

Top changes in admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday made some top-level changes in the civil administration by transferring two secretaries and six joint secretaries, promoting one as secretary and posting an officer on special duty (OSD), who was previously secretary.

Secretary-in-charge of the Ministry of Shipping Ismail Zabihullah has been transferred to Economic Relations Division (ERD) under the Ministry of Finance and Secretary-in-charge of the Ministry of Food, Disaster Management and Relief Siddique Rahman Chowdhury to the Ministry of Commerce.

Earlier this month, Siddique was first transferred to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, then to the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, and finally to the food ministry, cancelling the previous two orders.

About a year ago, he was transferred to the Ministry of Commerce but it was cancelled.

Director General of the Directorate of Food Muhammad Fazlur Rahman has been made secretary in-charge of the Ministry of Food, Disaster Management and Relief.

No decision was taken till yesterday about appointing secretary in the Ministry of Shipping.

Aizul Islam, previously a secretary

Contaminated

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been supplying the building with water from their mobile water tanks and has promised to continue until the problem gets solved.

"We always boil the water before drinking, but we use the direct tap water to do the washing," Mrs Hasan said.

Shahidur Rahman Pradhan, chief engineer of Wasa, said that the contamination was probably caused by leakage in the water pipe somewhere in the area. He said that workers working in Dhaka City Corporation's (DCC) drains might have damaged the pipes.

"We have ensured that there is no excreta getting into the supply water but we cannot yet advise the locals until we receive the reports on water condition of the area from our laboratory," Pradhan said.

Hasina Emran Chowdhury, a resident of House-12, Road 99, said that she had just returned from a hospital after one month of treatment for jaundice. She said her employees too have been ill for the last few months.

"I smell a foul odour while washing, but it never came to my mind that the Wasa water could cause these diseases," Hasina Emran added.

Guards at the residence of the Turkish Embassy at Road 96 were also unaware that they were consuming contaminated water and it had resulted in jaundice and other diseases among them.

Sadruddin Ghance, a resident of House-8 of Road-96, a resident said that there have been outbreaks of hepatitis and typhoid in the area. He however said he does not know what caused the outbreaks.

"When many of our relatives and friends on Roads No 104, 105 and 106 complained of gastrointestinal complications over the last few months, we thought it was only a natural phenomenon," a resident said requesting anonymity.

Wasa's acting Managing Director, CR Barua told The Daily Star that a group of Wasa experts had already visited the area and taken necessary measures to contain the contamination. He said that Wasa's mobile water tankers supply water in the area every day.

Khaleda blasts opposition

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people are leading a peaceful and happy life and want this situation to prevail, an opposition party stands against this situation. "Our opposition does not want peace-- they want terrorism and so they are harbouring terrorists."

Khaleda, the chairperson of the ruling BNP observed that the Awami League, during its last five-year rule, had presented the country with terrorism, corruption and unfairness at public examinations.

On the contrary, she said, the three-year-old BNP-led coalition government has given roads, bridges, new schools, universities and employment and curbed crimes and formed independent anti-corruption commission to eradicate corruption from the country.

"BNP wants peace, welfare, progress and development while the opposition wants unrest and terrorism to take the country backward and that's the fundamental difference between the two," said the prime minister.

The rally was addressed, among others, by Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain, also president of BNP Comilla district (south), Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, BNP leader Rabeya Chowdhury, Mohammad Shahjahan MP, Monirul Islam Chowdhury MP and Principal Yunus MP.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated works of the 15-km Nangalkot-Doukkhar-Boxganj road at Haripur in the upazila by unveiling a plaque. The project involves Tk 25 crore.

Outlaw, criminal flee from police van

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A regional leader of outlawed Biplobi Communist Party and a listed criminal of the area fled from police van yesterday.

Kushtia Police said they arrested Shah Alam Jamal, an accused in at least 12 cases including five of murders, at Hili border area under Dinajpur district on Monday and were taking him to Kushtia on a microbus.

A wheel of the microbus punctured when it reached Fwardi highway and as the police became busy with the microbus, Jamal jumped from the microbus and managed to escape, they said.

But sources in the Kushtia police said the policemen concerned let Jamal flee.

A joint team of Kushtia and Iswardi police conducted raids in different parts of the two districts but failed to trace out Jamal till writing of this report.

Following the incident, Kushtia and Iswardi police conducted raids in different parts of the two districts but failed to trace out Jamal till writing of this report.

A three-member investigation committee led by Assistant Police Superintendent (Circle) Walid Hasan has been formed to probe the incident.

'Aviator' gets 11 Academy Award nods

AP, Beverly Hills

The Howard Hughes epic "The Aviator" led Academy Awards contenders with 11 nominations Tuesday, including best picture, plus acting honors for Leonardo DiCaprio, Cate Blanchett and Alan Alda and a directing slot for Martin Scorsese.

The boxing saga "Million Dollar Baby" and the J.M. Barrie tale "Finding Neverland" followed with seven nominations each, among them best picture and acting nominations for Clint Eastwood, Morgan Freeman, Hilary Swank and Johnny Depp.

Eastwood also got a directing nomination for "Million Dollar Baby."

The other best-picture nominees were the Ray Charles portrait "Ray" and the buddy comedy "Sideways."

Along with Eastwood, Jamie Foxx also scored two nominations, as best actor for the title role in "Ray" and supporting actor as a taxi driver whose cab is hijacked by a hit man in "Collateral."

Matin said, "We must go for permanent structures to save the crops in the haors. Otherwise, we have to face food crisis."

Officials of the water resources ministry informed the meeting that Tk 10 crore was released to implement projects in the haor areas by February. They however mentioned that the ministry is facing fund crisis to implement the projects.

Committee members said it will be difficult to repair the damaged embankments after February as

Hasina blames government

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activists had brought out a procession in Rajshahi city in April last year carrying firearms and other weapons. There were also reports of secret meetings of the extremist group with ministers and high officials of police in Bagmara of Rajshahi, she added.

Some police high-ups openly lauded activities of Bangla Bhai and his followers, who are involved in killings and extortion, and set up camps to give their activists arms training at the AL chief's alleged.

The statement also protested murder of AL leader Mahbubur Rahman and attack on Sripur Union Parishad chairman Mokbul Hossain of Bagmara by JMB cadres on the 15th.

Hasina referred to the bomb blasts in Dinajpur, Mymensingh, Tangail, Khulna, Joypurhat, Bogra and Sylhet and alleged extremist groups are involved in the incidents.

The government did not unearth any of the crimes including the August 21 grenade attacks on the AL rally last year and grenade attack on the British high commissioner on May 7, 2004.

After the verdict, local units of the BCL and Juba League brought out a procession at district headquarters.

Dhaka to press

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These issues are likely to come up at the official talks between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur during the February visit, diplomatic sources said.

The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment would present a detailed report on manpower export to Malaysia at the joint economic council meeting.

Malaysia is yet to resume hiring workers from Bangladesh although a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the two countries in October 2003.

Export of Bangladeshi manpower to Malaysia has remained suspended since 1997 following influx of a large number of undocumented workers. During the mid-90s, the number of Bangladeshi workers in that country was over half a million.

The number has now come down to 1.13 lakh as Malaysia cracked

down on illegal workers several times and expelled a large number of them. Kuala Lumpur had earlier committed resumption of import of Bangladesh manpower after streamlining the process of hiring foreign workers. It has already taken a number of steps to this end.

Dhaka now expects implementation of the MoU and resumption of manpower export to Malaysia on a large scale.

Meanwhile, trade between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur was heavily in favour of Malaysia. But recently export from Bangladesh showed an upward trend. Its export rose to \$8.65 million in fiscal 2003-04 from \$4.71 million in the previous year.

In 2002-03, Bangladesh's import totalled \$169.42 million while Malaysia invested over \$530.4 million in Bangladesh's telecom, power and infrastructure sectors.

Wetland development

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also its members. The water resources secretary is member-secretary of the body, said a report submitted to the parliamentary committee.

At yesterday's meeting, the House body asked the water resources ministry to repair the damaged embankments immediately.

Matin said, "We must go for permanent structures to save the crops in the haors. Otherwise, we have to face food crisis."

The parliamentary body asked the ministry to maintain financial transparency in implementing the projects.

"We discussed measures to ensure accountability and transparency in implementing the projects," Awami League lawmaker and former water resources minister Abdur Razzak said after the meeting.

Dhaka rebuffs New York

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"Nearly 1,400 foreign journalists visited Bangladesh in the last three years. Reports by only three or four of them have been regrettable," Haq said referring to a portion of the January 23 report that claims, "Foreign journalists in Bangladesh are followed by intelligence agents; people who report interviewee are questioned afterwards."

The report narrates, "It is possible to travel through Bangladesh and observe the increased political and religious repression in everyday life. The global war on terror is aimed at making the rise of regimes like that of the Taliban impossible, but in Bangladesh, the trend could be going the other way."

Referring to such statements Haq said, "The NYT reporter came a long way but failed to portray the real picture of Bangladesh," adding, "To suggest Bangladesh is becoming a Taliban country is humorous at best and is the result of ill-motives."

The report also quotes Indian intelligence documents to suggest that Amini is a member of the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji) and says Huji is linked to Al-Qaeda and that there are rumours that Amini is a 'good friend' to the Afghan Taliban.

Refuting such claims Haq said, "This report has saddened us, but it will not be able to tarnish the international image and fame of Bangladesh."

The report also quotes Amnesty International's Bangladesh special assistant Govind Acharya as saying in her report, "The Bangladeshi government's arrest warrant doesn't seem to have made much difference, although for now Bangla Bhai refrains from public appearances."

On these points, Haq said the government is determined to tackle these issues and has already arrested 66 operatives of Bangla Bhai.

The author of the report chose a single village, Bagmara, out of the 70,000 villages here. The situation there does not represent all of Bangladesh," he added.

The report says, "Last Spring, Bangla Bhai, whose followers probably number around 10,000, decided to try an Islamist revolution in several provinces of Bangladesh that forum means its image would not be damaged so easily."

But Haq questioned the very credibility of the report: "Since there is a question mark in the headline, it suggests the author herself is not clear and confident about the subject matter."

"It is not right to judge a country on the basis of one aberration," he added.

The report also says the ruling coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami is "socially conservative and unafraid of violence," and referring to the coalition's incumbency it adds, "Since 2001, a politically aggressive form of Islam has found, for the first time since independence, a strong base at the top of the Bangladeshi politics."

The report quotes coalition leader and Islamic Oikya Jote Chairman Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini as saying in an interview that he had not been appointed as government minister as the West and Bangladesh would see him as an extremist.

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The report says, "Last Spring, Bangla Bhai, whose followers probably number around 10,000, decided to try an Islamist revolution in several provinces of Bangladesh that forum means its image would not be damaged so easily."

The author alleges that the government is determined to tackle these issues and has already arrested 66 operatives of Bangla Bhai.

But Haq rejected all these claims saying, "The people of Bangladesh are committed to democracy and Bangladesh has achieved great progress in social indicators highly appreciated in the international forum." He added that Bangladesh's active participation in that forum means its image would not be damaged so easily.

"They (Shayesta and Miraj) used to beat me with sticks and pierce kitchen utensils into different parts of my body for minimal mistakes," she said, adding, "Couple of days back they cut my lips with a knife as some food was missing from the kitchen."

Miraj used to threaten her of slaugthering when she wanted to go away from the house, she said.

The arrestees, however, denied torturing the house help, police said.

Asked about her wounds, they said she had been suffering from acute skin diseases and they had dropped her at Hazaribagh as she became ill.

Two Bangladeshis go missing as boat capsizes off Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

Two Bangladeshis were missing Monday after a North Korean registered cargo boat capsized off the coast of Lebanon, officials said.

Rescue teams were alerted at dawn when residents in Khalde, south of Beirut, saw the 25-metre (82-foot) Mary capsise in rough seas.

A civil defence team managed to fish three Georgians out of the sea, including the captain and two crew members, but two Bangladeshi sailors have been reported missing, the sources said.

The boat capsized after wires got entangled in its propeller and was left badly damaged, according to the initial findings of an investigation.

The captain told police that the Mary left Port Said in Egypt for Latakia in Syria on Saturday.

CTG ARMS HAUL

Court defers bail hearing to Jan 29

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chittagong court yesterday deferred the hearing for bail of six accused in the country's biggest-ever arms haul as there was huge rush of cases in the court.

The six, now in jail, appeared before the court of Metropolitan Sessions Judge Khademul Islam Md Belal with bail prayers yesterday.

But the court was under pressure to deal with a number of cases scheduled earlier, the acting judge Mohammad Shahjahan fixed January 29 for hearing of their bail petition.

Police on April 1 midnight last year seized ten truckloads of sophisticated firearms from the Chittagong Area Fertiliser Limited jetties.

Then Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) and Investigation Officer (IO) of the case AKM Kabiruddin submitted the first charge sheet on June 11 in which 42 people were accused and 71 made witnesses.

But there were many loopholes and discrepancies in the charge sheet, allegedly done intentionally by the first IO.

Following the allegations, the government changed the IO and gave then ASP of CID in Sylhet Zone Mir Nawsher Ali the responsibility to prepare a fresh charge sheet.

In the supplementary charge sheet, Nawsher Ali included another person, raising the number of accused to 43. He also increased the number of witnesses from 71 to 114.

Later police arrested 21 of the 43 from different parts of the country. Of them, 15 were