

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 Shamsur M Chowdhury, Bangladesh ambassador to the US and John D Rafaeli, 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.

Gathering ban

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at Kansat, killing 10 people, should not be declared illegal.

Dr Kamal Hossain assisted by Advocate Idris Rahman, Barrister Sara Hossain and Barrister Tanjib-ur-Alam moved for the petitioner.

SECTION 144 IN KANSAT

Our Rajshahi Correspondent reports: Shibganj upazila administration with an express aim to restore law and order imposed Section 144 in Kansat and the four other agitating unions yesterday, the third day of the PBUSP hartal protesting at Thursday's skirmishes that claimed four lives including that of a 14-year-old boy.

The ban on any gathering slapped on residents of the restive bordering area sparked fresh tension. With this, the government has virtually declared a war with the thousands of unarmed power-starved people of the area, PBUSP leaders said.

A man travelled about 5km from Bokarpur Crossroads to Kansat Bazaar along Chapainawabganj-Sona Masjid Land Port road in a rickshaw escorted by nearly 100 policemen announcing the ban over a loudhailer.

"All gatherings of more than three people are prohibited from 12 noon today [Sunday] within the 5km radius of Kansat. The curfew will continue until 6:00am tomorrow [Monday] with a one-hour break from 8:00pm," announced the man by an order of the acting upazila nibahi officer of Shibganj, Dewan Abdus Samad.

The announcement claimed the step was taken to avert violence like last Thursday's.

The authorities gathered about 1,000 police, 100 Armed Police Battalion members and 200 BDR troops in and around Kansat to enforce the ban. "If necessary, we will bring more forces to restore normalcy in this area," said Chapainawabganj SP Mahfujul Islam.

The administrative step came after

Govt covering

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An amount of \$75,000 per month is being spent from the public exchequer to build the image of the ruling alliance, he said, adding that the agreement aims at propagating for a "failed" government and its leaders rather than addressing public interest.

The agreement has no place for issues like quota free access for Bangladeshi readymade garment to the US market and US investment here, "which proves the ill motives of the lobbyist appointment", he added.

The Anti-Corruption Commission should look into the matter in the interest of the country, he said.

"The government made the secret deal [with The Washington Group and Ketchum Washington] in October last year," Saber said. "Who decided to appoint the lobbyist group—is it the prime minister herself, her cabinet or the Hawa Bhaban men?" he questioned.

He said the lobbyist group arranged visits of a number of ministers, including Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar and BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, in the US during

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 force 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 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.

"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.

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 IDB-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 IDB, 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 IDB 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 IDB and asked the government to revise the appointment letters of the NCB managing directors in the IDB-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 Khandker Ibrahim Khalid 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 meetings with the parliament security officers yesterday.

However, a few officials 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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Mudassir 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 Razzaq 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 anymore."

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 Mudassir 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, 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.

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

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 Udayan, meeting sources said, adding that traffic movement from Mymensingh to Mohibazar crossing and on Mymensingh-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 Boishakhi celebration at Ramna Bataiul 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'll resort to the steps that we always take in such cases."

Asked about observer status for

US, Korea

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decision of the summit leaders," Saarc Secretary General 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.

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 SAFTA 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 President Member Suranit 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's Telecommunication (amendment) Act, 2006: National Security or Infringement on Civil Rights" at Sreepur Convention Centre in Dhaka. Odhikar President AF Hassan Arif was the moderator of the roundtable.

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).

Journals 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 officials 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.

In his inaugural 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 Jalil 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.