

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 Pramnik, 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 newscaster 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 Baru 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 non-specific 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.

Air 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 finalized 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 Joyon Hazari at a public meeting here yesterday said, "I cannot think of a public meeting 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, Kushtia

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

Babar Uddin Kachi, 45, also a JSD leader and son of late Abdu Razzaq 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 of 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.

The new facility will be available round the clock but subscribers might initially face some inconveniences due to congestion.

International call charges slashed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday slashed to Tk 7.50 from Tk 40 a minute the charges for both fixed and mobile telephone to US and Canada.

The reduced rate will also apply to fixed telephone calls to eight countries – UK, France, Italy, Germany, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong – in phases.

However, per minute charge for mobile phone calls to UK, Australia, France, Italy and Germany will be Tk 18.

Users of both ISD (international subscribers' dialing) and NWD (nation-wide dialing) telephones will enjoy the reduced charges.

The NWD telephone users will be able to make ISD calls at the reduced rate through direct dialing using the new code 012 instead of 00.

Initially, the reduced rate is applicable to users in Dhaka only and then in the entire country in two to three months, said Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Huq.

He introduced the reduced charge facility making a phone call to S Hasan Ahmed, Bangladesh ambassador to US.

The new facility will be available round the clock but subscribers might initially face some inconveniences due to congestion.

The government has a plan to extend the reduced rates also to other Saarc countries, the minister told a questioner.

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 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

highly moderate and respect all religions, she said.

"In the eyes of Bangladesh and the BNP, believers of all faiths are equal, all are Bangladeshis," she maintained, adding, "It is the Awami League which frequently use the term 'minority'. People of other religions, particularly the Hindus, were repressed only when the Awami League was in power. They looted the properties of Hindus then."

In her 35-minute speech, Khaleda listed the various development initiatives of her government, highlighting the economic, educational and infrastructure developments and self-employment programmes. She mentioned that her government allocated Tk 300 crore as agricultural subsidy and announced more subsidies for the farmers for purchasing seeds, fertiliser and electricity to further boost the country's agricultural production.

Turning to Jessore, she said most of the development programmes in this southwestern district were taken up during the BNP regime, with the direct initiatives of the current information minister, Tariqul Islam.

The previous government of AL harassed Tariqul through filing various 'false' cases, including the one related to the Uidchi bomb blast, to kill his political career, Khaleda alleged.

Responding to various demands put forward by Tariqul, the prime minister said a science and technology university would be set up in Jessore soon. Besides, all of its

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

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.

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 Abu Kalam, and acquitted five others – Mehedi Hassan, Hasmat Ali Kazi, Mofzur Rahman, Shah Newaz and Mahmud Azhar.

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.

Amirul Rahman, the then officer-in-charge of Gopalganj Police Station, filed an arms case 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 workdays.

Special Public Prosecutor Harunor-Rashid Khan and advocates Sahara Khatun, Abdullah Abu, Abdur Rahim, 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 Kotalipara residents. Hasina was scheduled to address on July 21, 2000.

Police filed another case against Hannan with Kotalipara 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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Shechhasebak 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 Mashud 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.

Exports, imports

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prepared by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), an independent think-tank.

Presenting the 'Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD)', CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya said the main challenge of the government for the next six months will be how it handles the macro-economy as its management is currently going through an interesting period.

It is the non-economic factors relating to poor governance, high degree of corruption and weak law and order that are creating serious drawbacks for investment, he said. These are the factors which can largely explain the mismatch between the strong macro-economic fundamentals of Bangladesh and low confidence of investors.

Debapriya wondered, "The trigger to alleviating such a situation lies more within the domain of politics rather than in economics. Will the underlying political economy of Bangladesh continue to arrest its development prospects and to perpetuate poverty and inequality?"

The IRBD reported a 9.74 percent revenue growth during the July-November period, resulting in almost the full realisation of the temporal target. But, in the backdrop of high import growth in recent months, non-fulfillment of targets (around 4.00 percent shortfall) for collection of import duty comes as a surprise, it noted.

The government paid back more to the banking system than it had borrowed in the four months from July to October, the CPD executive director noted. "The net government borrowing during the period declined by 5.8 percent, notwithstanding a 9.8 percent net increase in non-bank borrowing."

Domestic credit recorded a net increase of 3.54 percent during the same period, compared to 2.93 percent during the corresponding period in the previous year, he added. "This increase is largely attributable to the higher inflow to the private sector."

In the backdrop of the slowdown in growth of industrial term loans in the recent years, Debapriya said the disbursement record for July-September 2003 was quite impressive – Tk 1,423 crores, which shows more than a 106 percent growth against a net outflow during the corresponding period of FY03.

Compared to only 4.5 percent growth in FY03, capital machinery import has exhibited a robust rise of about 49 percent and industrial raw materials went up by 27 percent during the first quarter of FY04, he mentioned.

On the other