

# Installation of gas pipelines

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"There is no official monitoring of the job," a Petrobangla source said.

The contractors are also allegedly giving 12.5 percent of the 'undue profit' to young leaders of a certain Bhaban so that no official investigation can stop them, an insider said.

An investigation of The Daily Star reveals that corruption in the project cropped up at its inception.

When Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd took up the BBARGP in 1997 and got the project including the pipe-laying component approved at Tk 126 crore, corruption was there.

"When designing the project, Titas high officials deliberately entered miscalculation in it that Ecneec (Executive Committee of National Economic Council) could not understand," said a Petrobangla high official who probed the corruption.

The BBARGP project has three components. The first component involves Tk 30 crore along with 10 percent contingency cost for construction of the two pipelines. It also spends Tk 70 crore on purchase of pipes, fittings and other construction tools and another Tk 26 crore on logistics.

It was supposed to be complete in 2002.

Soon after the BBARGP got clearance from Ecneec, the Titas board in 1999 revised the cost of all three project components keeping the total cost at the approved amount of Tk 126 crore, documents show.

"The Titas board said there was a mistake in estimating the purchase of pipes and awarding the contracts.

It said the project should be implemented 'mechanically' instead of doing it manually to ensure a high quality.

The logic gave the Titas board a chance to raise the pipeline installation cost to Tk 60 crore from Tk 30 crore and slash the material procurement cost to Tk 40 crore from Tk 70 crore.

It said Titas made a mistake in estimating the procurement cost.

The Titas board informed the Petrobangla of the 'readjustment' and as one of the beneficiaries of the

process was a high official of Petrobangla, it got the nod, sources alleged.

Petrobangla told Titas that the 'revised project' could be authorised later as it was a common practice with different government agencies.

The Titas board then imposed some conditions on the pipeline bid to ensure that only the companies of its choice get the job.

The three conditions that limited participation in the tender to only nine companies are: the contractors must ensure 'internal line-up of the pipeline through clamp-welding', the pipelines will be laid using 'side-boom' and the contractors must have experience of laying pipelines on riverbeds using dredgers.

The nine companies then joined hands and submitted proposals in both the pipeline schemes. But only three of them in each bid quoted price while the six stated, "no price quote". This gave the project a cosmetic competitive look.

The contracts for laying the 101 km pipeline went to Business King and the 109 km to Don Construction.

Business King asked for a cost of Tk 34 crore while Don sought Tk 28 crore, although Don's job was more complicated than the King's.

Shahidul Islam, who joined as the energy secretary at the stage, also became the ex officio chief of the Titas Board.

Sources allege that Titas officials tricked Shahidul into approving the tenders keeping him in the dark about the inconsistencies. But when someone alerted the secretary about the tender flaws, he recalled the files.

Upon a primary scrutiny, he asked King to explain why its proposed cost was higher than Don's. King instantly lowered its price by 7 crore, saying it could do the job at a lower price.

Shahidul formed a committee with a joint secretary as its chief to probe into the allegations of irregularities in the tender and pricing process and the committee pointed fingers at four Titas officials and recommended re-tendering after dropping the over-priced project.

The probe committee also recommended punitive measures

against three of the Titas officials and their exclusion from future tender planning.

But the state minister calmed the situation by issuing warning letters to the contractors, but gave them the green light to go ahead with the job. The Titas trio went scot-free.

The state minister denied any role in the corruption and claimed that the project was not overpriced.

"Tk 30 crore is an unrealistic estimate for this project," Mosharrarf said, adding, "There is no corruption in it."

"It's true I did not allow re-tendering," Mosharrarf added, "Because it would have increased the project cost further."

On his role after the ministry's investigation found wrongdoing, he said: "The probe was initiated by the secretary because of inconsistency in the prices quoted by two bidders. After the investigation, the bidder in question lowered the quote by Tk 7 crore."

Titas Managing Director M Abdullah also denied the allegations of corruption.

"This project was processed through the ministry and Ecneec. There is no scope for corruption," He asked The Daily Star to talk to Mahbubur Rahman, general manager (planning) of Titas, but the newspaper could not reach him despite several efforts on two days.

"We are aware of the allegations of corruption in this project," said Petrobangla Chairman MR Osmani, adding: "The pipelines are being laid manually sidestepping the mechanical condition."

He said a three-member Petrobangla committee was probing the allegations. "No corruption will go unchallenged."

The pipelines are supposed to be laid by March-April.

"Since October, they are working on the project. But you will not see anyone to ensure that the pipelines are being laid mechanically. The rivers are dry and there is no dredger. The pipelines are being laid manually with utter neglect," said a source in the GTCL.

# Anti-Ahmadiyya

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randum to the Speaker on January 26.

It will submit memos to deputy commissioners of all districts within the next week and conduct a signature campaign till February 29 in support of their 11-point demand. They will submit the collected signatures to the prime minister and home minister at a later date.

Later, they will stage a sit-in at the secretariat on March 17 if the government fails to meet their demands by the end of February.

The IMTKNB President and Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, Obaidul Haq chaired the conference participated by anti-Ahmadiyya zealots from across the country.

Speakers not only called the Ahmadiyyas kaffirs but also vowed to demolish all Ahmadiyya mosques, saying they cannot call their places of worship mosques.

"Defying the basic beliefs of Islam, you (Ahmadiyyas) cannot call yourselves Muslims and associate yourselves with any Islamic terminology," said Chamonnai pir and President of Islamic Shashantantra Andolon Sayed Fazlul Karim.

Mahmudul Hasan Mamtazi, amir of Hifazate Khatme Nabuwat Andolon (HKNA), an agitating anti-Ahmadiyya alliance, said, "If they call themselves Muslims anymore, we will eliminate them from the land."

Chairman of a faction of the IOJ Shaikhul Hadith Azizul Haq said,

"We are ready to sacrifice our lives to evict them."

An IMTKNB leader of Brahmanbaria Saidur Rahman asked the participants to call for banning the publications of Hindu and Christian communities.

Obaidul Haq said, "We will have no complain if the Ahmadiyyas live in the country identifying themselves as a minority community like the followers of other religions."

Amini and Shaikhul Hadith Azizul Haq, Chamonnai pir Sayed Fazlul Karim and Obaidul Haq sat together on the stage despite having strong differences of opinion, even rival Amini and Shaikhul Hadith both of whom claimed themselves IOJ chairmen. However, all admitted they are united in the anti-Ahmadiyya issue.

While the anti-Ahmadiyya grand conference was going on at the Paltan Maidan, the three-day annual conference of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh (AMJB) was inaugurated at their central office at Bakshibazar yesterday.

National Amir of the AMJB Mobassherur Rahman inaugurated the conference also attended by leaders of different socio-political and cultural organisations, professionals and human rights activists including Rashed Khan Menon, Mujahidul Islam Selim, Moimuddin Khan Badal, Justice KM Sobhan, Journalist Shahriar Kabir, Dr Kazi Nurul Islam, Barrister Sara Hossain, Dr Faustina Pereira and Advocate Sultana Kamal.

# Man bailed out

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officials did not hear him and filed the case to harass him," said the lawyer, who submitted the law-maker's recommendation letter for the accused.

The letter pegged Babul as a political aide and famous businessman who came from the lawmaker's constituency.

"I believe he was not involved in activities subversive to the state. It is also to be noted that he wanted to pay tax for the goods he brought with him. But the customs officials did not listen to him," the law-maker said in the letter, guaranteeing that the accused would pay the tax on the goods, if he was released on bail.

Section 25 B (1) of the Special Powers Act says: "Whoever, in breach of any prohibition or restriction imposed by or under any law for the time being in force, or evading payment of customs duties or taxes, leviable thereon under any law for the time being in force, or brings into Bangladesh any goods, shall be punishable with death, or with imprisonment for life, or with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to 14 years and shall not be less than two years), and shall also be

liable to fine."

A senior lawyer, asking not to be named, described the charges brought in the FIR as non-bailable and said the magistrate should not have granted bail as the case was in the primary stage of investigation.

He said the recommendation by the lawmaker might intimidate the investigating officer into bending the probe.

The lawmaker could not be contacted on several attempts for comments.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge Matuir Rahman in a letter on April 16 last year directed the chief metropolitan magistrate and his colleagues not to release any accused on bail in a criminal case in which there is a provision for punishment exceeding 10 years.

Moreover, he or they cannot release an accused on bail in a criminal case in which he or they are not especially empowered by the government or by the legislature to take cognisance of such offence referred in section 167(5)(a) of the Criminal Procedure Code, the letter pointed out.

# Int'l business confce

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inaugural session to be held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will welcome her Thai counterpart at Zia International Airport at 11:30am. Shinawatra is scheduled to leave Dhaka at 6:00pm this evening.

World Trade Organization Director General Supachai Panitchpakdi, European Union (EU) Commissioner for Trade Pascal Lamy, ICC Chairman Jean-Rene Fourtoun and ICC Secretary General Maria Livanos Cattau will speak at the opening session. Of them, Lamy, who arrives today on a two-day visit, will also make a courtesy call on the prime minister tomorrow.

Around 400 delegates from 37 countries including ministers, bankers, business leaders and experts on free market economy are attending the conference. Among them the most prominent ones are Indonesian Industry and Trade Minister Rini M Sumarno Soewandi, Sri Lankan Commerce and Consumer Affairs Minister Ravi Karunanayake, Swedish International Development Cooperation Minister Carin Jamtin, Turkish Industry and Trade Minister Ali Coskun, Zimbabwean

International Trade Minister SC Mumbengegwi and Japan Bank for International Cooperation Governor Kyosuke Shinozawa.

The conference will focus on global economic governance, multilateral trade regime and investment promotion in developing countries.

The interactions, statements and recommendations of the conference are expected to leave significant positive impacts on the stalled multilateral trade negotiations, said ICC-B President Mahbubur Rahman.

Three business sessions on 'multilateral trade regime in post-Cancun perspective', 'capacity building for investment promotion in developing countries' and 'trade facilitation through dispute resolution' -- will take place tomorrow at Hotel Sonargaon.

The participating countries are Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, China, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Qatar, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Thailand, Turkey, Vietnam, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe.

# People want a change

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terrorism, cheating in examinations and violence in the educational institutions," Dr Kamal said adding that the country has been going backwards.

He urged the youths of the country to come forward to bring about a change for the development of the country and the countrymen.

"If we stand against injustice we will win," he said and added, "We must unite and be ready for the supreme sacrifice to establish a democratic society. The meaning of our independence will be lost unless we stop the predatory, the unscrupulous and the corrupt few from denying the majority's right to livelihood, to freedom and liberty," Dr Kamal said.

Condemning the killing of journalist Manik Saha, Dr Kamal said, the evil forces of the country killed him as he was in favour of honesty and against corruption.

Habibur Rahman, father of Sabequunnahar Sony who was killed in a gunfight on the BUET campus, called for bringing back congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions so that no other Sony was killed in violence on the campus.

Chhatra Dhara General Secretary Monjur Ahmed urged the students' leaders to practice democratic politics to solve problems and to bring back congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions.

Presided over by Chhatra Dhara President Mahfuz Akram the meeting was also addressed, among others, by Forum leader Engr Abul Kashem, Chhatra Dhara leaders Piquel, Nabab, Fatema Nargis, Khatun-e-Jannat, Putul Biswas, and Alauddin.

Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Mozifuz Islam Kamal, Altaf Hossain, Zahurul Islam and Mizanur Rahman were also present at the meeting.

# Taslima's Kolkata visit sparks protests

**AFP, Kolkata**

Hardline Muslims in the eastern port city of Kolkata rallied yesterday against exiled Bangladeshi feminist author Taslima Nasreen, threatening to blacken her face.

Police said some 10,000 people shouted anti-Nasreen slogans demanding she leave Kolkata, in India's West Bengal state, where she arrived on Wednesday to release her controversial autobiography "Amar Meyabala" (My childhood).

"Protesters streamed out of (Kolkata's) Tipu Sultan mosque after Friday prayers and gathered on the busy streets stopping traffic for nearly an hour," said a police spokesman.

Muslim cleric Noorur Rahman Barkati from the mosque said a Muslim group had offered a 20,000-rupee (426-dollar) reward to anyone who would "blacken her face."

Blackening a person's face with shoe polish or soot is considered a grave insult in India.

"Taslima has denigrated Islam. If Muslims attack her in the city hotel where she is staying we will not be responsible as we have asked the chief minister to deport her," said Barkati.

# US embassy

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restrictions on in-country travel for official Americans," the department said.

"American citizens in Bangladesh should remain vigilant, particularly in public places frequented by foreigners such as hotels, restaurants, shopping areas, and places of worship," it said.

The department also advised US citizens in Bangladesh to avoid demonstrations and large crowds.

The statement, which repeated similar language issued earlier Thursday by the US embassy in Dhaka, did not elaborate on the scope of the new security precautions at the embassy or detail the restrictions on US diplomats' travel in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, hailed by the United States as moderate Muslim nation, has been the subject of frequent similar US warnings in the past, particularly during and after the war in Iraq which infuriated many Bangladeshis.

Last month, the State Department issued a public announcement for Bangladesh, warning of threats to the embassy and US interests there.

Bangladesh responded by playing down threats from terrorism and assuring foreigners that everything had been done to ensure their safety.

In July 2003, the US embassy in Dhaka said it had received unverified death threats against US officials and citizens in Bangladesh and warned Americans to boost their security postures.

# Shrine blast

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sheaded.

"Abduction has now become a trade for some people due to inaction of the authorities," she said.

The former prime said the downside in the law and order proves the government has failed to run the country.

"We want to get rid of such a suffocating and anarchic situation," Hasina added.

She also visited those injured in the blast and now under treatment at Osmani Medical College Hospital.

The AL chief, on a twoday visit to Sylhet, was accompanied by party leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Suranjit Sengupta, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid, AMA Muhiit, Sultan Mohammad Mansur and other party leaders.

# Bomb blasts kill four

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playing football in an abandoned lot with friends when people spotted a bomb hidden in a garbage bag on Haifa street, said Naimi, an officer who rushed to the scene.

But police struggled to push people back. Even after US troops arrived, they could not chase onlookers out of the immediate area when an assailant blew the bomb up by remote control, Naimi said.

Mohi said Khodayr had been watching the soldiers from the wall of the abandoned lot where he played football when the shrapnel hit him.

Five others were wounded, two of them seriously, with the oldest of the casualties being 30 years old, he said.

The US military earlier confirmed the blast but said only that three civilians and a translator were wounded when the bomb exploded before the US army could disarm it. The Iraqi capital has been hit by string of attacks, culminating in a New Year's Eve car-bomb blast at a popular restaurant that killed eight people.

Coalition officials warned that the incident could herald new tactics in the insurgency as guerrillas switch to softer targets in their efforts to destabilise US-controlled Iraq.

Another report adds: A bus packed with university students was blown apart by a landmine Thursday leaving three dead near Saddam Hussein's hometown Tikrit in northern Iraq as a new post-war currency began circulating and tens of thou-

sands demonstrated in Basra for elections.

The attack on the Tikrit university vehicle, came as Shiite Muslims filled the streets of the southern city of Basra to support their spiritual leader's call for elections.

And across the country, old Iraqi dinars bearing the image of Saddam became worthless, bundled for destruction and consigned to the history books as the US-led coalition declared the end of a three-month changeover period to introduce the new post-war currency.

The new dinars bearing less emotive images of Iraqi artefacts, scholars and landmarks came into circulation three months ago as the old "Saddams" were being collected.

The deadline for the old currency came as the dinar reached a new post-war peak of 1,000 to the dollar, appreciating at a rate that has alarmed central bank chiefs and put the squeeze on many Iraqis who receive their pay in dollars.

Preparations meanwhile were underway for talks at the UN on Iraq's future.

Paul Bremer, the US civilian overseer in Iraq, was due for talks at UN headquarters in New York on Monday accompanied by Iraqi Governing Council president Adnan Pachachi.

Pachachi told reporters that he, Bremer, and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan would hold "three-way discussions."

# Transcom Group

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was imported on 18-10-03 followed by a second similar consignment of 910 CKD refrigerator kits in 13-12-2003. On both occasions, Customs Authority after thorough examination released the goods as CKD.

Similarly, the present consignment of 880 CKD refrigerator kits was imported on 30-12-03. This time also, the Customs authority after due appraisal on 1-1-04 accepted the goods to be in CKD condition and assessed Tk 31.5 lacs as duties and taxes, which was duly paid on 5-1-04.

Since, 6-1-04 our consignment has been held up at the Chittagong port for reasons, which have been not been communicated to us by the Customs Authority in spite of our repeated letters. We want to also mention that all import consignments including the present one have been duly certified by the PSI agency confirming that they are in CKD condition.

In the meantime the above newspapers have been carrying on a malicious campaign against the Transcom Group accusing us of Duty, VAT and tax evasion. We want to categorically state that all their accusations are absolutely false. Transcom Group is among the most diligent tax paying groups in the country. We have been foremost in paying all applicable duties and taxes, having paid more than Tk 70 crores in 2002 alone. The figure for 2003 is expected to be higher.

We vehemently protest the contents, implications and innuendoes contained in the reports of the three aforementioned newspapers. It appears that a deliberate campaign is being made to tarnish the image and reputation of the Transcom Group, which has always tried to adhere to ethical business practices for which it enjoys a modicum of respect and goodwill.

# 4 Dewanbagh pir's men

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legs. The four injured were first rushed to Islami Bank Hospital and later shifted to the DMCH.

Earlier, police put up barricades at the Dainik Bangla, Fakirapool intersections and in front of Notre Dame College and stood guard to intercept any procession marching towards the Dewanbagh conference venue. A huge number of policemen were deployed around the venue at Arambagh.

Dewanbagh pir's own security force of a few hundred men in different coloured uniform carrying wooden sticks in their hands kept vigil. Some among them were wearing badges inscribed with the word 'commando.'

A number of Dewanbagh men were also seen monitoring the conference premises on close circuit TV cameras from a room.

Meanwhile, activists of IASC, Aamra Dhakabashi and ISA,

demanding the arrest of the Dewanbagh pir and his disciples, ban on all his sermons and publications and removal of 'illegal' Dewanbagh establishments from the roads, brought out a procession from the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at around 10:30am.

Police intercepted the marchers at the Dainik Bangla intersection as the procession was heading towards Arambagh. However, the demonstrators dispersed after talks with the policemen.

At a rally at the Baitul Mukarram later, IASC President Shamsul Haq demanded that the government ban all Dewanbagh publications like it did recently in case of Ahmadyia publicity.

The IASC will bring out a procession after Asr prayers today from the national mosque protesting against the interception of its procession yesterday.

# All-party consensus

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democracy always encourages direct election."

University Grants Commission (UGC) Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury pointed out that the ruling alliance and the opposition usually do not sit in the parliament at a time. So, mere increase of constituencies will hardly improve the existing parliamentary culture.

It is not only an unnecessary but also a wasteful exercise as people will have to bear the expenses for more MPs, he said.

Professor Chowdhury suggested direct election to the reserved seats for women in parliament.

Former vice chancellor of Dhaka University Prof Muniruzzaman Mia said, "Increasing the constituencies is definitely going to put an extra burden on the public exchequer."

He went on, "Since the number of parliament members will be larger, they may be more accessible to people and can serve people better if they so desire."

He suggested a national debate on the issue before taking a final decision on it.

President of Dhaka University Teacher's Association (DUTA) Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique said as population has increased over the years, parliament seats need to be increased.

"But the way the ruling alliance has taken the decision is not proper as the opposition parties were not consulted," he said.

The decision to fix the number of constituencies should be based on the size of population or area, he said. So, raising their number to 450 from the existing 300 is not a well considered decision, the DUTA president said.

The opposition parties must be involved in the process, he felt.

On women's reserved seats, he said democracy always encourages direct election.

Barrister Tania Amir said parliamentary constituencies should not be increased arbitrarily, rather it should be based on some criteria, especially the size of population.

She favoured direct election to women's reserved seats. In indirect election, party loyalists, not deserving candidates, get elected, she noted.

# Sarbaharas

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to "utilise them for their own political interests."

Golam Mustafa Nanna, secretary of Babuganj upazila unit of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and a leader of Sarbahara Zia group, Khaled Hossain Swapan and Ataur Rahman, union parishad chairmen of Agorpur and Dehergati respectively and leaders of Sarbahara Kamrul group, also condemned the postponement. They said, because of this, a long effort of the police administration and dreams of the local people for ending the clashes and bloodshed might be thwarted for a long time.

# Musharraf

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seconds each time.

"We expect preparations for the shifting will be completed by...end January," an official was quoted as telling English-language daily The News, saying he would move to the presidential office Aiwane-e-Sadr, situated next to parliament.

General Musharraf, also Pakistan's army chief, has lived at Army House, the official army chief's residence near military headquarters in Rawalpindi, for the past five years.

The report said security advisers believed Musharraf should curtail the number of trips along the 15 kilometre route between his current Rawalpindi residence and his Islamabad office.

In the first attack on December 14 a bridge was blown up by remote control just seconds after Musharraf's car drove over it. Five bombs had been planted on the bridge. Security officials said a hit-tech jamming device on his car delayed the explosions and possibly saved his life.

The second attack came on Christmas Day when two suicide bombers rammed explosives-laden trucks into the presidential motorcade, killing 15 people.

The reported move to the official presidential house comes almost 12 months ahead of the deadline for Musharraf to quit his post as army chief.

# Potters

**FROM PAGE 12**  
ing on with this project in stealth," said Albert Mankin, representing the indigenous peoples of Modhupur.

Albert said law enforcers opened fire on a peaceful demonstration and killed Piren Sna, a Garo, on January 3 "in a planned manner." "But we only wanted our natural habitat and peace of life undisturbed," he added.

Morshedul Islam, a filmmaker, observed, "Ironically, though the government is responsible for protecting the vulnerable groups, in this case, it's trying to build a park which will deprive the indigenous people of their spontaneous lifestyle."

Citing a few trans-boundary efforts by some African countries to conserve forests and natural environment, Professor Nazrul Islam of Bangladesh Environment Network said erecting a wall surrounding the eco-park in the Modhupur forest is a contrasting and wrong action.

# Journalist Manik

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No-one filed a first information report over the murder until early last night.

"We didn't find any clue to the killing, although a man has been taken into custody for questioning. Investigation is going on," Police Commissioner Mustafizur Rahman told The Daily Star, but declined to name the arrestee.

## TRIBUTE AND PROTEST

A contingent of armed policemen gave him a guard of honour in the presence of Information Minister Tariqul Islam, Mayor Shaikh Tayebur Rahman, lawmakers M Nurul Islam and Panchanan Biswas and senior officials of Khulna Metropolitan Police, joint forces and district administration.

The body was cremated with state honour after it was kept at the press club from 9:00am yesterday for journalists and other admirers to pay their last respect to the eminent reporter, also a freedom fighter.

The flower-bedecked coffin was taken to his home on Ahsan Ahmed Road and different temples before cremation at Rupsha Shasan Ghat in the presence of hundreds of people, including leaders of political parties.

Political parties, socio-cultural organisations, business community, non-governmental organisations, Kindergartens Association, Khulna University Teachers Association, Khulna Union of Journalists, Metropolitan Union of Journalists, Khulna Press Club, Khulna unit of Sangbad Patra Parishad, 11-party left alliance, Puja Udjapan Parishad and central leaders of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) placed wreaths on the coffin.

Khulna Press Club President Humayun Kabir Balu presided over a protest rally, also addressed by the mayor, Dainik Purbanchal Editor Liaquat Ali, CPB President Manzurul Ahsan Khan, BFUJ