

US lobbyists

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made" to keep the pocket expenditure within \$750 a month. The contract will be evaluated after the expiry of the first 90 days.

The contract, documents of which have been made available to The Daily Star, has been done after months of negotiation in Washington and kept out of public knowledge.

Signed by Shamser M Chowdhury, Bangladesh ambassador to the US and John D Rafealli, chief financial officer of The Washington Group, the contract said the lobbyists should rebut and contain negative reporting on Bangladesh and its government in the US media, academic circles and think tanks.

"Using the combined talents of TWG/K we would develop and implement a multi-faceted public relations, media and education plan to strengthen the image of Bangladesh in the US. We would seek to dispel misconceptions about alleged human rights abuses, corrupt government practices and Islamist militancy," the lobbyists said in their work objectives.

In its effort to improve Bangladesh's public image, the lobbyists promised placement of positive news and feature articles in newspapers, magazines and national journals and arrangement for the Bangladesh ambassador in US to appear on national television news shows originating in Washington.

The TWG/K while pitching for the task has promised a long list of tasks that include supporting the government in establishing and maintaining the "closest possible" relations with the White House and the Congress.

"The interests and objectives of Bangladesh must be communicated to and understood by the President and his advisors on an ongoing basis," The Washington Group said in its objective that was submitted to the US Department of Justice. The US laws require lobbyists to register with the justice department and disclose their interests.

It also observed that it is important that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia pays an early state visit to the US and promised to provide a full menu of services including comprehensive public affairs/public relations support for the prime minister's visit.

"We would endeavour to have the prime minister address a Joint Session of the Congress, a rare honor, which in turn would stimulate high visibility media opportunities. The latter would certainly include delivery by the prime minister of a major address at the National Press Club in Washington," the objective reads.

Based on their "close relationships" with senior officials in the Bush administration, the lobbyists also promised to endeavour to "convince the President to add Bangladesh to his itinerary" during his visit to India and Pakistan in March this year.

It also promised to work for increased US aid, assisting the government to get funding from the Millennium Challenge Account, debt relief, support the government in its dealings with the World Bank, IMF and the UN, establish free trade arrangement with US, give high priority to arranging for senior level military to military exchanges and exploitation of joint training opportunities, among other things.

The lobbyists would establish informal channels of communication with US officials to enable the Bangladesh embassy to better interpret and understand the US politics.

They said they would be able to 'open doors at the senior levels' of major US corporations such as Bechtel, General Electric, Lockheed Martin and Wal Mart to interest them in projects of importance to the government.

More promises were made in the arena of cultural exchanges and improving visa procedures.

DMCH

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contribution to the service, or facilitated it in any other way, provided almost voluntarily by the medical teachers, working extra hours, often late until 8 to 9 in the night, the doctors complain.

The ministry is careless even about providing its direct employees for taking accident casualties or victims of violence to hospitals. But police feel morally and professionally obliged to carry wounded persons to hospitals for treatment or the dead for autopsy.

Often no family member or friend of the injured or the dead is immediately available. In such cases, police have to spend their own money out of sympathy for the accident or violence victims for various pressing reasons like buying medicines needed right at the moment.

But the hitch is, there is no guarantee whether or when they would get back that money.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner SM Mijanur Rahman says there is no provision for paying back the money spent by police for injured people. "However, the government allows returning any amount spent for the dead. But, it usually takes a lot of time," the capital's police boss adds.

Now, if police keep away from such situations, it may end up in greater tragedies. A seriously wounded person may die if he is not taken to a hospital in time. And a dead person can miss a decent burial simply because there is no one to pay for it.

It is time the ministry wakes up to the reality and do something about it, quips a DMCH staff member.

CHARITY COSTS THEM PITY
CASE ONE: Constable Shahjahan was posted at Nesarabad Police Station in Pirojpur District in 2002. In the first week of June, when he and two other policemen were on patrol duty in Swarupkathi, some villagers informed them about a body floating in a nearby pond.

Shahjahan retrieved the corpse, took it to a local hospital and made sure that a proper autopsy is done. He had received his salary that very morning, out of which he spent Tk 1,050 for washing the body, the funeral stretcher to carry it, the burial clothes and services etc.

As per the regulations, Shahjahan submitted the bill of this expenditure to the deputy commissioner's office. After the years and eight reminding visits to the DC office, he is yet to get that money back.

Now he avoids any such 'philanthropic' service.

CASE TWO: A bus ran over a rickshaw, wounding its two passengers at 3pm on February 6 this year at Malibagh in the capital. A crowd gathered around the spot quickly. However, no one made an attempt to rescue them. A police van was passing by and stopped seeing the crowd. The van then took the seriously injured passengers to the DMCH.

The attending doctors gave a prescription to the police and asked them to get the medicines immediately. Havildar Parash narrates to The Daily Star: As no kin or friend of the injured was around, the policemen had to volunteer and spend about Tk 250 to buy six medicines. "The situation was such that we could not help buying those things," Parash notes.

He says, though they usually try to avoid such circumstances fearing such expenses, sometimes they cannot just avoid.

"We don't know if the DMP would pay back that money. We are not going to ask for it anyway," shrugs the burly man.

Nafees

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second wicket stand with Nafees, surpassing the previous best of 167 runs against Bashir and Javed Omar against Pakistan in Peshawar in 2003.

Together, the free-scoring pair also helped the home side amass their highest runs on a day. It eclipsed their previous best of 315-9 against Sri Lanka in the recent home series at Chittagong. The total has already crossed the previous best of 295 in an innings against Australia, in Cairns in 2003.

Nafees' heroics against the likes of champion leg-spinner Shane Warne, who made a very frustrating debut against the Tigers finishing with figures of 0-120, firebrand paceman Brett Lee, new sensation Stewart Clarke, Jason Gillespie and Stuart McGill made him the only Bangladeshi to score a century against Australia.

His 138 off 189 balls was also the third highest Test knock for the country after Mohammad Ashraful's 158 and former national captain Aminul Islam's 145 against India.

Having failed to scare the two batsmen on a non-responsive wicket, Australia played the mind game bowling on a strict line in the post lunch session but the two batters stood tall to defy Ponting's plan.

Well poised at 144-1 at lunch after 25 overs, Nafees and Bashir took the score to 238 before the captain was dismissed in the last ball before tea. Bashir mistimed a pull against McGill to give a simple catch to Lee at mid-on after smashing eleven boundaries in 113 balls.

Nafees showed great temperament to win the hearts of many, especially with his successful sweep shots against Warne, who remained wicketless in 20 overs.

The 21-year-old opener swept Warne to reach 99 and then glanced the next ball to complete his hundred in 131 deliveries. Having hit 19 fours, he was bowled round the legs by McGill.

Mohammad Ashraful (29) and Aftab Ahmed (29) but failed to carry on after good starts but Rajin Saleh (35) kept cool to finish the day with Khaled Mashud (2).

MacGill was the most successful Australian bowler picking up three wickets for 82 runs.

Tk 96cr consultation

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general managers of the IT, internal audit and accounting departments and the DGMs of credit department with qualified professionals by February 1.

Among other recommendations not yet implemented are incorporating specific and monitorable performance indicators in the contracts of the banks with management and consultant teams and making the NCB managing directors responsible for achieving the indicators by February 15.

The consultants also received little feedback from the Finance Division on their suggestions and recommendations, complained the mission, which it said also hindered the NCBs from carrying those out.

In some cases, the mission said, the NCBs were denied access to the consultants' reports, which rendered the consultant-NCB working relation ineffectual.

The WB also regretted that, though Agrani Bank is put under private management, the government continues to interfere in its day-to-day activities including credit decision-making. For instance, the bank was instructed and had to lend about \$195 million to the state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation for importing oil in just three months.

Apart from that, despite repeated reminders, the government has not carried out many actions specified in the IDA-government 10-point matrix of actions for improving the effectiveness of the existing contractual arrangements with the consultants, the mission said with express displeasure. It "strongly" urged the government to implement the action plan.

However, two of the consultants, PwC and IDI, are reluctant to include any quantifiable performance indicators in the contracts. While the PwC refused outright to take any responsibility for the performance of Agrani Bank or its MD,

the mission said, the IDI consented to including some necessary provisions in the contract along with a terms of reference for the MD to make him accountable for achieving certain targets. The mission sided with the IDI and asked the government to revise the appointment letters of the NCB managing directors in the IDI-proposed line.

In its report, the mission pointed out that "in order to avoid allegations of wastage of scarce resources, it was obligatory on the part of the WB and the GoB to ensure that the consultants achieve the objectives for which they are hired. The Bank's [WB's] fiduciary duties towards its shareholders require us to ensure that its funds are spent for the purpose for which they are approved."

The report alleged, "there is a serious lack of due diligence on the part of Finance Division in ensuring compliance with GoB's obligations."

But, finance ministry sources said the Finance Division could not implement many recommendations in fear of political backfire. "Besides, the finance minister cannot make all the decisions alone; he has to persuade his cabinet colleagues, too," they explained.

On this issue, Pubali Bank MD Khandkar Ibrahim Khaled suggested that the government can organise a brain-storming session with the country's leading economists and bankers as participants to work out a solution to the situation. Such a consensus will help the government justify implementation of the consultants' recommendations and the reform action plan, he argued.

Probe body fails

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found," he said.

Meanwhile, the speaker has extended the time limit for submitting the probe report up to April 11 as the inquiry committee sought more time.

The fire mysteriously broke out in front of the speaker's office and in two other rooms on Saturday morning, burning some documents.

The closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance system of the Sangsad Bhaban was closed at the time of the incident.

"I think insiders are involved with the incident aimed at discrediting me and parliament," the speaker told reporters at his office yesterday, describing the incident as "pre-planned" and an act of "sabotage".

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar also termed the incident a sabotage. The other intelligence agencies under his ministry visited the three spots and held meeting with the parliament security officers yesterday.

About non-functioning of the 16 CCTVs on Saturday, the speaker said, "It was not in my knowledge that the CCTVs were closed on Saturday."

"If the CCTVs had been functioning, it would have been easy to find out

the miscreants," he said, adding that he ordered to keep all the CCTVs functioning always.

A total of 92 security officers, including 45 army, navy and air force officers, are at present posted inside the parliament building to ensure security. The speaker said 48 more CCTVs will be installed soon and 82 security men will keep watch on different floors of the parliament building.

The six-member inquiry committee headed by Acting Secretary Abu Noki Rezwaniul Haque yesterday inspected the three spots and had talked with the security men.

Journalists were not allowed to go near the spots. The sergeant-at-arms said nobody except the committee members will visit any place inside the parliament.

However, a few officers were seen accompanying the probe body while it was visiting the spots.

Sources said the speaker yesterday discussed the issue with the prime minister over telephone and the PM urged him to take action against those responsible, including the security officers if they are found negligent of duty.

CEC says

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Mudassar Husain, the Supreme Court bench fixed today as the date for hearing on the petitions. The same day the SC full bench will also hear the CEC's leave to appeal petition against the High Court's January 4 directives on voter list.

Advocate Khandaker Mabubuddin Ahmed, chief counsel for the CEC, submitted the petition on behalf of Aziz while Barrister Abdur Razzak on behalf of Moni.

The CEC's petition [reply] argued that as the court's rule did not specify "as to how contempt has been committed", the petitioner is unable to state anyone.

Aziz then reminded the court that he himself is a judge and therefore is aware of the honour of the court. "Question of doing anything tantamount to contempt of this Division does not arise," he said.

Moni in his petition clarified his position regarding the February 4 letter saying that he holds the court in very high esteem and he did not use any word calculated to lower the judiciary.

The petition also says: "The present petitioner [Moni] is entitled to be informed of the specific allegations made against him. Since no specific allegation have been made against him, he is not in a position to defend himself."

On March 27, the Supreme Court issued the contempt rule against the two for lacking confidence in the apex court dealing with the much-talked about voter list case. The full bench of the Appellate Division chaired by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Husain also ordered the CEC and the ruling BNP lawmaker to show cause by April 9 as to why contempt proceedings should not be brought against them.

The contempt rule proceeded from the CEC's leave to appeal petition, the hearing of which was set on February 6.

But on February 4, Moni sent a "confidential and urgent letter" to Advocate Khandaker Mabubuddin

Ahmed, MP. It sought to bring to the recipient's notice Awami League (AL) lawmaker Dr Alauddin Ahmed's comments at a TV talk show.

According to the letter, Alauddin Ahmed had remarked that the CEC, also a sitting judge of the Supreme Court, would have to leave the commission after February 6, the then date for hearing on the petition.

The counsel for the CEC on February 5 attached the letter to the commission's leave to appeal application and filed a supplementary petition with the Appellate Division, seeking a stay on the hearing at the four-member regular bench. It wanted the full court hearing on the leave to appeal at a deferred date.

Sangsad

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session will be short-lived but is likely to witness heated debates on various contentious issues as the main opposition lawmakers are planning to give the government a tough time inside the House.

Awami League (AL) sources said they would join the session and demand discussion on a number of crucial issues ranging from crises of fuel, power and fertiliser to price spiral of essentials. Issues like reforms in the caretaker government and Election Commission are also on the opposition agenda for discussion, they added.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar at his chamber yesterday said the session would be a short one, but if the opposition wishes it would be extended. "The Business Advisory Committee will allocate business of the session prior to its beginning," Sircar said.

The last session of the Jatiya Sangsad, budget session, was a lively one when the main opposition lawmakers returned to the House ending their long boycott.

High security

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In addition to surveillance with closed-circuit television (CCTV), the law enforcers will take footages with 25 video cameras to find out the troublemakers indulging in any subversive act.

Two bomb disposal units of the DMP will also be kept ready there.

Rab will set up five observation posts and 15 CCTVs for surveillance at the Ramna Park. They will be posted at 39 points in the city.

"We had increased the security forces and the area of coverage as people now hold programmes in different parts of the city," State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar told reporters after the meeting yesterday.

Security has been arranged for the Suhrawardy Udyan, meeting sources said, adding that traffic movement from Matsya Bhaban to Moghbazar crossing and on Matsya Bhaban-Shahbagh-Bangla Motor road will be suspended during the celebration.

The DMP will set up a lost-and-found centre at the Ramna Park.

The meeting also instructed the law enforcement agencies to keep vigil over the diplomatic zone.

Bomb attacks at the Pahela Boishakh celebration at Ramna Batamul in 2001 left 10 people killed and scores others injured.

Asked about the government's plans for restive Kansat (Chapainawabganj), the state minister said, "In public interest, we'll handle the situation in our way."

As the agitators have stopped vehicular movement on the roads, perishable items in the stranded trucks have started to rot, and law and order is not properly maintained, he said, adding that the government has been compelled to enforce Section 144 there.

About the opposition's sit-in programme in front of the prime minister's office on April 19, Babar said, "We'll take necessary steps to ensure that the political parties can hold their programme peacefully."

Asked what if the opposition activists try to defy police barricade, he said, "We will resort to the steps that we always take in such cases."

Barisal JCD men

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lawmakers, ministers and influential leaders who were present there.

However, two JCD leaders from Patuakhali and Golachipa -- Jahurul Islam Shamim and Shahidul Oslam Molla -- said they were ashamed at the performances of commerce ministry while Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury was present at the stage.

They also alleged that Sujon, JCD president of Mirzaganj upazila, the native upazila of the commerce minister, was arrested and still facing police harassments by the minister's order due to personality clash with him (minister).

Tarikul Islam, a JCD leader of Zianagar under Pirojpur, criticised Moulana Delwar Hossain Saidee, Jamaat leader and the local lawmaker, and called on the BNP leaders to nominate a BNP man to contest from that constituency in the next parliamentary election.

In his inaugurating and concluding speeches, Tariq asked the JCD leaders to work for re-electing the alliance government in the next general election to continue the successes.

ACC appoints

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some have been already sent while others would be dispatched soon.

The appointed lawyers will only deal with the charge sheets submitted by the ACC while public prosecutors would conduct more than 5,000 under-trial corruption cases filed by the defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC).

Like BAC lawsuits, trial of the cases filed by the ACC will be held in special judge courts in the 19 old greater districts, as there is no new gazette notification regarding the venues for holding the ACC cases.

The source also informed the ACC has also appointed Ashiq Jaill as retainer to inform if any case has been filed against the ACC. If an immediate step is required on behalf of the ACC in respect of any under-trial case, the retainer will also advise the ACC to accept his action.

Meanwhile, former secretary of land Mohammad Abdul Alim Khan was appointed as Secretary to ACC. The new ACC secretary is expected to begin work today.

The position of ACC secretary fell vacant on January 25 when Secretary M Ataur Rahman was made Secretary to the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Bangla Bhai

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bodyguard Masud and his host Chan Miah.

Si Nazrul Islam of Rab filed all three cases with the Muktagachha Police Station after the arrest of Bangla Bhai at Rampur village under the upazila on March 6.

Bangla Bhai looked fresh and was smiling at the court and he exchanged salams with the waiting journalists and members of law enforcement agencies.

US, Korea

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decision of the summit leaders," Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin said yesterday.

Addressing a news briefing prior to the 2-day Saarc Standing Committee meet in Dhaka on April 11-12, he said the committee will discuss about the applications of the US and South Korea and refer them to the Saarc Council of Ministers meet likely to be held in July, but the ultimate decision will be taken by the summit leaders.

Replying to a question about admission of Afghanistan in the next summit without amending the Saarc Charter, which has no provision for inclusion of new members, he said "We expect to finalise a joint declaration that will be signed between the seven heads of state and government on the one side and the president of Afghanistan on the other at the 14th summit in New Delhi."

The joint declaration will pave the way for admitting Afghanistan into the 14th summit, which will also be ratified in the same summit.

He said the decisions to give new membership to Afghanistan, and observer status to China and Japan were taken by the summit leaders at the 13th summit in Dhaka last year.

On the guidelines for observer status, he said, "We do not have any detailed guidelines spelling out who to admit as observers and guests in various Saarc activities. A number of states and international organisations are showing interest in associating themselves with Saarc either as observers or guests."

In this context, the foreign secretary said a special session of the Standing Committee will look into various aspects of their involvement with Saarc. "The growing interest of these countries is not only an acknowledgement of Saarc's increasing relevance, but also a recognition by the international community of Saarc's emergence as an open and forward looking forum for regional cooperation," he said.

Asked about observer status for

the European Union, the foreign secretary said Bangladesh or the Saarc Secretariat has yet not received any formal request from the EU.

The 5th special session of the Saarc Standing Committee, comprises the foreign secretaries of the member states, during its two-day meet beginning tomorrow, it will deal with a number of vital issues, including finalisation of a vision document for the next decade, modalities for admission of Afghanistan as a new member, guidelines for associating observers, dialogue partners and guests.

Briefing diplomatic correspondents, Hemayetuddin said the Standing Committee will review all Saarc institutions and mechanisms, including reviewing of the functioning of the Saarc Secretariat, Saarc Regional Centres, various national and sectoral focal points that are involved in following up and implementing decisions taken by the summits and ministerial meetings.

For instance, he said SIFTA will go into implementation phase shortly, when the Secretariat will need to undertake close monitoring. "We are going to establish a more broad-based financing mechanism called Saarc Development Fund," he added.

The special session will consider ways and means to make the seven Saarc regional centres more effective. The centres include Saarc Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC) and Saarc Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC) in Bangladesh, Forestry Centre in Bhutan, Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka, Energy in Pakistan and Disaster Management in India.

Hemayetuddin said since the inception of Saarc, a number of UN and other international agencies have joined hands with the association through MoUs and collaborated with it on specific projects.

AL to repeal law

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enacted to fight growing terrorism, he observed.

Addressing the roundtable, AL Presidium Member Suranjit said if his party comes to power, he would take the initiative to repeal the law. "Now let's get rid of this unconstitutional law as the major militant leaders have already been caught."

Odhikar and English language daily New Age organised the discussion titled "Bangladesh Telecomunication (amendment) Act, 2006: National Security or Infringement on Civil Rights" at Spectra Convention Centre in Dhaka. Odhikar President AF Hassan Anif was the moderator of the roundtable.

Referring to the August 21 grenade attacks on AL rally and the British High Commissioner, Kibria killing and the August 17 blasts across the country, Moudud said these incidents weighed heavily on him.

"We must keep in mind in what circumstances we enacted such a law. There was an emergency-like situation in the country. And there was no scope for pre-legislative consultation as it was necessary to make a quick decision," he explained.

The minister said the purpose of the law has been served after the arrests of militant kingpins Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai.

Responding to Suranjit, Moudud said AL may repeal the law or may not but the present situation may continue for years to come.

Alleging that the law was rather imposed, Suranjit earlier said, "There should have been a debate in parliament as well as in different public forums before enacting the law."

Participating in the discussion, Additional Attorney General Fida M Kamal said there has not been any attempt so far to challenge the law.

AL lawmaker Muhammad Faruk Khan said he fears more political persecution would follow because of this law.

"It's a shame that huge money would be spent tapping people's telephones when there is no money to buy a crane for a rescue operation after a building collapse," he observed.

Hundreds detained

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Bharatpur around 2,000 protesters clashed with police firing tear gas after a woman died overnight from injuries sustained in a demonstration, Narayan Sharma, a local journalist, told AFP by phone.

"Protesters rained stones on police and they responded by firing tear gas," Sharma said. It was the second day of violence in Bharatpur, 220 kilometres (138 miles) southwest of Kathmandu, after thousands went on a rampage Saturday.

The death, reported by a hospital spokesman in the town, was the second in four days of protests called by a seven-party alliance in concert with Maoist rebels. It is set to end Sunday.

The government extended a daytime curfew in the capital to several towns, including the scenic tourist resort of Pokhara, 200km west of Kathmandu, where on Saturday troops shot dead a demonstrator. The army said the killing was in self-defence.

Iran shoots down

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further details.

US publications reported over the weekend that the White House is studying options for military strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities to pressure Tehran to abandon its controversial nuclear program.

The US media have reported that the US military has been secretly flying surveillance drones over Iran since 2004 using radar, video, still photography and air filters to detect traces of nuclear activity not accessible to satellites.

Executive Director of Ain O Salish Kendra Sultana Kamal said there is no indication of transparency in any stage of enacting the law.

Executive President of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal Moimuddin Khan Badal said people who were instrumental in introducing the law should also be 'scrapped along with the law'.

AL Women Affairs Secretary Dipu