

The Daily Star

on Friday

VOL. X NO. 229 REGD. NO. DA 781

www.dailystarnews.com

DHAKA FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2000

3rd Millennium

BHADRA 24, 1407 BS

JAMADUS SAANI 8, 1421 HIJRI

16 PAGES PLUS MAGAZINE PRICE: TAKA 9.00

Ruling party feasts on vested property

44% now belongs to AL people; BNP men owned 71% in 1995

By Reaz Ahmad

People affiliated with the ruling party have mainly occupied the property of minority Hindus dispossessed of those under the Vested Property Act (VPA), a six-year research has revealed.

Over 44 per cent of the occupants are affiliated with the ruling Awami League and 31 per cent with the opposition BNP.

The situation was totally different in 1995 when 71 per cent of the illegal occupants belonged to the then ruling BNP and 11 per cent to AL. During Pakistani days, over 43 per cent of the occupants were affiliated with the Muslim League.

They always belong to present party-in-power (PPP). The alignment of the beneficiaries with the ruling party is obvious, as they need political protection for occupying others' property or depriving others (especially,

religious minorities) of their basic citizenship rights," according to the research findings documented in a book to be launched on September 11 in the city.

All six members of the Cabinet Committee which is drafting the law for restoration of ownership of the vested property will be present at the launching ceremony of the book titled 'An Inquiry into Causes and Consequences of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act'.

Experts explained that theoretically all lands with the owners dispossessed of those under the VPA (formerly Enemy Property Act) are supposed to be under state possession but in reality those are not.

As the Cabinet decided on Sunday to return all lands under VPA to their original owners,

the government found that out of 6,52,000 acres of such lands, over four lakh acres have already gone out of its possession.

However, Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad leader Dr Nim Chandra Bhowmik claimed that the lands under VPA would not be less than 10 lakh acres.

Convenor of the Cabinet Committee and Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Abdul Matin Khasru told The Daily Star that the government would repeal the VPA and return the vested property to the bonafide owners in the shortest possible time.

"The claimants must be regular citizens of Bangladesh and the property claimed must be under the possession of the government," he added.

Talking to this correspondent yesterday, author and

editor of the book Dr Abul Barkat said that 90 per cent of the occupants of so-called vested property had no legal documents of ownership or any lease contacts with the government.

He said the owners of some 21 lakh acres of land were dispossessed under VPA over the last three decades and the process was still on. But over 90 per cent of the affected Hindu population are still residing in this country and hardly five to 10 per cent migrated to India during and after the 1965 Indo-Pak war.

Dr Barkat, a professor of economics at Dhaka University, noted that the government could immediately go for annulment of VPA and later work out the mechanism to return the lands to their original owners.

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Surrounded by party lawyers, leaders and activists, a smiling Khaleda Zia waves to crowds while walking out of the court premises yesterday. Khaleda and seven other defendants in a graft case were granted bail the same day.

- Star photo

Death threat for writing book on VPA

Star Report

Unidentified men have threatened the life of Dr Abul Barkat, author and editor of a book on the controversial Vested Property Act.

Dr Barkat, who teaches economics at Dhaka University, registered general diaries to Ramna and Dhanmondi police stations on Tuesday regarding the several death threats he received over the telephone.

When contacted concerned police said that the diaries had been filed and police were acting upon the complaint. On Wednesday, Dr Barkat also wrote a letter to the DU Vice Chancellor informing him about the threats he had received over the phone.

Formal launching programme of Dr Barkat's book 'An Inquiry into Causes and Consequences of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act' is scheduled for September 11.

Dr Barkat, who is also the general secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), told The Daily Star yesterday

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Hasina for a 'new' UN

NEW YORK, Sept 6: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged world leaders to rebuild United Nations as a strong forum capable of taking effective steps to free underprivileged people from poverty, illiteracy and disease and ensure peace and development in a democratic global order, reports UNB.

She made the call as leaders from nearly 160 countries sat in the UN Millennium Summit Wednesday to map out the world body's next course of action to ensure mankind's secure journey in the new century tackling the major challenges.

Addressing the summit, the Bangladesh Prime Minister suggested a refurbished strong and effective United Nations for pulling millions of people out of abject poverty.

"At the dawn of the twenty-first century, we should work unitedly for establishing a just, fair, equitable and democratic global system," she said in a ceremonial speech at the summit at the UN headquarters.

The prime minister emphasized the need for genuine democracy to ensure development and its equitable sharing. She called for working together for accruing benefit from the process of globalisation.

The heads of state or government will debate peacekeeping, UN reform, set global target on poverty, AIDS, education, and environment, before adopting the Millennium Declaration articulating their commitments.

In her five-minute speech in Bengali, on the first day of the three-day summit, the largest-ever congregation of world leaders in history, the prime minister said the Millennium Summit provided the leaders with a unique opportunity to express their collective will for better life for their peoples.

Hasina observed the Summit would only be worthwhile if it is remembered not as an event to mark the transition to a new millennium, but an event that marks the transition from words to deeds. "We have a historic opportunity at the Summit. We cannot allow it to slip."

"Praising Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his Millennium report, she said his proposals in four broad areas of poverty alleviation, prevention of conflicts, environmental regeneration and renewal of the United Nations.

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BNP rally at Paltan tomorrow

Countrywide protest against 'false' case planned

By Staff Correspondent

BNP will hold countrywide demonstration tomorrow (Saturday) to protest filing of 'false and conspiratorial' case against its chairperson, Khaleda Zia.

As part of the programme, the BNP will organise protest

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Khaleda granted bail

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia was yesterday granted anticipatory bail in a Tk 175 crore graft case.

Metropolitan Sessions Judge Ahmed Jamil Mostafa granted her and seven other defendants the advance bail against a bond for Tk 1 lakh each.

Surrounded by hundreds of party lawyers, leaders and activists, Khaleda appeared before the tightly-guarded Metropolitan Court of Sessions, Dhaka at around 9:50 a.m.

Seven of the nine other defendants, including former finance minister M Saifur Rahman MP, ex-State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Abdul Mannan MP and former Cabinet Secretary Ayubur Rahman, were also granted anticipatory bail.

The other two defendants, former managing director of

Biman and secretary Ahab Ahmed and deputy general manager of Biman Jamir Ahmed, did not appear before the court.

Barrister Moudud Ahmed moved the bail petition on behalf of Khaleda, Saifur and Mannan before the court.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption submitted the charge sheet against Khaleda and nine others to the court late Tuesday alleging that they misappropriated Tk 175 crore in the deal to purchase two French Airbus for the state-run Biman Bangladesh Airlines during the BNP's 1991-95 rule.

The case was filed on August 30, 1998 and a total of 37 people were shown as witnesses. The Airbus were commissioned in the Biman fleet in 1994.

More than 3,000 leaders and activists of BNP and its different

front organisations, who have been assembling on the court premises since 9 a.m., chanted various anti-government slogans outside the court premises.

A large contingent of police with riot gears was earlier deployed in and around the court premises. Proceedings of the cases in different courts were delayed by nearly two hours because of crowd. Besides, more than one hundred lawyers loyal to the opposition also converged at the court premises.

Moving the bail petition, Barrister Moudud said the case against the leader of the opposition is baseless, and politically motivated in a bid to harass her and other senior leaders of BNP and also to tarnish their image.

"This is a false case, which will definitely not cause any

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SPA mostly misused

69,010 detained in 24 years, 68,195

freed on HC order

By Staff Correspondent

Vague, indefinite and weak grounds for detention led to the release of 99 per cent of them.

This was revealed by a parliamentary sub-committee at the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

The three-member sub-committee submitted a 31-page report to the House after three years' study of SPA records from February 1974 to December 1998. The SPA came into being in February 1974.

Since its introduction by the then Awami League government, the SPA generated a lot of controversies in the political arena. While out of power, political parties bitterly criticised it, but none scrapped it while in power because they found it useful.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions had formed the sub-committee on

August 7, 1997 while scrutinising a bill seeking amendment to the SPA.

BNP lawmaker Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury had submitted the bill in late 1996 seeking financial penalty if detention under the law is declared illegal by court. But the sub-committee opposed placing of the bill.

It said that approval of the bill would create a sense of fear among enforcers of SPA, leading to slackness in its application for running the affairs of the state. The sub-committee viewed that special law or provision was required as deterrent measures to deal with some special types of social crime and desist criminals from doing crimes.

The sub-committee recommended that enforcers should

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Haroon, 'chosen' one

By Shahriar Karim

The ruling party has virtually succeeded in ensuring a smooth sail for its 'own' man, Yusuf Abdullah Haroon in the election to the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) presidency.

None of the other major contenders submitted nomination on the last date yesterday, reportedly due to government pressure and politicisation of the electoral process.

However, the government initiative to have their candidate elected unopposed did not succeed as a low-profile business leader Aminul Haq from Natore chamber submitted his candidature for the top FBCCI position.

Two top business leaders - Latifur Rahman and Salman F Rahman - who had earlier expressed their intention to vie for the most coveted position in the country's business community decided not to file nomination and neither did Mir Nasir of Faridpur Chamber.

According to sources, ministers and ruling party leaders had been engaged in intense behind-the-curtain parleys to ensure that Haroon did not face any challenge.

Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil reportedly requested all other aspirants not to file nomination. Jalil had a meeting with Salman, Haroon and Mir Nasir at his official residence till 11.30 pm on Wednesday.

The incumbent FBCCI

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Latifur Rahman not to contest FBCCI polls

By Staff Correspondent

President of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka, Latifur Rahman in a press statement yesterday said that despite MCCI nomination, he would not contest for the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) presidency.

"It is the view of the Metropolitan Chamber that if given the chance to lead the Federation, I would have been able to make some modest contribution in inspiring and activating the

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