

Defence audit reveals Tk 182cr loss in 29 yrs

UNB, Dhaka

Financial irregularities in the army, navy, airforce and related institutions under the defence caused a huge loss of nearly Tk 182 crore to the government in 29 years till 1999-2000.

The financial loss has been revealed in an audit report placed in the just ended autumn session of parliament.

A note by Mesbah Uddin Khan, Director General of the Defence Audit Directorate, incorporated in the audit report says that the matter loses importance due to inordinate delay in settling the cases of grave financial anomalies for a long time.

As a result, grounds are being created for more indiscipline and irregularities in these institutions. Steps should be taken to settle the financial disputes detected during the audit, it said.

The audit report mainly dwelt on 44 unsettled matters of 1999-2000 involving nearly Tk 67 crore. The report also envisaged the previous financial anomalies since 1971-72

till 1999-2000 incurring a total loss of nearly Tk 182 crore.

The irregularities during 1999-2000 were mainly detected in construction works, overpayment to contractors, non-deposit of leased money, bank interest and earnings from other sources to the government exchequer, collection of electricity bills at lower rate from commissioned officers, irregular payment to temporary workers, unnecessary purchase, irregular increment to employees, tiffin and ration, etc.

A rough breakdown of financial anomalies shows that the government incurred financial loss of about Tk 1.18 lakh during 1971-72 to 1975-76.

During the 1976-82 period, the loss amounted to about Tk 56.80 lakh while 1982-90 period it was more than Tk 75 crore.

From 1990-91 to 1995-96, the financial loss was Tk 29.76 crore while from 1996-97 to 1999-2000, the loss amounted to Tk 76.08 crore.

3 killed in Chuadanga bus crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chuadanga

Three persons were killed and 15 others injured when a bus carrying a bridal party skidded off the road and fell into a pond at Kalidaspur under Alamdanga upazila of Chuadanga yesterday.

Police said the accident occurred at around 6pm as the driver lost control over the vehicle.

The bus was carrying a bridal party to Kalidaspur from Kushtia.

Of the dead, two were identified as Rono and Bishu. Identity of other could not be known.

The injured people were admitted to Alamdanga health complex.



Central Reserve Police Force paramilitaries stand guard near a crater left by a blast near Kulgam, some 60 kms south of Srinagar, following an attempted assassination on Kashmir's Tourism Minister Sakina Itoo. Itoo survived the attack which left dead a security personnel and a Muslim woman who was reportedly killed in retaliatory firing by security forces. (Story on page 9)

Tofail, Moshuir granted bail in graft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Special Court for Dhaka Division yesterday granted ad-interim bail to former industries minister Tofail Ahmed and former ERD secretary Moshuir Rahman, accused in a graft case.

They appeared in the court, seeking bail and cancellation of a warrant order.

Judge (in charge) A T M Fazle Kabir passed the order upon a bond of Tk 50,000 each with two guarantors.

CAG reports gather dust

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expenditure irregularities of the audited government organisation in return for bribes.

On the other hand, different ministries make inordinate delay in taking steps as regards audit objections raised by the CAG's office. In certain cases, ministries took more than 16 years to initiate a process to address audit objections.

Since independence, the CAG's office has submitted 770 reports with 16,085 audit objections to the parliament and to the president till July 16 this year. The PAC has so far reviewed only 18.3 per cent or 141 of these.

Ten audit directorates of the CAG audit about 22,885 administrative units of government departments every year. However, lack of efficient manpower makes it difficult for the CAG's office to perform the job, the TIB reports say.

The area of audit is limited and also there is a lack of effective steps to redress faulty audits and their weak supervision.

The TIB notes that although the current Jatiya Sangsad is almost a year old, it is yet to form a public accounts committee. The last PAC was formed four months after the parliament session began.

The PAC can only recommend

after reviewing audit reports but there is no monitoring on implementation of the recommendations, the TIB reports say.

The PAC recommends on financial irregularities but due to negligence of ministries concerned, effective steps cannot be taken against such anomalies.

Prof Shahidul Islam MP, Col (Retd) Shaukat Ali MP, Chairman of Public Expenditure Commission and former advisor to caretaker government Hafizuddin Khan, former minister Abdul Matin Kharsu, former MP Prof Ali Ashraf and SM Akram, economist Dr Moinul Islam and former CAG Syed Yussuf Hossain took part in discussion on the reports.

Hafizuddin said it is not possible to audit all things of such a big administration.

Dr Moinul Islam, former president of the Bangladesh Economic Association, said the nation should be informed about all overt and covert expenditures of defence sector.

"If a country spends 63 per cent in unproductive sector, how will it provide education and healthcare services to people?" he questioned.

Later, talking to newsmen Hafizuddin, who is also the chairman of the public expenditure

review commission, said all public expenditures, including military expenditure, will be made public in time. "We are now reviewing all the expenditure."

Awami League lawmaker Col. Shaukat Ali said the parliament runs according to the wish of the ruling party and its leader. "The speaker of the house cannot function in constant fear of losing his job. There has already been a precedent of removing the president and it needs only a simple majority to remove the speaker."

The chairman of the PAC in the seventh parliament SM Akram said, "Any case should be resolved in the court, not on the instruction from the Prime Minister's Office."

Referring to absence of opposition party in the fifth and seventh parliament, Shudhangshu Shekhar Halder said, "We (political parties) cannot work in cooperation."

On the other hand, BNP lawmaker Professor Shahidul Islam said there should be an understanding between the treasury and the opposition benches that any report related to corruption would be discussed in the House.

'Ziko' Babul

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in multiple criminal cases including those for murder and extortion. He is also an accused in the Idris murder case filed with Keraniganj police station.

According to police, Babul was a bodyguard of Haji Selim, former Awami League lawmaker from Old Dhaka.

He came to the limelight when different national dailies published his photograph with a nine-shooter gun, chasing pickets during a hartal in the city when AL was in power.

Shaheed Minar

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planned manner. Police brought in makeshift barbed wire fences and kept those on the roads leading to the Shaheed Minar.

The roads are usually kept open, but whenever any organisation announces a programme at the venue, the barbed wire fences are immediately placed on the roads. Police backed BDR then take position behind the fences to face the situation.

Yesterday, police intercepted a procession of writers, teachers, artists and cultural activists in front of National Museum. The procession was marching toward the Shaheed Minar to demand an end to the present situation there. They warned of a vigorous movement if their demand is not met by September 26.

Earlier, police barred several processions of Sammilta Sangkritik Jote from moving to the area.

When contacted last night, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Ramna Police Station Md Mahbubur Rahman said, "Any one willing to bring out a procession or hold a rally anywhere in the city needs prior permission from the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP). But the organisations which were prevented from doing so did not have any such permission."

The OC accused of the organisations of trying to vitiate peaceful atmosphere on the Dhaka University campus. "We can't let them do this when the authorities have already decided to reopen the university."

Asked about this, renowned educationist Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury said sanctity of the Shaheed Minar, symbol of the Language Movement, has been tainted by the government action.

By sealing off the Shaheed Minar, the government has virtually sealed the spirit of our Liberation War and the Language Movement," he said. "It is very shameful that we have to demonstrate for our right to go to the Shaheed Minar."

BCL leaders

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leaders after they were granted bail in all the cases by Wednesday.

Plainclothes police picked Liaquat, Babu and BCL Vice-president Rafiqul Islam Kotwal from outside the residence of opposition leader Sheikh Hasina on February 25. Kotwal, who was also granted bail in the same cases, was not released, as relevant documents did not reach the Khasimpur jail until yesterday.

Jail authorities said the order of Kotwal's release would be sent to the Khasimpur jail sometime today.

From the jail, the two BCL leaders went to the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi and placed wreaths there. They were later admitted to the Shikdar Medical College.

During their seven-month detention, the BCL leaders were allegedly tortured as they were placed on remand.

The authorities had implicated the three BCL leaders one after another as the court granted them bail in the cases.

All the three leaders were elected to the BCL central committee during their imprisonment.

JCD

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admission test.

As the authorities declined, they went to the institute on September 18 and locked some rooms at the administrative building and the almirah at the principal's office where admission-related papers were kept.

They also hurled abuses at the principal and some teachers, sources at the institute said. The authorities then suspended the admission process.

A total of 260 students are to be admitted to the five departments of the institute as per the merit list prepared after admission test.

The admission test was held on September 8 and result announced on September 18.

However, no case has been lodged with police in this connection.

ICAB

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A team of experts from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), hired by the SEC, found the assets of the company to be only 10 per cent of the value shown in the audited balance sheet.

The audited balance sheet of the accused company -- Mark Bangladesh Shilpa and Engineering Ltd -- on June 30, 1998 showed assets worth Tk 52.36 crore while the BUET experts on physical verification of the company found assets worth Tk 5.35 crore only.

An investigation by the SEC had found that the company used its own funds for trading its own shares from the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) in fictitious names.

The SEC then lodged a criminal case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court on April 11, 2000 seeking warrant of arrest against the accused company's chairman, vice-chairman and a director.

The case is now pending with the High Court following a writ petition by the accused against a decision of the Sessions Judge's Court.

PM: 4000 medics

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Bangladesh in a neighbouring country alone, she urged the doctors to imagine how much development could be brought about in the country's health sector if the treatment expenditure in all the foreign countries could be spent here.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia reaffirmed her government's commitments to extend improved quality health service to the doorsteps of common people.

"We will set up a medical university which was one of our election commitments and implement Health Service Expansion Programmes to ensure quality healthcare at village and union levels. Setting up of a training institute for making health service and hospital management time-befitting is also under consideration," the prime minister told the physicians.

The government has also taken up programmes to fill the vacant posts at different levels, she said addressing the doctors and members of the newly-elected executive committee of Bangladesh Medical Association at the International Conference Centre yesterday afternoon.

The function was also addressed by Health Minister Dr Mosharrif Hossain, State Minister for Health Amanullah Aman, former advisor to the caretaker government Prof M A Majid, newly-elected president of BMA Prof M A Hadi, secretary general A Z M Zahid Hossain and other leaders. Among other BMA leaders were Dr Azizul Huq, Dr M A Qamrul Hassan and Dr Mosaddek Hossain.

State Minister for Textiles Mizanur Rahman Sinha and Prime Minister's Political Secretaries Haris Chowdhury and Mosaddek Ali were present.

The prime minister said despite inheriting a ravaged economy and indiscipline in social and administrative sectors, the four-party alliance government had taken pragmatic steps to remove anomalies and resolve accumulated problems in the health sector.

"We believe in work and not words," she told the doctors referring to the top priority laid on the health sector, after education, by the present government. She mentioned the budget allocation of Tk 3027 crore, about 14 per cent increase, for the health sector.

She mentioned the increase in the number of beds by more than 3,000 in the government hospitals, appointment of new doctors, ensuring regular promotion of the physicians and increase in the facilities for them.

Khaleda Zia said government efforts helped create more employment for doctors and health-service providers abroad.

The prime minister asked the doctors to serve humanity with sincerity and dedication -- an oath they take on completion of their studies.

She assured the doctors of fulfilling their legitimate demands in phases.

Khaleda Zia directed the health minister to set up a professional library at the BMA and also assured all necessary cooperation from the Prime Minister's Office in this regard.

The BMA leaders in their deliberations said the BNP government in the past as well as at present had always worked for the improvement of health service and development of the health sector.

PBCP men

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Police said Haider Ghazi was president of Jubo Dal Rudagarha union and a contractor by profession. He joined the outlawed PBCP last year as its financier.

On the other hand, Taj Mohammad was a Jubo League activist. He also joined PBCP along with Haider Ghazi the same year. Both of them were wanted in several criminal cases including murders, police further said.

Abdul Quddus was abducted by Minal group from Tolna Bazar at about 10:30 am yesterday.

Witnesses said Abdul Quddus was shot dead by his rivals in the outlawed PBCP at about 11:00 am in a paddy field about two kilometres from Tolna Bazar.

Quddus was also wanted in two murder cases, police sources said.

His dead body was taken away by the killers.

Combing operation was going on in Dumuria area to recover the body of Quddus and arrest the PBCP cadres till filing of this report at 6:00 pm yesterday.

Garment unit owners seek govt attention

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The garment unit owners at a discussion yesterday said the garment sector is on the verge of a collapse and needs the government's urgent attention for survival.

They also vowed to start an all out agitation to try to have their various demands met.

Several hundred garment factories have already been closed down due to worldwide economic crisis and the rest are to face the same fate very soon, they said.

The garment owners of one of the election platforms 'Forum' organised the discussion at a city hotel. Forum President Anisul Huque presided over the discussion.

Arafat's office shelled

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besieged his headquarters at the end of March this year.

The French foreign ministry described the Israeli assault as 'alarming' and called on the army "to do nothing that would harm the physical security of the president of the Palestinian authority and the ministers around him." France also called on Israel to immediately halt its siege.

But other world reaction was muted, with the United States delivering only the mildest of rebukes to its close ally.

"Israel has a right to defend itself and to deal with security," said White House spokesman Ari Fleischer. "But Israel also needs to bear in mind the consequences of action and Israel's stake in the development of reforms in the Palestinian institutions based on its progress."

The Palestinian leadership issued a statement calling on all factions to halt attacks against Israeli civilians, like the back-to-back bombings Wednesday and Thursday that sparked the Israeli onslaught.

And Arafat's Fatah movement warned the Jewish state against harming its chief, saying "no one will be immune" from retaliation if he were hurt.

But there was no immediate reaction from Israel, which denied top Palestinian officials permission to visit their besieged leader to discuss an end to the crisis.

The garment unit owners demanded regular release of government fund for cash incentives.

The speakers also blamed the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporter Association (BGMEA) and its present leadership for not presenting the actual picture of the garments sector and protecting the sector from destruction.

They observed that the present leadership failed to solve their problems and also tainted the image and degraded the status of the BGMEA.

They also alleged that they were not getting any sort of help from the BGMEA office regarding business and market access.

No more lip service, blind students of DU say

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"We don't need compassion, we want our rights; no more assurances, please. We want implementation of previous assurances," said Sarwar Hosain, a blind post-graduate in political science from Dhaka University.

Sarwar along with other blind unemployed graduates and post-graduates turned up at the National Press Club yesterday to speak about disparities and repeated breach of promises made by successive governments.

Dreestheen Bekar Oikya Parishad (DBOP), an organisation of the visually impaired, educated unemployed, told journalists that no government has arranged enough job openings for the blind since independence.

In a written statement, the organisation said as per 'Policy for Disabled 1995', 'Welfare Law for Disabled', 'Bangladesh Disabled Law 2001', and the prime minister's circular of March 7, educated and unemployed blind people are entitled to such facilities as 10 per cent reserved quota for the blind in government appointments, lifting of restriction on first and second class government jobs for the visually impaired and relaxation of age limit and experience for them.

Stating that employment opportunity for the blind is very limited, they said they even cannot enjoy the limited opportunity. Only one school in each of the 64 districts and five schools in five education boards offer jobs for them.

A Public Service Commission (PSC) circular on July 16 for permanent appointment of seven resource teachers under 'Blind Education Project' violated the rules regarding the disabled, they said.

According to the circular, all disabled excluding the blind would enjoy the facilities the government promised, they said.

They said they submitted a memorandum to the prime minister on August 1 pointing out the violation, and the Prime Minister's Office asked the offices concerned to take steps according to existing rules.

AL: Donors

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opposition activists are being subjected to torture in one hand and being blamed for the deteriorating law and order on the other hand. They will produce media reports and independent surveys at the meeting to prove that cadres of the ruling alliance are responsible for the deterioration in law and order.

At the September 16 meeting, the finance minister admitted that the government could not achieve much in improving law and order.

"It is true we have a lot to do regarding law and order. But, if any body creates a law and order situation deliberately, nobody can do anything regarding this," Saifur had said at the meeting without naming who were deliberately creating a law and order situation.

Corruption including the recent wheat purchase scam and alleged fall in quality of governance are likely to be focussed prominently at tomorrow's meeting. AL leaders are likely to put forward some suggestions for better governance in a nascent democracy and developing economy like Bangladesh.

The BNP-led four-party alliance government is preparing to celebrate its one year in power early next month. AL, the immediate past ruling party, will also evaluate the new government's performance in last one year, the sources added.

Local govt bodies

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The proposed law will soon be placed before the cabinet for final approval. Then, it will be tabled in the Jatiya Sangsad, said sources.

Besides, the Election Commission has proposed amendments to some laws on local government bodies and their elections and responsibilities.

The LGRD ministry has prepared a set of recommendations to make local bodies, especially the union parishad, effective, dynamic and more stable. The focus is to empower women representatives, whose responsibilities are not well defined and who are not involved in development activities or policymaking.

The government has decided to build a union parishad complex like the upazila parishad complex in each union to bring all offices and staffs to one place so that people can get all of them together. LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has recently told The Daily Star.

Steps have also been taken to define responsibility of women representatives, he added.

The LGRD ministry has recommended that one-third of development responsibility of one ward be provided to each woman member,

elected to three wards as per existing laws. Besides, responsibility of family planning and sanitation, among others, should be exclusively entrusted to them.

The ministry is also reviewing the zila parishad structure and observed that deferral of election, indiscipline and financial irregularities crippled the body.

The ministry has proposed three alternatives to revive the zila parishad -- election under the existing law, direct polls for zila parishad chairmen and appointment of a chairman from the MPs of the district concerned in rotation.

The first two alternatives need amendments to the laws and the third needs a constitutional amendment. A decision in this regard is yet to be taken.

Bappi murder

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float floating on the river near Kutubpur Gudara Ghat on August 14.

The investigation officer (IO) of the case submitted a charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM's) Court, Dhaka, on August 21 against five people, including Shipon.

Later, the case was transferred to the Special Court for trial.

US forces ready

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US military officials said Tuesday that US Marines would stage an amphibious landing in Kuwait during a month-long exercise scheduled for later in September.

"Eager Mace 02" will involve up to 2,000 Marines from an amphibious assault force led by the helicopter carrier USS Belleau Wood, the officials said.

"I don't believe our activity in the region has been characterised as anything that resembles what we've seen over the past 11 years," Franks said.

"We're not in the same situation that we have been in over the past 11 years. In fact we have increased the amount of training that we do with forces of friendly nations in the region, and I would anticipate that we continue to do that," he said.

Token strike

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Thursday, yesterday brought out a procession and handed over a memorandum to the authorities concerned demanding exemplary punishment to the killers.

The BMA also expressed its grave concern over the alleged dilly-dallying in arresting the killers.

Meanwhile, the hospital unit of the Bangladesh Sarkari Karmachari Samannaya Parishad in a statement expressed its grave concern at law enforcers' failure in arresting the killers Dr Aftab Hossain.

The statement also called upon higher authorities of police to transfer the case to CID or to Detective Branch.

The employees and nursing staff at the hospital arranged a quran khwai and doa mahfil for Aftab after Johar prayer yesterday. The hospital's director Brigadier General Mohammad Masud and principal of the medical college Dr Rezaul Karim also attended the programme.

Meanwhile, the three persons arrested in connection with the murder were placed on three days' remand on 18 September. Yesterday, they were produced before the court, which sent them to jail hajat again.

Police failed to find out any clue to the murder from them, sources said.

