

Rejoinder and our reply

Giasuddin-Al-Mamun protested a report headlined "Posh Gazipur house mystery to locals" published in The Daily Star on May 15.

Denying the house, Khwab, being palatial, Mamun said the house belonged to his wife. He termed false top-level officials' visiting his house and holding nightlong parties.

Denying to be named a sidekick of BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, Mamun denied allegations of controlling various industries, postings, transfers and contracts.

He also opposed that Tk 8 crore has been spent on the house.

Mamun also denied that few hundred workers toiled one and a half years to renovate the house and said "the house was renovated gradually over a period of time with usual number of workers as dictated by the construction sector practice in the country".

Brushing aside his connection

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US soldier jailed over Iraq abuse

AGENCIES, Baghdad

An American soldier was convicted yesterday of abusing Iraqi prisoners in the first court-martial to come out of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

The judge, Col. James Pohl, gave Spc. Jeremy C. Sivits, the maximum sentence: confinement for one year, a reduction in rank to private and a bad-conduct discharge from the Army.

The 24-year-old military police reservist wept at his court martial and apologised to his victims, saying he does not want to be thrown out of the US army.

"I'd like to apologize to the Iraqi people and those detainees," said Sivits. "I should have protected

those detainees, not taken the photos."

He told how fellow US soldiers sexually humiliated naked Iraqi detainees and punched one so hard he needed treatment.

He also wanted to apologise to the army and his family. "I've let everybody down. That's not me."

Sivits, who pleaded guilty to four abuse charges as part of a pre-trial plea agreement, told the court that fellow members of his unit gravely abused prisoners and that he knew it was wrong, but participated anyway.

Abu Ghraib prison, once Saddam Hussein's torture centre, resembled a "horror movie" when

he arrived last year, Sivits said, adding that it was overcrowded with detainees and regularly attacked by mortars, rockets and small arms fire.

Recounting the abuse, Sivits told the court that on 8 November 2003, Staff Sgt Ivan Frederick told him to go to where the prisoners were gathered.

"I heard Cpl [Charles] Graner yelling in Arabic at the detainees," he said.

"I saw one of the detainees lying on the floor. They were laying there on the floor, sandbags over their heads."

He said Sgt Javal Davis and

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PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia talks with US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca at her office in Dhaka yesterday.

3 cops to die for killing Yasmin of Dinajpur

UNB, Dhaka

Three policemen are to walk to the gallows for murder after rape of 19-year-old Yasmin of Dinajpur in 1995.

The petition filed by condemned Assistant Sub-Inspectors Moinul Huq and Abdus Sattar and constable Amrita Lal Barman with the Supreme Court to review its verdict upholding the death penalty was rejected yesterday.

The Appellate Division on March 19 rejected the prayer for leave to appeal against confirmation of death by the High Court.

Yasmin, 19, a domestic help in the capital, going home by bus on August 24, 1995, was picked up by the policemen from Dashmille with a promise to reach home in Dinajpur. On the way, she was gang-raped a

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Bad governance thwarts dev

WB country director tells Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

World Bank Country Director Christine Wallich yesterday met Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina and identified non-economic factors including lack of governance, law and order downside and corruption as major obstacles to Bangladesh's overall economic development.

The WB official also expressed her concern over 'confrontational politics' and stressed the need for collaborative efforts of both the government and the main opposition for poverty reduction and rural development.

Emerging from about two-hour meeting at the Dhanmondi house of Hasina, Wallich told reporters that she discussed various issues and the recently held Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting in Dhaka with the Awami League president.

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PHOTO: STAR

Time to stitch ... With a choppy sea because of a passing cyclone, trawlers moored at Fishery Ghat in Chittagong yesterday, giving fishermen a time to repair fishing nets.

Govt seeks \$75m WB medical aid

Funding uncertain for health ministry's neglect

NAIMUL HAQ

The government has formally asked its development partners for an aid of \$74 million for essential drugs, vaccines, contraceptives and other medicines for union level health centres.

In a letter to the World Bank, the Economic Relations Division (ERD) last month asked for immediate support so that the medical supply can be obtained as soon as possible.

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecne) headed by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia approved a contingency plan on April 18 to that end.

An interruption in obtaining the medical stock surfaced before, as the planning wing of the health ministry submitted no operation plans (OPs) to the WB for fiscal 2003-04. Although the money (\$74 million) is available with the WB, the government cannot access the fund in the absence of OPs.

As a result, vaccines, contraceptives, essential drugs and other requisites may not be available before September at Union Parishad level, experts said.

Meanwhile, a six-year sector investment plan (SIP) for the Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme (HNPS) supposed to

be submitted by the planning wing for monetary participation of the development partners has been delayed, causing uncertainty of donor participation in the programme.

Donors are likely to contribute an estimated \$1 billion aid for the HNPS, which now looks uncertain due to the absence of the SIP.

A two-day meeting in this regard was held at Brac Centre in Rajendrapur in Gazipur on Monday and Tuesday to find a solution to the problem. Major development partners contributing to the health sector attended the meet.

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2 traders abducted in Chuadanga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Armed criminals abducted two small traders from separate villages under Alamdanga upazila in Chuadanga on Monday.

A gang of 10 men stormed into the Jamjampur village house of Pachu Biswas at about 2:00pm and picked up his son Abdul Majid 35, a raw material supplier, at gunpoint, sources said.

The gang later demanded Tk 2 lakh for his release and also threatened to kill Majid if his family informs police of the matter, they added.

The same gang earlier demanded Tk 50,000 toll from the trader, which he refused to pay, family members alleged.

Another armed gang abducted local trader Dudu Pramanik, 30, son Subal Pramanik, from Modhupur village under the same upazila at about 9:00pm when he was returning

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Air patrol on cards to curb crime at Ctg port

RAFIQ HASAN

The government has decided to introduce regular air patrol on the outer anchorage of Chittagong port and villages along the port channel of Kamaphuli river and the Bay of Bengal coast in a bid to curb armed robbery, theft and other criminal activities in the ocean-going ships.

An inter-ministerial meeting at the shipping ministry yesterday decided to ask Bangladesh Air Force to carry out air patrol by helicopters, meeting sources said.

In case of detection of any criminal activities by the air patrol, the Coast Guard will rush to the spot on getting signal.

The meeting also decided to equip the Coast Guard with two modern speedboats to facilitate quick response to signals and step up security in the port channel and

outer anchorage. Chittagong Port Authority will procure the speedboats in a month with its own funds.

Moreover, the areas along the port channel will be brought under one police station to ensure effective vigilance. Police will conduct raids in the villages as robbers and thieves take shelter in them and goods stolen from ships are often sold at the village markets.

The measures follow concern over deterioration of law and order and security lapses at Chittagong port.

The government is also under pressure to implement International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) code.

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has asked all its member-countries to implement the code by June this year and warned of port boycott by international ships in the event of non-implementation.

The IMO piracy centre in Kuala Lumpur termed Bangladesh ports as second most dangerous ones in the world due to reported armed robbery and thefts in foreign ships.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain chaired yesterday's meeting attended by, among others, the shipping secretary, defence secretary, Mongla Port Authority chairman and representatives of the home ministry and Armed Forces Division.

Akbar Hossain told the meeting the government would implement the ISPS code within the stipulated time.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Ocean Going Ship Owners Association said at least two incidents of robbery or theft take place a week at ships anchored at Bangladesh ports.

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Break ties with two forums

Proshika asks Faruque

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The governing body of Proshika, a non-government organisation, has asked its president Qazi Faruque Ahmed to disassociate himself from two civil society forums in the greater interest of the organisation.

After repeated police raids on Proshika headquarters and attacks on its other branches, the governing body held an emergency meeting on Tuesday night in Dhaka and asked Faruque to disassociate himself from Oikyabaddha Nagorik Andolon and Jatiya Oikya Mancha.

Mahbubul Karim, senior vice-president of the NGO, told The Daily Star last night that the governing body took the stand to erase the negative perception centring Faruque's involvement in various civil society movements.

"Eight of nine-member governing body, including Qazi Faruque Ahmed, were present at the meeting chaired by Abdul Wadud. He (Faruque) immediately accepted the board's decision," said Karim.

Internet telephony caught in red tape

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Bureaucratic tangles keep holding back the internet telephony licensing process, denying people access to modern, cheaper technology and the public exchequer counting huge loss.

The telecoms regulator, Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC), has asked the telecoms ministry to give the go-ahead to private operators to launch internet telephony via VSAT (very small aperture terminal) instead of going for an internet exchange.

"If the ministry give its nod immediately, we hope the internet telephony could be launched by the end of this month or first week of June," BTRC Chairman Syed Marghub Murshed wrote in a letter to the secretary of the ministry.

The BTRC thinks it is already late to award licence for the Voice-over Internet Protocol (VoIP), a technical

synonym for internet telephony, and the ministry should come up with a formula that the private operators find friendly.

State telecoms monopoly Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) introduced VoIP in February to generate calls to 10 countries without licence, a move that private operators say is against BTRC's even-playing field concept.

Telecoms Secretary Faruq Ahmad Siddiqi told The Daily Star that the ministry was considering to work out a formula making sure that the government does not lose revenue once the VoIP is introduced.

"It is not wise to launch VoIP without having a solution to the contentious issue. We are working on it and will inform the BTRC at the right time," Faruq said.

"Bangladesh can earn more than

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Water transport workers threaten strike tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Water transport workers threatened to go on indefinite strike tomorrow as their deadline to the government to meet their demands, including publication of a government gazette on a new pay scale and its implementation, expires today.

This is the third time the workers called strike in eight months. Earlier on September 25 last year and January 11, they called strikes and backtracked after assurance from the government and owners.

Leaders of the launch workers association criticised the government for its attitude towards them at an assembly at their Barisal port office with Association President Golam Mawla in the chair on May 18.

The leaders said they submitted a

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Prayer Timing		
May 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-05	4-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-40	6-45
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

EC asks officials to take action against poll code violation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday asked returning officers responsible for next month's parliamentary by-polls to take stern action against people violating election code of conduct.

The EC after a meeting wrote to the returning officers of Dhaka-10 and Mushiganj-1 constituencies and Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed expressed dissatisfaction over frequent violation of the code and attacks on Bikalpa Dhara supporters, meeting sources said.

The supporters of BNP candidate Mosaddek Ali Falu have posted a large number of illegal colored posters and billboards in Dhaka-10 constituency in violation of the election rules.

His opponents lodged several allegations accusing him of violating the code.

EC secretariat officials told yesterday's meeting that the returning officer of Dhaka-10 constituency on May 18 warned Mosaddek of violation of the code of conduct and asked him to follow the election

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