

Wheat scam: More names

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and food directorate officials behind the irregularities.

Because of its political sensitivity and involvement of ruling party men, both the probe committee and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) have remain tight-lipped about the contents of the detailed investigation report.

Islam yesterday kept journalists of leading national dailies waiting for three hours before eventually denying them access to his Secretariat office.

Later when the newsmen walked into his room, he said, "I will not talk to you."

When asked about any sort of compulsion on him from PMO, Islam again said, "I will not talk to the press."

Journalists wanted to know the reason behind such secrecy on an important public issue and told him that the committees on gas and on Dhaka University incident have already revealed findings to the press. But Islam did not change his mind.

Following submission of his probe report on Tuesday, some senior bureaucrats held a meeting on the

probe report findings last night. Some senior ministers and policymakers of the government also discussed the issue.

The prime minister handed the report to her principle secretary for review, official sources said.

Sources said the prime minister was annoyed when she came to know of her party men's involvement in the scam and gave instruction for stern actions against all involved.

The officials, particularly whose names were mentioned in both the probe reports (one by the secretariat committee and other by the food ministry committee), would face immediate actions including termination of their jobs, sources added.

However, till yesterday the government was indecisive over mode of actions which might be taken against the party lawmakers whose names were mentioned in the report.

The accused MPs are Helaluzzaman Talukdar Lulu of Bogra, Selim Reza Habib of Pabna, Khurram Khan Chowdhury and Delwar Hossain Khan Dulu of Mymensingh and Mujibur Rahman of Kishoreganj.

Meanwhile, when the wheat scam

issue reached to a climax over the last two days, the AL yesterday formed three separate committees comprising nine AL legislatures for a fact-finding mission.

Formed under the directive of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina, these committees would visit two districts each and collect information on wheat purchase irregularities. The districts are Pabna, Bogra, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Barisal and Satkhira. They have been asked to submit their probe reports by September 5 to Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Md Abdul Hamid.

The convenors of the three committees are Shamsur Rahman Sharif (Pabna-4), Mirza Azam (Jamalpur-3), and Col. (ret.) Faruq Khan (Gopalganj-1). Six members of these three committees are Dr Md Abdur Razzak (Tangail-1), Md Motaahar Hossain (Lalmonirhat-1), Rezaul Karim Hira (Jamalpur-5), Abdul Matin Sarkar (Mymensingh-7), Panchanan Biswas (Kulna-1) and Md Mahabubur Rahman (Patuakhali-4).

Bin Laden back at helm

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their Taliban allies have continually frustrated the US-led coalition by hiding in mountains, melting into the local population or fleeing into neighbouring Pakistan or Iran.

Atwan said that the al-Qaida and Taliban had reestablished links that were severed when the United States began its military campaign in Afghanistan.

"They are working together again. They are organising," he said.

Gunfight

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27, Monsur Alam, 30, Nurul Islam, 50, Jannatul Ferdous, 26 and Alam Sayer, 40.

Of them, three were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital while the rest to Malumghata Dulahazara Christian Hospital and Chakoria Health Complex.

Two local UP members were also injured when they came to calm the clashing groups, sources said.

Police arrested five persons in connection with the incident.

No case was filed till filing of this report at 7.00 pm yesterday.

There is no trail, meanwhile, leading to bin Laden.

Bin Laden's associates told Atwan that the Saudi-born militant was well, "safe" and planning new attacks on the United States. They did not say where bin Laden was currently living.

"My sense is that he will time any new attack to coincide with a US attack on Iraq. He would want to capitalise on this to appeal to the Arab street so he will probably delay any attacks until the United States moves on Iraq," said Atwan.

"He will probably want to be seen as the only Arab standing up to the United States when the United States attacks Iraq."

Bin Laden made a series of defiant videotapes broadcast on television as US warplanes pounded Afghanistan. But he has recently stayed out of sight.

His associates said Bin Laden, who has a \$25 million US bounty on his head, was well protected but his entourage was small in order to avoid capture, said Atwan.

Bin Laden's top aide Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian-born chief strategist of al-Qaida, was with him along with a small group of militant

bodyguards, Atwan was told.

AFP adds: Bin Laden and his top lieutenant al-Zawahiri are probably alive and moving around mountain hideouts along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, The New York Times said yesterday.

Unidentified US officers in Afghanistan told the daily the driving force behind the manhunt along the border was the assumption that bin Laden and al-Zawahiri were alive.

They cited Afghan and Pakistani intelligence reports indicating that bin Laden, the al-Qaeda terrorist network boss, moved around with an entourage of several dozen men.

Owners assoc

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An official of the communications ministry said the ministry would ask the BRTA to allocate stickers to no more than 5,500 two-stroke three-wheelers.

The sources believe that there will be more than 5,500 two-stroke three-wheelers on the roads, as the government has no monitoring mechanism.



PHOTO: STAR

Chairman of the Transparency International, Bangladesh, Khan Sarwar Murshid addresses a press conference on the Corruption Perceptions Index-2002 at the Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday.

Most corrupt nation

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Ahmad, trustee member of the Bangladesh chapter of TI.

The CPI score relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people and risk analysts, said Khan Sarwar Murshid, chairman of the TI, Bangladesh (TIB). The CPI ranges between 10 and 0, meaning highly clean and highly corrupt respectively.

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Five countries namely Indonesia, Kenya, Angola, Madagascar, Paraguay, Nigeria and Bangladesh, where corruption is highly prevalent scored less than two out of 10. And it is Bangladesh, which became the most corrupt country with a lowest score of 1.2.

However, the report said Bangladesh's score, which has improved by 0.8 point compared with the CPI 2001, was due solely to the methodological changes. Bangladesh's original values had remained constant. The higher score in 2002 does not reflect actual improvement, the TIB officials explained.

"The impact of corruption varies from country to country," said Khan Sarwar Murshid. "A developing country like Bangladesh suffers more than a developed country," he added. Murshid also stressed that developed countries nurture a notion that developing countries are most corrupt, which is entirely wrong. In most cases, the developed countries are assisting the corruption in the developing countries, he added.

However, Transparency International brought out the complementary information by publishing Bribe Payers Index (BPI). The index addresses the propensity of companies from top exporting countries to bribe in emerging markets, since the CPI only focuses the intensity of corruption among the developing countries.

The BPI 2002 revealed high levels of bribery by firms from Russia, China, Taiwan and South Korea, closely followed by Italy, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, USA and France, although many of these countries signed the Anti-bribery Convention.

"We can get a global view of corruption if we compare CPI 2002 with BPI 2002," noted Murshid. The CPI is published throughout the world by Transparency International itself and the Bangladesh chapter has no authority to select the time for publishing it, said the TIB officials.

When journalists asked them about publication of the CPI 2001 prior to the general election last year, Prof. Muzaffer Ahmad said, "The TI has to collect their data from different sources and process them which takes time and the report can be published any time of the year."

However, the TIB officials mentioned though the report is published in 2002, the data have been collected till December 2001. They noted that the tenure of a single government cannot be termed as most corrupt since three different governments held the power during that period.

The unbridled corruption in the auto-rickshaws would specially be painted white with a yellow stripe at the back. On the yellow stripe the newly issued registration number must be written.

Officials and association leaders said many owners did not register these vehicles. And many of them have already sent their vehicles to the rural areas outside Dhaka. They did not get their vehicles registered since they have no valid documents.

Drivers queuing up for the formalities said they paid between Tk 800 and 2,500 to the agents of the BRTA and the association. Zakir Hossain, an autorickshaw driver, said he had paid Tk 1000 to one Mostafa, who works for the BRTA at Mirpur.

Zakir said he paid the money being assured that he would not face any problem regarding the processing of the papers. Some drivers said they had paid up to Tk 2500 to be on the list.

Scores of autorickshaw drivers and owners flocked to the BRTA office to know the registration procedures. They however fell victim to unscrupulous middlemen assigned by the BRTA officials and the association leaders.

country can be curbed by establishing parliamentary standing committee and independent anti-corruption body, Prof. Ahmad later told BBC Radio.

Industries Minister MK Anwar told BBC that his government was not responsible for record of corruption. "We're in government for 10 months only and it's not enough time to rid of this dubious distinction."

"This is harming the country's image. Such a report during our time was published intentionally with the general election ahead," Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament Abdul Hamid was quoted by the BBC Bangla Service as saying.

Hamid also noted that this time the report was done only to justify the previous report.

Meanwhile, Reuters adds: Over two-thirds of the world's countries are rife with corruption—a spectre haunting Latin America, the former Soviet states and vast swathes of Africa, Transparency International said.

The Berlin-based anti-corruption group said 70 per cent of the 102 countries it surveyed for its 2002 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) scored less than half-marks, a clear deterioration from last year.

Latin America in general has slipped down the rankings of perceived corruption of its politicians and public officials.

"In the past year, we have seen setbacks to the credibility of democratic rule. In parts of South America, the graft and misuse of political elites have drained confidence in the democratic structures that emerged after the end of military rule," TI Chairman Peter Eigen told a news conference.

For example, Argentina, ranked 57th last year with a score of 3.5 out of a potential 10, dropped to 70th and a 2.8 rating.

Eigen, speaking before heading to the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, said corruption ruined a nation's chance to relieve poverty and heal the planet.

There were a few positive signs in former communist nations. Slovenia showed improvement, climbing from 5.2 points to 6, although many nations of the former Soviet Union were still riddled with corruption.

Russia, for example, had improved yet still had a long way to go and like Uzbekistan, Georgia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Azerbaijan, it still scored below three points.

Finland topped the table, as it did last year, followed by Denmark, New Zealand, Iceland, Singapore and Sweden.

However, many developed countries had no cause for pride. Among the nations of the European Union and North America, Greece was the lowest-ranked country at 44th. Italy was ranked 31st. Ireland's rating had slipped from 7.5 to 6.9.

Vacant posts

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Prime Minister's Office.

The post of Press Secretary to the Prime Minister is suffering from the same fate. No appointment has been made either to the post of Director General of the Press Institute of Bangladesh.

Policymakers of the ruling BNP are highly annoyed due to such indecisive attitude. They said that the alliance government, which is enjoying over two-third majority, seems to be the "most weak" government since independence.

They further said that this, which has now become like a major "disease", has gripped the entire government.

A number of senior ministers alleged that some of the politicians and bureaucrats at the Prime Minister's Office have deliberately kept those posts vacant for their petty interest because of their failure in finding such persons as will be loyal to them instead of the Prime Minister.

An influential leader of BNP, while talking to The Daily Star, said that promotion of Dr Saadat Hossain was held up for a long due to the influence of a senior bureaucrat. He said that the government's failure to appoint someone to the post for four months is a

ETV case

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The case is not subject to review, added the attorney.

After concluding his argument, Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, counsel for ETV chairman AS Mahmud, said the Supreme Court has discretionary power to review. Citing examples, he said the Supreme Court, in the process of judicial evolution, exercised such discretionary power.

Informing the court about public opinion in favour of ETV, the elderly lawyer said, "People want to see ETV alive, which is under sentence of death, waiting for execution."

Strongly opposing the review petition, Abdur Razzak, counsel for the litigants who won the case in the High Court, argued that review should not be entertained as the highest court already dismissed the petition seeking leave to appeal.

He submitted that the Supreme Court has limitations as regards considering the review petition, and that the opponents could not find error of law in the judgement.

Ashim Kumar

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defence lawyers stated that the AL leader was arrested under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) without any charge as part of a conspiracy to harass him politically.

After hearing both sides, Magistrate Kazi Meraj Hossain rejected the bail petition and issued an order to send Ashim to the Dhaka Central Jail.

Earlier, the detectives alleged that Ashim had met with top criminals to execute plans to commit different criminal activities to harass and embarrass the government.

A team of the Detective Branch of Police intercepted his car at 12:15 pm on Saturday while he was on his way to the Awami League office through Abdul Gani Road in the city and took him to the DB office at Minto Road.

Police had been hunting for Ashim Kumar, a member of publicity sub-committee of Awami League, following confidential statement of a young man arrested with an M-16 rifle in the man mentioned Ashim in connection with the illegal firearm.

Four other Awami Leagues leaders including former state ministers Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Obaidul Kader, ex-MP Kamal Majumder and former student leader Shafi Ahmed were mentioned in the confidential statement.

All the five AL leaders had already

matter of embarrassment. He further said that it was not seemly for a person to simultaneously run both the vital posts of Cabinet and Home.

The BNP leader further said that the PMO has been captured by a "viscous quarter", that tends to mislead the Prime Minister in taking decisions and that the government might not be able to remove its indecision until it comes out from it.

Top level bureaucrats are also unhappy saying that the administrative power is held by one or two top bureaucrats and some junior officials. Many officials were seen openly making comment against them.

They further alleged that the administrative and press wing people at the PMO are busy serving their bosses instead of the Prime Minister and the government. They said that all the postings and appointments at the PMO were based on loyalty to influential persons rather than efficiency and competency.

DU reopening

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the university yesterday. They urged him to resume university activities without further delay.

Meanwhile, one source said the DU halls are likely to be reopened on September 5 and classes might resume on September 7.

The DU Academic Council will decide on the postponed examinations when the university reopens.

Some 30,000 students of the Dhaka University might face session jam of at least six months due to the ongoing closure, sources pointed out.

Haikkar Khal

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ply on the canal. A source said that the hoodlums have asked every boatman to pay Tk 20 everyday for plying on "their project area". There are about 200 mechanised boats at the Mohammadpur ghat using the Haikkar Khal.

Several hundred people demonstrated in front of the canal on Sunday demanding the cancellation of the project and the restoration of the water way immediately. BELA (Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association) has also served a legal notice to different government departments, ministries and to the mayor expressing its concern.

Haikkar Khal is one of the last remaining canals in the city.

Shazneen case

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(Latifur) house and Shazneen's room was not visible from there. Shazneen used to stay at her elder sister's house when he (Latifur) along with his wife would go abroad.

The witness said there was no special arrangement for Shazneen's security at his house. A domestic help at his house, Hawa Begum, used to attend her and sleep in her room at night.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, was the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom.

Special public prosecutors Arfanuddin Khan, ABM Sharfuddin Khan Mukul, Mahub Ahmed and Assistant public prosecutor Anisur Rahman appeared for the state. Advocates AFM Abdul Wadud, Moharrar Hassan kajol, Mizanur Rahman and M H Kamrul Hasan Khan Aslam represented the accused.

All the accused - Shahid, Hasan, Bada, Shaniram, Minu and parvin - were produced before the court yesterday.

The Shazneen murder case, pending with the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, was earlier stayed following an order of the High Court. The order will remain valid till disposal of the rape case.

Hasina: Graft case

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The two other accused are Abul Hasan Chowdhury, former state minister for foreign affairs and Dr S A Samad, former Principal Secretary to Sheikh Hasina.

In the case filed with Tejaon thana, it has been alleged that Sheikh Hasina in connivance with former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, former Principal Secretary Dr S A Samad and BEPZA (Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority) Executive Chairman Brigadier General M A B Siddiq Talukder unnecessarily employed a lobbyist in the United States for garment industries that cost the country Tk 2.1 crore.

Abdullah-Al-Zahid, an officer of the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) and investigation officer of the case, submitted a charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, on June 18 against Hasina and two others dropping the name of Siddiq Talukder.

The BAC filed the case on December 11 last year.

Alamgir

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officer of the BAC filed the case against Dr Alamgir on May 13 this year.

He was shown arrested in the case on August 13 this year.

Dr Alamgir was granted bail in the case on August 24.

He was earlier granted bail in five other cases, including the Janatar Mancha case (sedition case). But the chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on August 26 stayed the bail order till September 3.

Dr Alamgir was arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) from the Zia International Airport on March 15 on his return from Singapore. Later, he was shown arrested in the Janatar Mancha case and four other cases.

Meanwhile, the CMM's Court on August 17 directed the complainant and IO of the graft case to explain within September 16 why the address of Dr Alamgir was written incorrectly in the FIR of the case.

The court passed the order upon a petition filed by the defence lawyers in this connection.

Alamgir's permanent address is village-Gulbahar, police station-Kachua, district-Chandpur. But in the FIR, the complainant of the case wrote the village as Mulparpa, police station as Faridgonj and district as Chandpur.

Meanwhile, the CMM's Court yesterday sent the graft case to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, for trial.

PM vows to curb crime

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and front organisations of the BNP attended the daylong meeting.

The meeting was aimed at strengthening the party and bringing dynamism to the grassroots.

The meeting was organised to get the real picture of the party and the government from field-level leaders.

Similar divisional meetings will begin in the first week of the next month.

The meeting expressed satisfaction with and congratulated the prime minister's eldest son Tanque Rahman on his appointment as joint secretary-general of the BNP.

About the economy, Khaleda said her government continues to take bold steps for economic development.

The steps to reduce losses in state-owned enterprises and the policy to help private sectors generate employment have been acclaimed both home and abroad, Khaleda claimed.

The government has taken effective steps to turn the unemployed population into human resources, she said.

She pointed to some steps and achievements in education, health, infrastructure, and women's empowerment, professional skills, improvement of the environment and image-building.

The prime minister has regretted

that each time the BNP assumes power, with the economy in tatters.

The treasury was empty, the development budget fully dependent on foreign aid and the country mired in corruption, anarchy and crimes when her government was voted to power in 1990.

This time round, the BNP took over when Bangladesh was plagued with politicisation, nepotism, crimes, corruption and destruction of democracy by the previous government, she said.

The BNP left US\$204 crore in reserve in March, 1996, but the Awami League left only US\$115 crore, she said.

Devaluation of taka was three times greater during the past AL's rule than the 1991-96 BNP's, she added.

The total domestic borrowing in 24 years from 1972 to 1996 was Tk 14,000 crore, while Tk 24,000 crore was in the last five years of the AL government, she said.

The previous BNP government made a profit of Tk 3,000 crore from the petroleum corporation, while the AL government incurred a loss of Tk 3,000 crore in the same sector, she said.

The loss from state-owned enterprises stood at Tk 3,000 crore during the 1991-96 period, but the loss in the

last five years of the AL's rule stood at Tk 8,000 crore.

Khaleda said the AL government set examples of corruption, irregularities and misuse of funds in different fields, like construction of Smrityambha at Suhrawardi Udyan and of Martyred Intellectuals' Memorial at Rayerbazar.

The BNP chairperson advised party leaders to remove intra-party conflicts and keep away from crimes, corruption and anarchy.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in his welcome speech revealed the plans and programmes and the organisational situation when the party was in opposition.

The BNP held 200 major public meetings, processions, sit-ins and blockades, 71 half- and full-day hartals, 38 days of mass contact, one long march towards the Chittagong Hill Tracts, seven road marches, unspecified gayebana janaza and five siege programmes across the country.

Earlier, the BNP leader Nazrul Islam Khan read out a condolence proposal and the meeting observed a one-minute silence in memory of those killed in the AL period and those who expired.

Ctg BNP men blast govt

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The participants criticised the local administration for not performing up to the desired level. They also complained that police was not taking effective steps to combat terrorism, hijacking and extortion in the port city of Chittagong.

Many field leaders alleged that relatives and close associates of ministers and MPs had indulged in various corruption and criminal activities, hampering the image of the party and the government.

Leaders also pointed out that the 60-member jumbo size cabinet is being widely criticised. They urged the Prime Minister to immediately downsize the cabinet.

Rejoinder

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claimed.

"I can tell you for certain that I had not been put to any pressure from any quarter. But now I feel that I am under pressure [due to the] incorrect report of The Daily Star," the secretary contended.

Our Reply: Like other journalists present there, The Daily Star staff correspondent heard the secretary saying about the pressure he was facing regarding the jet fuel and it was accordingly reported in The Daily Star. The other journalists also in their reports quoted the secretary as saying so and his comment appeared in some other national dailies such as The Daily Jangant and Daily Janakantha, as well.

The staff correspondent was present at that time but was unable to draw the attention of the secretary.

They observed that price hikes of essentials were detrimental to the party image. Some even deplored the current budget for what they felt was aimed at 'robbing the poor.'

Some leaders, according to informed sources, criticised the widespread terrorism for negating all the achievements of the government. They wanted a stop to terrorism and crime at all cost.

Current issues like spread of dengue and wheat scam also featured in the discussion.

Speakers also noted with concern that a gap between the ministers and local leaders were hindering the performance of the government as many senior ministers were no longer interested in party affairs.

They alleged that the present government had not learnt from its previous mistake when it allowed itself to be misled by a vicious circle during its 1991-96 rule. Many openly accused some political leaders and bureaucrats at the PM's Office for creating a distance between the party members and leaders.

Most of the speakers in their speeches congratulated Tareque Rahman, the eldest son of the PM, for his appointment as the joint secretary general of BNP and his contribution in the last general election.

Thanking Tareque for organising the representatives' meetings, most participants requested the PM to give him the responsibility to reorganise and revitalise the party.

The entire Pradhan Montri Bhaban was decorated with colourful balloons, festoons, flags, flowers and banners carrying different

New plot to export gas