



Foreign delegates to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference visit a stall of local clothes at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday.

Misappropriation of pension money

Railway faces severe repercussions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

The Bangladesh Railway faces severe repercussions in the wake of detection of misappropriation of railway funds amounting to Tk seven crore.

A high-powered investigation team recently found that the money was misappropriated from the family pension scheme during the period from January 2001 to July 2003.

A nexus of officials and employees of accounts section at Chittagong railway office and Kamalapur railway station are responsible for the embezzlement, sources said.

Over the past one month, the three-member probe committee scanned about one lakh official documents and quizzed the officials and employees of the accounts and pension sections.

Formed on August 28 this year, the committee was asked to submit its report on September 9.

But the committee took more time to complete the investigation, railway officials said.

"We hope to submit the report within a week as the investigation is almost complete," said Chief Traffic Manager Aftabuddin Ahmed, convener of the probe body.

"The committee has already detected the misappropriation of pension money, but we don't like to disclose everything at the

moment in the greater interest of the investigation," he said.

More than eight railway staffs were found responsible for the embezzlement, who drew the money by producing over 1000 copies of fake pension payment order (PPO), said MA Halim, a member of the committee.

"We found that there was a lack of supervision in the payment process. The PPOs were not properly scrutinised and pension audit code was not followed," Halim said. "In fact, the receipts which reached the Chittagong office were not examined at all."

"Had those receipts been examined after the payment, the corrupt practices would have been unveiled long ago," he said.

"We also found that a nexus is involved in the misappropriation of funds. This group engaged about 50 women to draw the money," Halim added.

"The photographs of those women with fake addresses are now lying at the office of payment," he said but declined to elaborate.

"The committee found that 3,000 prescribed forms of PPO have been missing from the accounts office here. These forms might have been used by the nexus," said an official of Chittagong railway, preferring anonymity.

"Recently, misappropriation of pension money of Tk 10 lakh was also detected in Comilla," he said.

"A big network is involved in such corrupt practices. Everything will come to light after the submission of the investigation report and anti-corruption officials are also waiting to file suit in this regard."

"The pension money were embezzled very tactfully as there was no pre-audit or post-audit system in the process of the payment," said Deputy Finance Advisor Sohel Ahmed who has been posted at the accounts and pension section of Chittagong railway office on deputation since August.

The receipts were also not examined after payment as there is a shortage of manpower in the accounts section here, he said.

SCB donates Tk 33.50 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) yesterday donated Tk 33.50 lakh to the Islamia Eye Hospital (IEH) to perform surgeries free of cost on the needy and underprivileged people.

Under the 'Seeing is Believing' initiatives, the SCB staff in Singapore raised the fund.

Euleen Goh, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the SCB in Singapore, handed over the cheque to

'Standard of primary education has deteriorated'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The standard of country's primary education has deteriorated, said the experts at a discussion yesterday.

They attributed over crowded classrooms, lack of proper supervision and poor teaching method as the main causes of deterioration.

The discussion was organised by the primary and mass education ministry to mark the completion of two years of the alliance government led by BNP at the LGED Bhaban at Agargaon in the city.

Prof Jahanara Begum, prime minister's advisor on primary and mass education, presided over the discussion.

Taking part in it, former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University Prof Moniruzzaman Miah said only 25 per cent students of class five appear at the primary scholarship examinations of which only 44 per cent come out successfully.

"This is sheer wastage of time, energy and money," he added.

Moniruzzaman Miah, who is also the chairman of Education Reform Commission.

Former vice-chancellor of Jahangirnagar University Prof Kazi Saleh Ahmed said many primary students cannot not attain the desired level of knowledge after completing their five-years of schooling.

Prof Jahanara Begum said the government has attached highest priority to primary and mass education. A separate ministry has been created to eradicate illiteracy from the country, she added.

The advisor blamed the teachers for their lack of commitments. She said no programme would be effective if the teachers are not committed to their profession.

Earlier, Prof Dr Tahmina Hossain, secretary of the primary and mass education ministry, presented a paper on the achievement of the alliance government in this sector during the last two years.

The secretary said under the Primary Education Development Programme-2, taken at an estimated cost of Tk 4,933 crore, the government will appoint 35,000 teachers, 1,000 assistant education officers, 128 computer operators, 216 PTI instructors, and 397 assistant district education officers.

Tahmina Hossain said under the programme, the government will also build 30,000 new class rooms, 15,000 latrines for women teachers, 8 lakh pairs of high and low benches and distribute 37.26 crore books free of cost among the children.

Former chairman of Public Service Commission Al Hossain also took part in the discussion.

Journalist Bashira Islam dead

BSS, Dhaka

Bashira Islam, the feature editor of the Daily Sangbad, died at her Kalabagan residence here yesterday at the age of 35.

Hospital and family sources said Bashira fell unconscious yesterday morning apparently after taking some sleeping pills. She was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared her dead.

Bashira, also a poet and former executive committee member of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), left behind her husband, five daughters, parents and a host of colleagues, admirers and relatives to mourn her death.

She will be buried at Azimpur Graveyard after namaz-e-janaza after Zohr prayers today.

Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) expressed deep shock at the death of Bashira.

In a joint condolence message, BFUJ President Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and Secretary General Akhtar Ahmed Khan and DUJ President Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan and General Secretary Omar Faruque prayed for peace of the departed soul and conveyed heartfelt sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

Sufferings of patients mount as student nurses continue strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sufferings of the patients at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital (SSMCH) mount as the third day of the indefinite strike enforced by the student nurses passed yesterday.

The Bangladesh Unemployed Diploma Nurses Association (BUDNA) and the Bangladesh Diploma Student Nurses Association (BDNSA) have enforced the strike since October 7 to protest the move to appoint in government hospitals 177 nurses, who passed from private nursing institutes.

The striking nurses locked the matron office at DMCH to prevent about 40 newly recruited nurses from joining their services when they came to the hospital yesterday.

The government has recently finalised appointment of 1,971 nurses in different hospitals and 177 of them have passed from private

nursing institutes, the nurses claimed.

In the morning, more than 1,000 unemployed and student nurses took out a procession in the city. But police intercepted it near Doel Chatter on the Dhaka University campus at about 12:30pm as the demonstrators were marching towards the office of the Directorate of Nursing Service at Motijheel.

Following a brief scuffle with the police, the agitating nurses staged a sit-in there, disrupting traffic movement for about two hours.

Meanwhile, different organisations and individuals condemned the Wednesday's police attack on the rally of striking nurses.

They demanded fair investigation into the incident and action against those responsible for the attack.

The Karmajibi Nari, an organisation of the working women, and the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights are

among the organisations that condemned the attack.

In a statement, Advocate Abed Raza also condemned the attack.

Khaleda greets Palestine PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday felicitated Ahmed Qorei for his appointment as the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine.

"It is my firm conviction that we will be able to work together to further strengthen and consolidate the brotherly relations that so happily exist between Bangladesh and Palestine", Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said in a message to Ahmed Qorei.

"May I take this opportunity to reiterate our total solidarity and unflinching support to the Palestine brethren in their just struggle for an independent state with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital", she said.



British MP Cheryl Gillan speaks at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association workshop on 'Do we have adequate peacekeeping mechanisms for preserving world order' at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday.



Euleen Goh, CEO of Standard Chartered Bank in Singapore, and David Fletcher, CEO of the bank in Bangladesh, hand over a cheque to Mirza Ali Behrouze Ispahani, chairman of the Islamia Eye Hospital, yesterday.