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Immigration to top UK minister's trip agenda

By M Anwarul Haque

The process of British immigration operations conducted in Bangladesh are expected to receive special attention during the forthcoming visit of Keith Vaz MP and United Kingdom's minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

Keith Vaz arrives in Dhaka on Sunday on a two-day official visit to Bangladesh.

Diplomatic sources said the main purpose of Keith Vaz's visit here will be to see personally the British immigration services conducted in Bangladesh and look into ways and means to improve the services for people seeking visas or migration to Britain.

Bangladesh has a sizeable number of immigrants in UK and every year thousands also apply for immigrant status or 'visit' visas. Vaz's visit is also a follow-up of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's trip to UK last year during the Bangladesh festival.

A major portion of Vaz's itinerary would comprise his visit to Sylhet and acquainting himself with the problems of visa-seekers.

Vaz will also look into the prospects of opening of a British Visa office in Sylhet, which place has the distinction of sending the largest number of immigrants from a single district in Bangladesh.

The present UK government is credited with making improvements in its immigration procedures worldwide and its plans to simplify the processes further to ease the problem of entrants and immigrants to Britain. An 'appeals process', that was discontinued, is also expected to be re-introduced.

The UK government has already taken steps to improve the process of visa applications at Bangladesh Overseas Centre at Zindabazar in Sylhet.

Vaz will be given a civic reception, organised by the Sylhet Municipality at its office premises.

He will visit Newham Bengali Community Trust Office at Bari mansion in East Subid-bazar, Sylhet.

The British minister during his stay will address two news conferences, the first one in Sylhet at and the other prior to his departure at the residence of the British High Commissioner to Dhaka.

Vaz would be received at the airport by the State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Abul Hasan Chowdhury.

During his stay in Bangladesh, he will call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, senior ministers and political leaders. He will have discussions on bilateral matters with Bangladesh leaders during his stay in the country.

Keith Vaz, a member of parliament for Leicester east since 1987, will be in Bangladesh as part of his sub-continental tour which will also take him to several Indian cities, including Delhi. Vaz is responsible for entry clearance matters worldwide and was appointed Minister for Europe at the FCO.

Vaz had earlier paid a trip to Bangladesh as an opposition MP.



Keith Vaz ready improved visa operations in Bangladesh by simplifying procedures for the applicants. The British State Minister's second day of stay in Bangladesh would be highlighted by programmes and events in Sylhet. He will be handing over British passports to some successful visa applicants at Bangladesh Overseas Centre at Zindabazar in Sylhet.

Ekushey Book Fair begins February 6

By DU Correspondent

The Ekushey Book Fair begins on the Bangla Academy premises on February 6.

The organisers, Bangla Academy, has come up with special programmes to hold the fair in a grand way after the UNICEF declaration of Ekushey February as the International Mother Language Day.

There will be a separate small book fair for children and women.

"We have decided to focus on the children and women as they have been given much priority across the world," said director general of Bangla Academy Dr Syed Anwar Hossain.

The fair usually begins on February 1, but the DG said they are taking time for the special programmes and decoration.

The whole Academy (premises) will also be decorated on the occasion of International Mother Language Day," he added.

"Special focus will also be given on the traditional discussion of the fair to highlight the Bengali culture and its achievement in the last millennium."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the book fair as chief guest. Prof. Anisuzzaman will chair the inaugural function while state minister for youth, sports and culture affairs Obaidul Quader attend the programme as special guest. Eminent educationists will also be invited.

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Prelude to paradise
A bird's eye view of Maheshkhali island where nature nurtures man with her beauty and bounty.
Star photo: A K M Mohsin

BPC bypasses bidding

Star Report

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation is purchasing some three lakh tonnes of diesel from Abu Dhabi without floating any tender, breaking away from tradition, sources said.

The BPC, which imports around three million tonnes of petroleum products annually, usually purchases diesel and other petroleum products from Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia through a competitive bidding. However, this time it has taken steps to purchase three lakh tonnes of diesel exclusively from Abu Dhabi.

The government always purchases crude oil from Adnoc of Abu Dhabi and Aramco of Saudi Arabia on separate government-to-government agreements. But it never purchases diesel, which is consumed heavily in the country, through a competitive bidding, the sources pointed out.

Adnoc which is one of the oldest suppliers of petroleum products to Bangladesh had earlier struck a deal with BPC for supplying six lakh tonnes of crude oil. But surprisingly, it imposed a condition in the deal that BPC must also purchase three lakh tonnes of diesel, one source said.

Adnoc had never before imposed such a condition and we cannot say why it imposed such a condition all of a sudden," he added, hinting that there might be some "underhand dealings" between BPC high-ups and Adnoc.

However, the move has triggered criticism among officials of BPC itself. An official admitted that BPC was facing some problem in purchasing diesel without any tender. "But we'll find a solution to this problem very soon," he added.

Some 16 lakh tonnes of diesel, eight lakh tonnes of kerosene, two lakh tonnes of petrol and one lakh tonnes of octane are consumed annually in the country. BPC imports crude oil, diesel and refined petrol on a half-yearly basis and processes the petroleum products at the Eastern Refinery for local consumption.

Other than the half-yearly import, BPC also takes special measures to import petroleum products in smaller quantities to meet excessive seasonal demands.

Though BPC makes huge profit from petroleum product import, it has been incurring loss for the last three years. It claims that it is incurring loss due to price hike of crude oil in the international market and it advocates price hike of diesel and kerosene. Other sources however say that due to inefficiency and corruption in BPC, it is incurring losses.

Proposed public safety act: salient features

- * A one-member special tribunal will be set up
- * It will deal with the following acts of crime and award punishment to the convicts for
 - : hijacking — 2-10 years of RI
 - : extortion — 3-14 years of RI
 - : Obstruction to tender (procurement and contract award) process — 3-14 years of RI
 - : damage to cars and properties — 2-10 years of RI
 - : obstruction to free movement of vehicles — 3-14 years of RI
 - : extortion ransom by kidnapping — 3-14 years of RI
 - : terrorising through explosion and arson — 2-10 years of RI
 - : filing case on false charge — maximum 7 years
 - : incitement of criminal activities — as same as the criminal's
 - : Financial penalty with all terms of imprisonment
 - * Investigation to complete in 30 days
 - * Tribunal to accept audio-video records and still photographs as evidence
 - * Provision for trial in absentia
 - * Trial to complete in 90 days and a 30-day extension upon failure, 180-day trial in case of granting bail
 - * All offences are non-bailable but bail in case trial is not completed in first 90 days
 - * Convicts and aggrieved persons can appeal to the Appellate Division
 - * Charges reported by a police sub-inspector or persons authorised by the government will only be cognizable to the tribunal

Non-govt pry teachers on hunger strike

By Staff Correspondent

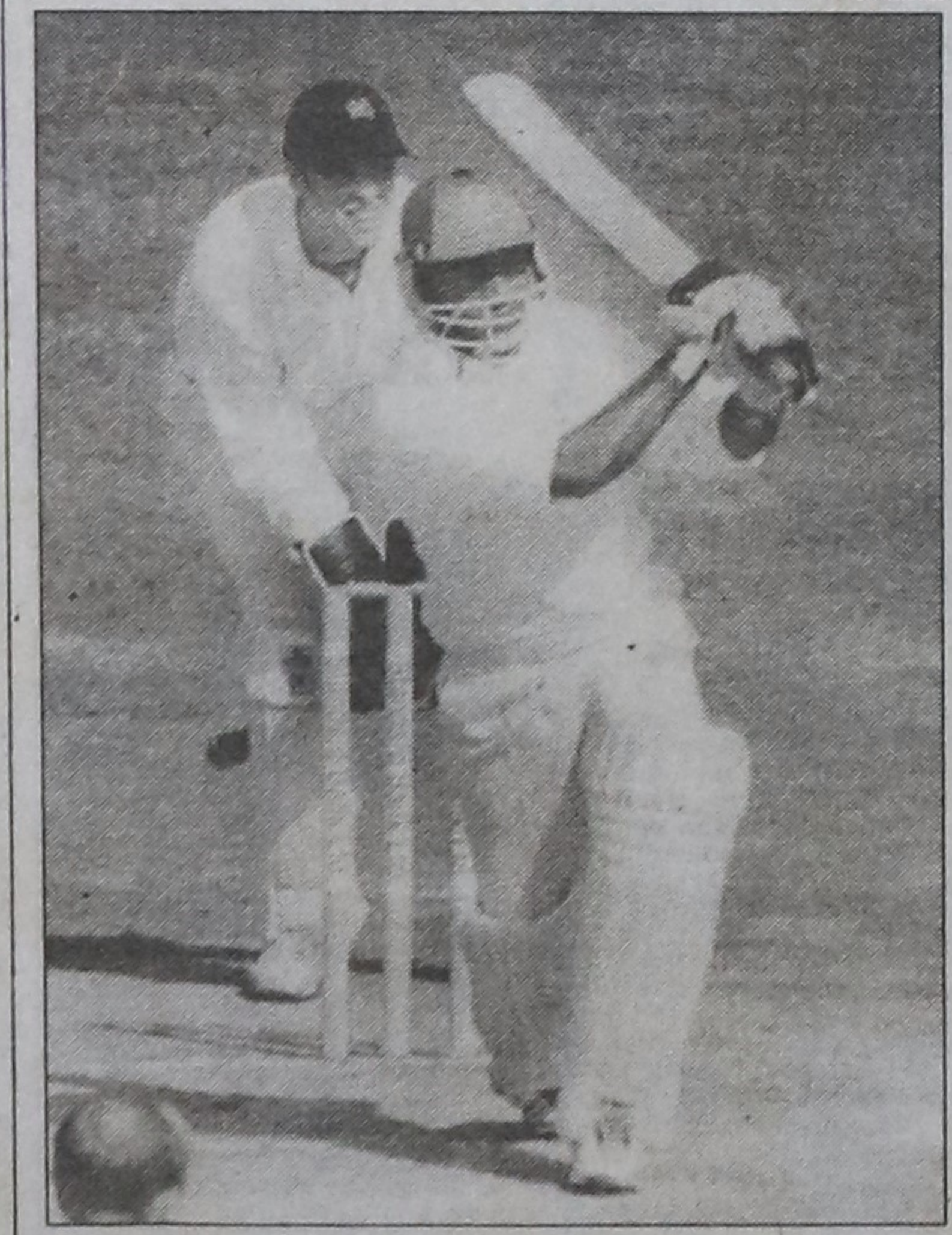
The non-government primary school teachers started a 36-hour hunger strike yesterday, the fifth day of their sit-in demonstration at the Osmani Udyan in the city demanding regularisation of their jobs.

The teachers will announce fresh agitation programme to realise their demand at 5 pm today.

Several hundred non-government primary teachers began their agitation programme at Osmani Udyan on Sunday.

Doctors Association Bangladesh (DAB) has set up a camp at the Udyan to give health assistance to the agitating teachers.

The Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) and Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) are yet to supply water and electricity at the Udyan, teachers complain.



En route to glory
Opener Shahriar Hossain, who became the first Bangladeshi to score back-to-back centuries, executes an exquisite on-drive on his way to an undefeated 121 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.
Star photo: Anisur Rahman

National IT Policy enters final stages

By Asad-uz Zaman

Professionals and the general public should get their first look at the country's long awaited National Information Technology Policy by the end of February.

A source close to the policy draft said its work has entered the final stages. Copies of the draft will be posted on a Web site and distributed at a February seminar so people at home and abroad can make comments and suggestions.

"If everything goes smoothly, we would like to send a draft of the policy to the authorities concerned by March 26," he said. "The draft was revised recently after we received some new documents. It was supposed to be complete by January 27, but it may take another week."

The committee preparing draft were cautious due to the country's Y2K preparations, he added.

The source said the committee examined the information technology policies of other countries while preparing their draft. The draft will tackle a lot of related issues, but remain consistent with policies in related sectors, such as telecommunications, education and industry. The policy might include an action plan, he said.

A professional working in the information technology field said the sector cannot develop properly unless there is a clear cut policy.

India, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines have thriving information technology sector thanks to the guidance of strong policies. Bangladesh could achieve the same status if the policy is implemented properly, he said.

2 young man shot dead in city

By Staff Correspondent

Two young men were shot dead by miscreants in separate incidents in the city's Pallabi and Mirpur areas yesterday.

The dead were identified as Abdul Malek, 38, son of Abdul Wahab of D Block in Pallabi and Rana, 17, son of Chunnun Mian of E Block in Mirpur Section One.

According to police and hospital sources, a gang of eight armed men called Malek out of his house and took him to Balur Math. They shot him and severed his left wrist.

He was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the attending doctors declared him dead.

Police could not confirm the reason behind the killing till filing of this report last night.

Samsun Nahar, wife of the victim, filed a case with Pallabi thana.

In another incident, the bullet-hit body of Rana was found near Hazrat Shah Ali Primary School at Mirpur Section One yesterday morning.

Prayer Timings

January 28

Fajr	Azan	Jamaat
Zohr	5-45	6-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-44	5-48
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Poverty propels trafficking

By Raziur Rahman

Poverty happens to be the prime factor behind woman and child trafficking from villages of bordering areas of Bangladesh, revealed a study of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) recently.

Other major factors behind their trafficking have been identified as illiteracy, landlessness, over-population and low levels of income. The study shows that the organised gangs of traffickers take advantage of the crushing poverty of their victims and lure them away with prospects of job opportunities.

The UNICEF-aided study, was conducted by BNWLA between October 1998 and May 1999 in ten villages of three bordering thanas of three districts of Bangladesh.

The three thanas are Teknaf of Cox's Bazar, Sharsa of Jessore and Patgram of Lalmonirhat district. The study also identified four main routes used by the traffickers.

A total of 51 women and children were trafficked during the study, of whom 31 were children and 20 were women. The percentage of male children was about 29 per cent, while women comprised about 70 per cent of the victims.

The study said that about 22 per cent of the female children belonged to the age group between 13 and 16, which demonstrated the 'demand for adolescent girls'.

About 42 per cent of female victims (aged between 11 and 16) were recruited through 'offers of marriage' while 28 per cent were recruited through job offers, it said.

Only 5 per cent of the women have primary education while the remaining 95 per cent are illiterate. About 52 per cent of the women victims have been divorced, separated or widowed. Divorced, separated or widowed are more frequently trafficked than married women, according to the study.

About 90 per cent of the women were household workers or unemployed. Most of these victims were married to husbands who had very low incomes. Families of 61 per cent of the victims were 'landless'.

The study also showed that over-population was another important factor behind women and children trafficking in Bangladesh. According to the study about 59 per cent of the victims came from big families, 25 per cent from medium sized families and only six per cent from small families.

The study identified four main routes through which the victims from the villages of the mentioned three thanas are being trafficked.

Traffickers have been using the following routes to traffic the victims from Teknaf :
 1. From Cox's Bazar the victims are brought to Gabtali bus terminal in Dhaka by road and from Dhaka they are taken to Sathkhira and Jessore by bus.
 2. From Cox's Bazar the victims are brought to Gabtali bus terminal in Dhaka by road and from Dhaka they are taken to Hilli border of Dinajpur by bus.
 3. The traffickers of Jessore have been using the border of Sharsa for trafficking. The names of border 'exit zone' in Sharsa is Benapole, Sadipur, Gatipara, Rudrupur, Puskhali, Salbahan and Sikarpur.
 4. The traffickers are using the border of Burimari for trafficking from Patgram. The border exit zone of Patgram is Upharnara, Padhanath, Azizpur, Bamandal, Istampur and Khengtu.

Open University graduates out in the open

By Mustak Hossain

Open University students are having trouble pursuing higher education, since the country's five Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Boards and some colleges refuse to recognise their work.

Meherun Nesa Umy received her SSC from Open University. She was admitted to the commerce department of Shaheed Anwar Girls College for the 1998-1999 session.

However, college authorities asked Umy to find another school when she tried to register. The education board had told the school it couldn't register her.

Mohammad Kamal Pasha, Umy's father, secured a court injunction against the authorities to ensure his daughter's education continued.

Monzur-e-Khoda Tarafdar, the registrar of Open University, said the university met with Higher Education Board and Education Ministry officials five months ago to resolve the problems facing students like Umy, just one of 14,000 who have received their SSC from Open University since it opened in 1995.

The officials asked the university to submit its curriculum so the board and the ministry could compare it to those followed in mainstream institutions.

"We gave them the relevant document several months ago, but they still haven't replied," said Tarafdar.

The Chairman of the Dhaka Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board said students should get their basic education from a conventional education institution.

Students who get their certificate from Open University

151-member APAC city unit proposed

By Staff Correspondent

Leaders of city units of the BNP-led opposition alliance have prepared a list of 151 members for the proposed All-Party Action Council unit in the capital, ignoring the guidelines set by the Liaison Committee of the alliance.

According to the guidelines, a 101-member APAC unit headed by a convener are to be formed in each city, district, municipality, thana, ward and union.

The list was prepared at a meeting of the city unit of Liaison Committee yesterday, meeting.

Sharif on a tighter rope

Former aviation chief testifies against him

KARACHI, Jan 27: The former aviation chief testified today that, in the heat of Pakistan's army coup, he completely shut down Karachi's airport after the then-premier ordered him to prevent a plane from bringing home the head of the military, reports AP.

The testimony came in the second day of the trial of Nawaz Sharif, the prime minister who was ousted in the October military takeover.

Sharif is charged with hijacking, attempted murder, kidnapping and terrorism for ordering that the plane be barred from landing, which the military-led government says endangered the lives of Gen. Pervez Musharraf and the others on board.

The coup was sparked when Sharif tried to fire Musharraf on October 12, while the army chief was out of the country on a visit to Sri Lanka. The firing sparked an army revolt and Musharraf headed back by plane for the airport in the southern Pakistan city of Karachi.

Amituddin Chaudhury, former Civil Aviation Authority chief, testified that Sharif ordered him to bar the plane and force it to land elsewhere, preferably in a Gulf nation.

Chaudhury said that after Sharif's order, "I used my own discretion and ordered the airport shut down completely," although that was not the order of the ex-prime minister.

Yusuf Abbas, the chief operation officer in the Traffic Control Tower at Karachi Airport, corroborated testimony, saying he warned Chaudhury that the aircraft did not have enough fuel to reach a Gulf nation and would have to land within Pakistan.

Chaudhury gave him orders to let the aircraft land in Nawabshah in interior Sindh, several hundred kilometers (miles) north of Karachi, he said. But when the aircraft was part way there the army gained control of the control tower and the aircraft was told to return to Karachi, he said.

When Musharraf's aircraft eventually landed at Karachi, it reportedly had only seven minutes of fuel remaining. By that time, the army was in control and soon announced Sharif's ouster.

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Evening Batch - 2 Months - Starting from February
Friday afternoon Batch - 5 Months - Starting from February

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