI.

With this, a total of four AK 56 rifles had been recovered from the district during the past two months.

## DU senators

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sent a notice to the VC as per rules to convene a meeting of the Senate to discuss these irregularities. But the VC did not respond to that although he was bound to convene Senate meeting after being notified by at least 30 members, they said.

The senators urged the caretaker government to ensure recovery of arms from the campus for maintaining a healthy academic atmosphere.

The press conference was attended by, among others, Dr ATM Zahurul Haque, Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique, Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, Dr Anwar Hossain, prof Harun-ur-Rashid, prof Shahadat Ali and prof M Akbaruzzaman.

Advocate Sayed Ahmed, registered graduates' representative to the DU senate, read out the written statement at the press conference.

## Text book crisis

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NCTB in this regard.

"Before giving them the positives to print and market about two crore books, it was clearly explained to the TBPSA that the work should be completed within five days, and they should also engage more printing presses to meet the deadline," he said.

The association, ignoring the urgency, gave the job to only 30 presses — automatically delaying the process, one source alleged.

A top official of the Ministry of Education said that in January, the country's schools were given instructions "to arrange sports and other extra-curricular activities for the students until the books were available."

In addition to scarcity of books for classes six and nine, books for classes seven and eight also vanished from the markets only to be available for twice the price, officials and others concerned said, alleging large scale hoarding.

A publisher at Bangla Bazar, who has been in business since 1965, said that the failure to meet the demand for text books could be attributed to the political unrest in the country as well as an unprecedented rush in the printing sector.

After court ruling in favour of printing note books late last year, which had been banned in the eighties, thousands of publishers took to printing of notebooks, said Mohammad Mozammel, who is also a member of the TBPSA. At the same time, text books had to be printed, he added.

This created an enormous jam in the printing sector and unusual pressure on its limited resources," Mozammel said.

## The Midnight Fire

### Heavy fighting in Mogadishu: 19 killed

MOGADISHU, Apr 19: At least 19 people were killed and another 47 wounded in heavy fighting Friday between militiamen of rival faction leaders in southern Mogadishu, witnesses and hospital staff said, reports AP.

## US envoy in India accused of favouring Cong

NEW DELHI, Apr 19: A senior leader of India's largest opposition party accused the US ambassador Friday of trying to influence voters in this month's general election by favouring the governing Congress Party, reports AP.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's former president, Murli Manohar Joshi, said that Frank Wisner's statements defending the free-market reforms that Rao introduced five years ago amounted to an endorsement of Congress Party policies and candidates.

"By asserting that economic reforms are to continue in India, the American diplomat is trying to undercut those parties who are either against the reforms or want the reforms to be altered," Joshi told the Press Trust of India news agency in an interview.

Indians begin voting for a new Parliament on April 27 and the economic reforms are being used by the Congress party as an important example of good governance.

The BJP elections manifesto suggest the reforms would be continued if it came to power. But Joshi and other party hardliners favour controlling any foreign investment that exposes Indian businesses to harsh competition or that dilutes India's Hindu culture with too many westernized products.

## Common strategy for CHT peace stressed

RANGAMATI, Apr 19: A seminar titled "The prospect of peace in Chittagong Hill Tracts is bright," was held at the Shipkalia auditorium here yesterday evening, reports BSS.

Organised by Parbatya Chattrasangsad, the seminar was presided over by sangsad president Rajibur Rahman.

Visiting professor of the George Town University, Washington, Dr K M Haq Kaiser, CHT National Coordination and Peace Council president Saiful Islam Dildar, tribal leaders Suniti Bikash Chakma, Arun Bikash Tripura, CHT NCPC leaders Ruhul Amin, advocate Muktar Ahmed, Deepal Dewan were among others, who participated in the seminar.

The speakers underscored the importance of finding out a common strategy for permanent peace in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

They urged the government committee of Chittagong Hill Tracts affairs and PCJSS, an apex body of tribal insurgents to make the on-going dialogue more meaningful in order to solve the Chittagong Hill Tracts problems.

They also called for expediting repatriation process of the tribal refugees to their homeland.

## BNP pledges

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February 15 polls." However, some "popular issues" will be incorporated, he added.

The manifesto is also expected to promise compensation to the industries and their workers affected during the recent non-cooperation movement by three political parties (Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami).

BSS adds: BNP joint secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said yesterday that the election manifesto of the party will be announced after the declaration of the election schedule.

He was briefing newsmen at the party's central office at Naya Paltan.

Bhuiyan told a questioner, that it was untrue that the BNP was now demanding the election must take place within May this year. He said that it was the demand of the other parties to hold election to the seventh Jatiya Sangsad by May.

"BNP had accepted the challenge to join the election by May," he said adding "We do not understand where is the difficulty to participate in the election within May."

Bhuiyan reiterated the party's stand in recovering illegal arms by maintaining absolute neutrality by the caretaker government.

"We want illegal arms recovery irrespective of party affiliations," he said, adding, "It will not be acceptable if only the BNP leaders and workers were harassed in the name of arms recovery."

Replying to a question, the BNP joint secretary general said his party was discussing how to strengthen further the local government institutions ensuring its representative character.

## ID card project

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"The electoral database must be maintained at all times since the electoral roll is an ongoing process. There will be omissions, inclusions, corrections every now and so the database is a must," the official pointed out.

Implementation of the Tk 180 crore ID card Project held behind schedule due to various reasons. As a result, the EC had to seek amendments to the relevant law passed by parliament earlier, under which every eligible voter had to be provided with an ID card.

The ordinance which enabled the EC to conduct the February 15 elections without the issuance of ID card to the voters, however, became inoperative as the short-lived sixth Parliament failed to pass it as an Act. EC is now seeking fresh promulgation of the ordinance.

## Uttara Bank Limited Branch Shifting

Uttara Bank Limited  
Fakirapool Branch has been shifted to the following address and starts functioning from today (20-4-96):

**New Address**

Uttara Bank Ltd.  
Fakirapool Branch,  
3, Motijheel Inner Circular Road (1st floor),  
Fakirapool, Dhaka.

**Old Address**

Uttara Bank Ltd.  
Fakirapool Branch, 28/3, Fakirapool, Dhaka.

Our valued clients and well-wishers are requested to contact and transact at the new premises

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## Deaths of servicemen in Chechnya

### Yeltsin to punish guilty Russian commanders

MOSCOW, April 19: President Boris Yeltsin said today he was shocked by the loss of scores of his servicemen in a Chechen rebel ambush and pledged to punish those Moscow commanders who were guilty, reports Reuters.

"The military leadership is to blame and will be held responsible for what has happened," Itar-Tass news agency quoted Yeltsin as saying. Yeltsin was reacting for the first time to reports that over 70 Russian servicemen had been killed on Tuesday in a rebel ambush.

Yeltsin, for the whole of Russia, for the president," Yeltsin said. "It is now clear who wants war and who wants peace."

Yeltsin said he would not abandon his attempts to find a peaceful solution to the Chechen conflict.

"Despite this tragedy, I want the peace plan to be im-

## Youngman's body recovered

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Body of an unidentified boy, aged about 15, was found hanging from a Bokul tree at Ramna Park in the early hours of Friday, according to police sources. Ramna police recovered the body around 2 am yesterday and sent it to the DMCH for autopsy. A UD case has been filed with the thana.

Nazmul Islam, 25, was electrocuted when he stepped on a live wire while walking on a road at Begun Bari, Tejgaon.

## 49 arms recovered, 28 arrested

Police recovered 49 firearms from across the country during the last 24 hours, an official handout said here yesterday evening, reports BSS.

The recovered arms included one rifle, one sowed off rifle, four revolvers, one pistol, three single barrel guns, three cut guns and 29 pipeguns.

During the period 28 persons were arrested on charges of keeping illegal arms.

Since April 1, police have so far recovered 527 different type of firearms and arrested 430 persons for possessing the arms, the handout said.

## BTTB

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The press release noted that although it has been alleged by some quarters that the Chairman of the BTTB has been instrumental in awarding lucrative contracts to certain parties during the last three years, the truth is that he has been in this post for one year only and during this period no such contracts have been awarded at all.

The largest on-going project is the 1,50,000-line digital telephone project valued at Tk 1200 crore. This project was evaluated and the contract was awarded prior to the incumbent Chairman's tenure.

"Nevertheless, since this project has to be implemented in view of pending demand, the present Chairman is making his best efforts to expedite its implementation and already 60 per cent of the work has been completed."

The press release also noted that attempts are being made by some vested quarters to link extension of the present Chairman's tenure to the baseless allegation of his being affiliated to a particular political party, and explained that "extension of tenure of service of efficient technical officers in the greater national interest of the country and the people is an established practice."

"The fact that different employees unions of T&T Board (affiliated with different political parties) and the BCS Telecom Association have publicly felicitated the Chairman for impartial and efficient management of the BTTB and have hailed extension of his services merely serves to highlight this," the release further added.