

463 recruited by AL govt thru' 'nepotism'

Says JS body chairman on Open University

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 463 persons were recruited through irregularities and nepotism by the then Awami League government, according to Shamsul Alam Praminik, chairman of the Jatiya Sangsad committee on the education ministry.

"Financial anomalies were rampant at the university that turned it into a failed institution," Shamsul told newsperson emerging from the parliamentary standing committee meeting yesterday.

Owing to corruption and irregularities during the previous government, Open University failed to meet its aim and live up to people's expectations after 11 years of its founding, the committee observed yesterday, but expressed satisfaction with the current running of the university.

The committee, dominated by the ruling BNP lawmakers, found no irregularities at present in the activities of the university.

"We have no allegations against the present performance of the university authorities. The vice-chancellor briefed the committee on the day-to-day running of the university," the committee chairman added.

The committee asked the univer-

sity authorities to inquire if there were any irregularities in the recruitment and purchase process during the previous government.

Open University was set up in 1992 to remove illiteracy from the adult population. At present, 82 teachers, 270 officers, 268 third-class officials and 222 fourth-class employees are working at the university.

Vice-chancellor Dr Ershadul Bari told the meeting that the university was facing difficulties due to shortage of logistics. The VC proposed to set up a satellite TV channel for the university to conduct its educational activities. He also sought Tk 10 crore for building its infrastructure.

Chairman of the University Grants Commission, Dr Asaduzzaman, said the universities should maintain balanced manpower distribution and proper financial allocation in different sectors.

The committee asked the National University authorities to submit a report at the next meeting to clarify the reason for its failure to publish examination results in time.

Shamsul presided while committee members and officials concerned were present at the meeting.

US bolsters security

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Ridge said Monday. "So ultimately a denial of access is the leverage that you have."

Ridge also said the nation would remain at orange alert through the New Year's holiday and perhaps beyond. "We are as concerned today as we were yesterday," he said. "We'll be concerned as much this week as we were last week."

The new directive Ridge outlined Monday requires selected international flights that enter US airspace to carry an armed law enforcement officer aboard. The Homeland Security Department will require such officers on airplanes where intelligence information leads to a specific concern about that flight.

For months, US security officials have feared that al-Qaeda operatives would again hijack planes to use them as missiles. The most recent concerns centered not on domestic passenger flights, but on airliners or cargo planes that take off from overseas and cross over US airspace, either on their way to a US airport or to a foreign one.

American security officials will "be working with our aviation partners internationally to ensure that the kinds of protective measures we have requested actually" are implemented, Ridge said.

The Bush administration raised the terrorism alert level to orange, or high, on Dec. 21, citing nonspecific but credible threats of an imminent terrorist attack.

Air France canceled six flights between Paris and Los Angeles on Wednesday and Thursday, after security discussions between US and French officials.

French Transport Ministry spokesman Olivier Mousson said Monday that US security agents have inspected security at French airports since the United States raised its alert level.

Aviation security experts said the announcement marks a significant change in that, up until now, international security guidelines have been voluntary.

"In the past, no country has ever tried to impose on other countries any measures of aviation security," said Rafi Ron, president of New Age

Security Solutions, a Washington-based consultancy, and the former security director for the Israeli Airport Authority.

Ron predicted that despite concerns about armed air marshals expressed by British pilots and others, the measure will be enforced without much resistance because of the huge importance of the US market to foreign carriers.

The next logical step will be for the international community to push for global aviation security standards, including mandated reinforced cockpit doors and better airport perimeter defenses.

Homeland Security officials said governments frequently set security and other standards for planes bound for their airspace.

Homeland Security reviews the passenger and crew manifests of all planes bound for US airspace, generally after the plane has taken off, because passenger lists are usually finalised only minutes before the plane taxis from the gate, department spokesman Dennis Murphy said.

Some passenger lists are reviewed beforehand, he said.

I can't think of a public rally at Feni without Hazari: Tofail

UNB, Feni

Awami League central leader Tofail Ahmed speaking in favour of Joynal Hazari at a public meeting here yesterday said, "I cannot think of a public meeting in Feni without Hazari."

Branded as godfather of criminals by his political opponents, Hazari had been relieved from the post of district Awami League general secretary by the party high command.

Former lawmaker Hazari, now a fugitive, has been sentenced to jail for life in an arms case. He also faces about half a dozen criminal cases, including murder.

The meeting in front of Shaheed Minar in the afternoon was addressed, among others, by Mosharraf Hossain Hazari, who was also expelled from the Awami League.

Tofail asked the party workers to prepare for enforcing hartal on January 3 and for a grand rally on January 10 in Dhaka.

Accused in Kazi Aref murder case shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kusthia

An accused in the murder of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) leader Kazi Arif Ahmed was shot dead by unidentified assailants at Amla Bazar in Mirpur upazila in the district last night.

Basir Uddin Kachi, 45, also a JSD leader and son of late Abdur Razzak of village Aburi in the upazila, was accused in at least seven murder cases, police said. Kachi came under attack while he was playing badminton near Amla Bazar at about 8:25pm.

Quoting witnesses, police said a gang of 15 masked armed men swooped on Kachi and dragged him from the playground to a place where they shot him in the chest, head and abdomen point blank. Five bullets pierced his body leaving him dead on the spot.

The incident occurred within 50 yards off Amla Police camp. Police went to the spot after about half an hour and recovered the body.

No details could be known about the killing immediately. Police said Kachi surrendered in 1999 taking advantage of a general amnesty and was enlarged on bail three months ago.

AL turns to hartal

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destruction when in opposition.

Tens of thousands of people from far and wide converged at the meeting, presided over by district BNP President Chowdhury Islam Nayan.

Referring to the two terms of the AL rules, the PM told the rally the money that it borrowed then from foreign countries and donor agencies were never utilised for the country or the people. "They looted the money and placed the burden of loans on the people. We are now repaying the loan borrowed by the AL," she alleged.

The prime minister claimed her alliance government has successfully rescued and stabilised the economy through right measures and tireless efforts. "Bangladesh achieved a tremendous development in the last two years and would continue to do so in the next three years. People have already started getting the benefits of our development programmes," she observed.

But, the opposition does not want to allow the government to continue rendering these services to the nation in peace, she alleged, adding, "They obstructed us in the past and now again are trying to do so."

Khaleda also blamed the AL for engaging in anti-Bangladesh campaign abroad. They are trying to portray Bangladesh as a country of communalism and extremism, she stated. But, Bangladesh has always been a country of communal harmony, people of this country are

Harkatul Jihad

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4 handed down the verdict in a crowded courtroom in absence of the Islamist outfit leader, popularly known as Abul Kalam, and acquitted five others -- Mehedi Hassan, Hasmat Ali Kazi, Mofizur Rahman, Shah Newaz and Mahmud Azahar.

In sentencing, the judge said police seized a huge haul of bomb-making materials and a foreign-made revolver from Hannan's rented house in Hemangan residential neighbourhood in Gopalganj on July 24, 2000.

Aminur Rahman, the then officer-in-charge of Gopalganj Police Station, filed an arms case against Hannan and Hasmat, the homeowner.

The Criminal Investigation Department pressed charges against Hannan and five others on November 2, 2001 and the court framed charges against them on July 1, 2001.

The case was transferred to the tribunal on November 13 this year and 21 prosecution witnesses were cross-examined during the trial completed in 34 workings.

Special Public Prosecutor Harun-or-Rashid Khan and advocates Sahara Khatun, Abdullah Abu, Abdur Rahman Howlader and Rasheda Parvin appeared for the state.

Police linked Hannan to the seizure of a powerful timing device in a metallic container weighing 76kg, secreted underground only 50 feet from the rostrum for a rally of Kotailpara residents Hasina was scheduled to address on July 21, 2000.

Police filed another case against Hannan with Kotailpara Police Station under the Explosives Substances Act, as they believed the device was part of a bid to assassinate Hasina.

25 hurt

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Shechchhasebak League, Awami Krishak League and Jatiya Sramik League were among the nearly 4,000 participants in the procession.

The duty officer at Mirpur Police Station said last night police went into action as the AL loyalists hurled stones at them and also created traffic congestion in the area.

Police filed a case accusing Kamal Majumder and 49 AL activists of assault on them.

Hasina

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Lieutenant General Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, Hasina's Personal Secretary Mohammad Nazrul Islam Khan requested the Army Headquarters to make necessary arrangements for the programme.

Hasina with other AL central leaders wished to pay their homage either at Zia International Airport when the bodies would be flown in or at any other convenient place and time, the letter said.

The principal staff officer to the army chief would communicate the army headquarters' response to the opposition leader's letter this morning, Nazrul told The Daily Star last night.

A special UN aircraft, carrying the bodies of army peacekeepers, arrives in Dhaka today. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is scheduled to receive the bodies at the airport.

Pollution control

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enlisted automobile workshops will be trained by experts to properly identify and correct emission problems. Foreign experts might also be hired for the programme if necessary," said a DTBC official.

"Diesel- and petrol-run vehicles are the biggest polluters and the workshop will teach proper ways to handle such vehicles," he added.

Most automobile workshops in the city do not have the equipment to identify the factors causing harmful emissions.

Participant at the workshops will be awarded certificates at the end of the training programme.

upazilas would be brought under digital telephone network. She also promised to construct new roads and bridges and dredge the river Kapataksha.

She called upon the people to rally under the banner of the BNP for peace, progress, development and production and build strong resistance against the 'negative politics' of the AL. The PM also expressed determination to root out crime and corruption from the country.

City road accidents kill 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were killed in as many road accidents at Farmgate and Nakhalpara in Tejgaon yesterday.

A yellow taxicab hit a CNG auto-rickshaw near Nakhalpara Drum Factory at about 6:30am and seriously injured Morshedul Hasan, 35, passenger of the auto-rickshaw, sources said.

He died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), few minutes after he was admitted there, sources added.

In the other incident, a passenger bus knocked down an unidentified man near Farmgate at about 10:00am, killing him on the spot.

6 ljtema devotees die in B'baria road accident

UNB, B'baria

Six people died and 40 others were injured when a bus carrying the homebound devotees from the Biswa ljtema plunged into a road-side ditch at Budhonti on the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway early yesterday.

Police said the Chhatak-bound bus from Tongi with the devotees aboard drove into the ditch at about 6:00am, killing six on the spot and injuring 40 others.

Five of the dead are Tajuddin, 60, Basiruddin, 55, Suruj Ali, 65, Aziruddin (age unknown), and bus driver Abdul, 25. Identity of another aged about 70 also could not be known.

Police and firefighters from Brahmanbaria rushed to the spot and sent the injured to sadar hospital.

India, Myanmar, Thailand run survey on mega highway project

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

India, Myanmar and Thailand have conducted a survey in New Delhi on December 23 for the construction of a 1,360-km long highway connecting the three countries to expand trade, tourism and people-to-people contact.

A joint ministerial meeting reviewed the progress the project has so far made, said a press release of High Commission of India.

The ministers underscored greater connectivity as a means of strengthening regional economic growth and integration of mutual relations.

The meeting discussed route alignment of the highway as recommended by the technical taskforce. Construction of the highway will be complete in three phases.

India agreed to consider a line of credit and finance the construction of Chaungma-Yinnabin (30 km) and Lingadaw-Letsgan-Pakokku (48 km), upgradation of Uinmabin-Pale-ugradaw (50 km) and Bagan-Meiktila (132 km) segments of the highway.

Thailand has agreed to finance Thaton-Hpa-an-Kawkarai (136 km) and the Kawkarai-Myawaddy (62 km) sections.

Myanmar agreed to finance constructions of all weather intermediate lane approach roads at both ends from Pakokku to Bagan and reconstruction of the weak bridges.

The meeting also decided to finalise the reports on various segments at the earliest to formulate finance proposals.

External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha represented India, while foreign ministers of Myanmar U Win Aung and Surakiat Sathirathai of Thailand represented their countries.

Musharraf

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war on terror, has said it supported the amendments to end a political deadlock that had paralysed both houses of parliament since last year's election.

The main opposition, Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD), said Islamic parties had once again proved themselves to be allies of the military, as they have often been in the past.

"It is a black day in Pakistan's history because parliament has circumvented its own powers," Senator Raza Rabbani, a senior ARD leader, told Reuters.

"The parliament, prime minister and the cabinet have surrendered their powers to a single man," he said.

The government would like the matter resolved ahead of a key regional summit to be held in Islamabad starting on Sunday. The summit will bring together the leaders of seven South Asian nations, including India. It is seen as an historic opportunity for Pakistan and India to cement recent peace overtures.

Another tremor

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seismic observatory centre at Arambagh in the city.

A 25-second moderate quake, measuring 5.41 on the Richter scale, shook the port city and its adjoining area at 12:58 hours 43 seconds on Monday.

Health workers

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officials have already visited Australia, New Zealand, USA, UK and some other countries reportedly for in-service training, spending about Tk 11 crore.

The health directorate said the funds for the trips were released much earlier and had nothing to do with the OPs.

Poush Mela

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Batamul like previous years.

In a press release, Dr Anisuzzaman, convener of the PMUP, organiser of the fair, termed the decision illogical, saying the fair never created any noise pollution.

The fair has become popular in the last five years, the press release added.

Among others, poet Shamsur Rahman, singer Kalim Sharafi, painter Quaiyum Chowdhury, actor and politician Asaduzzaman Noor, journalist Wahidul Haq and playwright Mamunur Rashid signed it.

Barrister Salma Sobhan

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Salma Rasheeda Akhtar Banu, known as Salma Sobhan, was born on August 11, 1937. Her father Md. Ikramullah was the first foreign secretary of Pakistan and mother Begum Shaista Ikramullah, one of the first women lawmakers in Pakistan, served as Pakistan ambassador to Morocco.

Salma was educated at Westonbirt School in England and studied law at Girton College, Cambridge, in 1958. She was called to the Bar from Lincoln's Inn in 1959 and became one of Pakistan's first women barristers.

She started her career as a legal assistant with M/S Surridge & Beecheno from 1959 to 1961 in Karachi. She came to Dhaka after her marriage with Prof Sobhan in 1962.

Salma taught law at Dhaka University from 1962 to 1981. She lost her eldest son Taimur in an accident in 1981.

She worked with Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (Bilia) from 1981 to 1988, and served as editor of the Supreme Court Law Reports (SCLR) for several years.

In 1982, she co-founded the human rights organisation, Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK), and was its first executive director until her retirement in 2001.

Salma also helped establish Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (Blast) and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (Brac).

She was on the boards of many organisations working on human rights and social justice including Brac, Blast, Bilia, the international network

US winds down post-war Afghan operation

REUTERS, Kabul

US-led forces have ended their largest post-war operation in Afghanistan saying they have reduced the threat from militants during a key constitutional debate in Kabul.

A US military statement Tuesday made no mention of the deaths of 15 children in a series of botched raids around the start of "Operation Avalanche," in which 2,000 troops fanned out across southern and eastern provinces.

The level of attacks by remnants of the ousted Taliban and its militant allies dropped during three weeks of the operation, but it did not prevent deadly raids in the south and east or a suicide bomb in Kabul killing five security officials.

The statement said the operation had ensured the constitutional loya jirga, or Grand Assembly, was not disrupted and that the opening of a resurfaced highway between Kabul and Kandahar was not delayed.

Iran quake

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bricks not leave the air pockets typical of modern concrete structures but their dust would have suffocated survivors, experts said.

Two lynched

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Nazmul was found near Lutful Tower in Madhya Badda around midnight. His uncle Mozammel Haq, a constable of Sabujbagh Police Station, took him to the DMCH where the victim was declared dead.

Earlier around 10:00pm, Khilgaon Police found Kajal, a grocer, near Hajipara Petrol Pump in Khilgaon and rushed him to the DMCH where he died about four hours later.

"Nazmul left my house at Madhya Badda, around 11:00am Monday to join the Biswa ljtema at Tongi," said Mozammel Haq.

Kajal's uncle Abdus Salam identified his nephew's body at the DMCH yesterday.

Police could not say anything about the motive behind the lynching. No case was filed till the filing of this report late last night.

Another source quoting eyewitnesses said a group of men lynched the two in front of the filling station at Hajipara, saying they were muggers, but police said neither had any criminal records.

Reviving a lost culture

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northeast of Dhaka.

"We want to resurrect the Garo people," Sanjib Drong, a Garo activist, says. "We want to find them together with our lost culture. And so, we decided to hold Wanna this year."

But that was not an easy job. The rituals are long forgotten. The people who had ever witnessed it are all gone. Gone are even traditional ornaments and musical instruments.

"Christianity had done the culture in," Sanjib says. "When the fathers came to convert us, they had little regards for our culture. They asked us to change our way of life and we followed them."

"But we need to get back to our culture," says Haripada Marak, one of the eldest villagers. With hearing ability going down and bifocals getting thicker, some say, he is well past 90. "We should not forget we are Garos. We should not forget the spirits of our forefathers. It's good the village youths are organising it."

The Garos, simple as they are, were fierce warriors -- the reason even the British rulers wanted to tame them by tramping their culture.

"We had the last Wanna in Don Barga village," says Haripada. "But then the British sent police on elephants and stopped the function."

But on December 29, the mood at

Women Living under Muslim Laws and UNRISD, Geneva.

In 2001, Salma was honoured by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in New York for her contribution to protecting human rights.

Her major publications are Legal Status of Women in Bangladesh, 1975, Peasants Perception of Law, 1981 and No Better Option-Women Industrial Workers (co-authored), 1988.

"She was a wonderfully warm person, with a great sense of humour," said Dr Hamida Hossain of ASK. "She had a lot of friends all over the world and used to spend time mailing to them. She was very keen in swimming and loved sight-seeing," she added.

"This star enthusiast woman had kept interest in politics, but had no desire to be a politician," said Val Arnold-Forster, a journalist and a family friend who knew her since 1947.

Salma left behind her husband Prof Sobhan, sons Babar and Zafar, brother Enam and sisters Naz and Sarvath.

Her namaz-e-janaza will be held at Gulshan Central Mosque today after Zohr prayers.

Quikhwani for Salma will be held at her Gulshan residence on January 2 after Asr prayers.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock at the death of Salma Sobhan.

Brac, Odhikar, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, Kamajibi Nari, Nagarik Uddog, ASK also mourned.

New Year's Eve

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Avenue to reach Gulshan, Banani and Bandhara while commuters in cars will be let into Dhaka University through Shahbagh crossing from 8:00pm to 4:00am, said a press release signed by MPE Commissioner Ashrafur Huda.

Although people will be able to use any points to leave, all other roads leading to the areas will be closed, it said.

Fire brigade vehicles, ambulances and other emergency services will be kept out of the restriction, it added.

Law enforcers will be empowered to search any car at Kemal Ataturk Avenue and Shahbagh crossing entry points.

About 3,000 police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles personnel will be deployed at 41 points in the capital during the early hours of the New Year, police sources said.

Cold wave

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The lowest temperature of 9 degrees Celsius was recorded at Chuadanga yesterday.

The lowest temperature in Dhaka was 13.2 degrees Celsius and the highest at 24 degrees.

The Met Office forecast for today and tomorrow said the sky would remain overcast in most parts of the country.

Navigability on river routes may be impaired by mild to thick fog, the forecast said, asking vessels to exercise caution.

UNB reports: Diarrhoea and pneumonia claimed six lives in the district during the last seven days till yesterday.

Sources in the District Civil Surgeon's Office said Fatema Begum, 48, of Khetlal upazila, Farzana Begum, 14, of Akkelpur upazila and Sathi, 8, of Kalai upazila died of diarrhoea and two babies, Papri and Mimma, of Panchbibi upazila and Rupali, 5, of Sadar upazila died of pneumonia.

Some, 1078 people were affected and five died of diarrhoea during the last one month. Besides, 296 people were affected and nine children died of pneumonia during the same period, the sources added.

Our Pabna Correspondent adds: Three aged persons died of severe cold and hundreds of others are suffering from different cold-related diseases in most parts of the district in the last three days.

The deceased were Sabura Khatun, 60, of Hasupur village under Chatmohor upazila and Ali Moshai, 65, of Majpara and Azur Prang of Doparkol village under Sadar upazila.

Many of the affected have been admitted to different hospitals in the district.