

Rejoinder and our reply

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appointing SIs on political consideration or lobbying is not based on facts.

OUR REPLY

There are 133 circle ASP offices and the authorities were aware of it when the SIs were appointed.

Now, while the Police Headquarters admits that the SIs were supposed to be posted at the circle offices and says their practical training will be completed "in phases", the question is: How will all the 821 SIs be accommodated in the 133 circle offices, which, according to the Police Headquarters itself, is not possible?

Our interpretation is that they have been posted directly at the police stations with a political objective ahead of the general election while the fact remains that they might also be posted at courts or police lines for training as the number of circle ASP offices is less than the number of probationary SIs.

The political tilt in the selection process of these SIs strengthens our interpretation.

If the 821 SIs are posted at the circle offices, courts and police lines is phases later, why this move has not been taken initially? No question would have arisen if the 821 SIs were divided into several groups and simultaneously placed at circle offices, courts, police lines and police stations.

Regarding the appointment of the SIs also, we stand by our report that a good number of these SIs

were leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhahtra Dal (JCD), student front of ruling BNP, and Islami Chhahtra Shibir, student front of Jamaat-e-Islami.

Also, some of them are accused of criminals offences and cases are still pending against them.

The SIs include Nilphamari district JCD president Mokhesur Rahman Labhlu, former JCD vice-president of Chittagong Mohsin College unit Sheikh Khairul Bashar, Shibir leader of the same college Habibullah, Shibir leader of Kalaroa Government College unit Abu Bakar Siddiq, Barguna district JCD member and Taltoli thana JCD president Mahibullah, school affairs secretary of Barguna district JCD Zahidul Islam, Chittagong Mohsin College unit Shibir leader Jobair Syed, Shibir leader of Godagari, Rajshahi, Bony Israil, and Godagari Municipality unit JCD president Mahbubur Rahman and vice-president Shahidul Islam Bakul.

Bogra Law College unit JCD leader SM Amanullah Nayan, Bogra district JCD leaders Rakibul Hasan Shipon and Fazle Ashiq, Bogra district JCD leader Mithun, Majhira union JCD president Mahmudunnabi, and Bogra Azizul Haq College JCD leader Ratan have also been appointed as SIs.

Former general secretary of Zia Hall (Dhaka University) unit of JCD Murad Khan, who was expelled from DU for his involvement in criminal activities, was also appointed as an SI.

Apart from these political leaders, a good number of relatives of ministers and BNP lawmakers were also appointed.

Besides, some accused in cases under trial were also appointed as SIs.

Of them, Barisal district JCD president Mainul Islam Pulak is a chargesheeted accused in a criminal case. Godagari Municipality unit JCD vice-president Shahidur Rahman Biltu is an accused of Chhatra League leader Firroz killing case which is under trial.

An accused of the Ramna Batomul bomb blast case Mizanur Rahman Swadhin who was arrested and remanded has also been made an SI. A former JCD cadre, Mizanur joined the post in the first week of April and was posted at Patuakhali Sadar Police station.

Moreover, there is no precedence of awarding examinees with grace marks in any competitive examinations, but this time the authorities gave 20 per cent grace marks to the SI candidates to qualify the relatives of ministers and MPs and the JCD and Shibir leaders.

It is a partial account of the fact. We could not put up all the substantial information due to shortage of space.

No relief for Barapukuria

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has said it will not arrange any loan for Petrobangla for the repayment. Instead, the BCMCL will have to make the repayment from its own earning.

But the BCMCL is unable to earn enough despite very high price of coal as the coal-fired power plant, which is the main buyer of coal, is not buying much and nor paying the arrears.

Under the influence of Hosaf, which is also the local representative of a consortium of three Chinese companies, the government is paying \$260 million for the power plant that could be built for less than \$170 million.

Moreover, the Chinese consortium has built a power plant with hundreds of flaws, including that the machinery is not suitable for the type of coal produced in the mine. Barapukuria coal is rich with iron, and also damp, and the plant cannot efficiently handle burning this type of coal, plant sources said.

The power plant was supposed to start operation early this year but till date it could not properly start full operation as it has been tripping frequently.

The plant is designed to consume 85 percent of Barapukuria coal. But due to its faulty functioning, a huge quantity of coal has been piled up at the mine site.

"The mining authorities now has an inventory of 1.20 lakh tonnes of coal on the surface and has stopped further production of coal," said one source.

The Power Development Board (PDB) that owns the coal-fired power plant owns the BCMCL Tk 64 crore for coal consumed by the power plant. In addition, the plant should pay another Tk 60 crore for the 1.20 lakh tonnes of coal in the inventory. If the PDB pays the BCMCL this amount, Petrobangla can repay the CMC the fifth instalment of the Supplier's Credit.

As this is not happening, the CMC-Hosaf consortium told Petrobangla in their letter that since it is unable to pay the instalment, it should consider giving it the mining lease.

Petrobangla officials however rule out the unsolicited proposal.

"The government is in deep trouble with this mine. But the mine has 303 million tonnes of coal in place with 200 million tonnes recoverable, if designed and handled properly. It has high financial value if everything is done anew, properly and protecting the national interest," one official said.

"There should not be any question of any more of unsolicited deal," he said. "Besides, whichever company takes over the mine should also pay for the project cost of Tk 1,600 crore first. The equity between the government and the mining authority should be designed in the light of the present international price."

WHAT'S SO LUCRATIVE ABOUT THE MINE?

The Ecneac approved Barapukuria project proposal in March 1992 with the target of completing it on July 31, 2001. But the project was kept suspended when sub-soil waters started gushing in at a rate of 700 cubic metres on April 5, 1998 at a depth of 1,100 feet. This happened because of design flaws, according to official sources.

Redesigning of the project involved relocating the mine's shaft half a kilometre to the south where coal seams lie at a greater depth. As a result, the mine's annual production capacity has been officially reduced to 700,000 tonnes from the original target of 1.1 million tonnes. Unofficial sources however say the present mining design will give a maximum annual production of 500,000 tonnes.

Besides, the CMC did not provide mining equipment as per the agreement, yet the government accepted the mine in its half-baked condition.

Combined with the doubling of project cost and reduction of annual production capacity, cost of coal production has nearly doubled from \$ 35 a tonne initially to nearly \$60 now.

Meanwhile, the global price of coal, which was barely around \$25 per tonne in the early nineties, has shot up to \$70-\$75 now.

In 2004-06, the BCMCL produced 87,000 tonnes of coal and in 2005-06 it produced 2.39 lakh tonnes. The company sold a portion

of the coal to private buyers at a rate of \$73 a tonne through open tender. This shows the potential of the mine, which in the present situation can not be tapped.

The BCMCL sells coal to the power plant at the site for \$60 per tonne.

This has made the coal mine a lucrative business.

Earlier last year, Indian giant Tata had proposed taking over the Barapukuria mine. And the government primarily said it is willing to permit this if Tata pays the existing project's cost and also starts mining after 2011, when the existing operation contract with China will end. This is essentially an admission by the government that the current project has failed to attain its objective.

ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER AT THE MINE SITE

Though many geologists had in the past favoured underground mining than open-cast mining, Barapukuria underground mine has brought along environmental catastrophe due to project design flaws, negligence of the developer and non-installation of many project components as per the agreement.

According to sources, a huge area on the surface of the mine has already subsided and become unusable. Besides, the mine is pumping out toxic black waters into the locality, causing health hazards.

But the authorities have not taken any action against the CMC for not installing environment friendly units or other facilities to prevent such disasters, or for faulty mine designs that are causing land subsidence. The project's consultant is also responsible for such poor quality work as it did not object to the foul practices.

"It has been possible for the CMC, project consultant IMCL and the Chinese consortium to deliver low quality product because of Hosaf, which has orchestrated everything from the beginning," said an official.

Hasina slams govt

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measures to rescue missing fishermen. Even the met office also circulated the forecast before the storm but many fishermen did not come back from the deep sea due to a sudden storm.

Taking the floor on a point of order Sheikh Hasina said now the government wants to control the matters of religious practices too, like Ramadan and Eid. "The month of Ramadan started from Saturday in other Muslim countries but our moon sighting committee did not see the moon," she said.

Lambasting the government for failing to alert the people about the storm she said, "Now foxes and dogs are gnawing the bodies of the dead in coastal areas but the government has no worry. Many people including a captain of a naval vessel are still missing," she complained.

"The prime minister could not visit the storm affected area as she is busy attending public rallies," she alleged adding that the prime minister used a helicopter to attend her party programmes while there is no helicopter for rescuing the people affected by the storm.

Criticising the prime minister, she said, "People's lives are totally valueless to the present government and that is why it does not respect the people's right to vote freely. It knows how to rig the polls and it also knows election engineering. That is exactly why we have placed the reform proposal."

She strongly criticised the govern-

ment for its failure to come to a pragmatic decision regarding the sighting of the Ramadan moon as the Muslims of many countries started fasting from Saturday.

In his hard hit replies Health Minister Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain said radio and TV channels duly aired all the warnings to fishermen asking them to remain in safe places.

"Just after the storm, the government took all kinds of measures and engaged all available tools for rescuing the affected people and fishermen," he said.

Criticising Hasina's speech on moon sighting, he said, "Religious matters should not be brought into politics."

After Mosharrar's speech, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid stood up but the speaker moved on to another business of the day and subsequently the AL lawmakers staged a walkout.

Prior to the health minister, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said it was Awami League who started rigging votes in 1973. "The opposition have failed to show their sense of responsibility by observing a hartal and a blockade programme during the natural disaster," he said.

Earlier, Suranjit Sen Gupta, K M Jahangir Hossain and Shahjahan Khan from AL, BNP lawmakers Major (retd) Manjur Quader and Salahuddin Ahmed, and Jatiya Party Lawmaker Hafizuddin Ahmad spoke on points of order.

Vegetable prices

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were available for Tk 15-16 and Tk 10-12 per kg, are now selling at Tk 24-28 and Tk 24-26.

Long beans are now being sold at Tk 28-32; earlier, the price was Tk 18-20 in retail markets.

The prices of various kinds of leafy vegetables have also increased significantly.

The prices of egg and potato, which had already seen a significant rise, shot up further. Potato was selling at Tk 24 per kg while egg was selling at Tk 60 per dozen.

Wholesalers at the Karwan Bazar kitchen market told The Daily Star that the supply of vegetables against the need has decreased significantly as harvest was not possible due to the torrential rainfall.

Retailers at different local markets complained that skyrocketing prices of daily essentials at wholesale markets have forced them to increase the prices.

The prices of fruits and dates have also shot up with the Ramadan beginning today.

Different varieties of dates were selling at retail shops between Tk 60 and Tk 400 per kg. The prices ranged between Tk 40 and Tk 250 last Ramadan.

UNB adds: Thirty-five mobile courts will be in operation in the capital to keep the prices of essentials stable during the Ramadan.

State Minister for Communications Salahuddin Ahmed told parliament on Thursday that the home ministry will monitor the activities of the mobile courts.

He said the government has already started selling essentials like sugar, pulses, soybean oil and onion through the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) at a "reasonable price".

The TCB is ferrying the items in 20 mobile trucks in Dhaka, four in Chittagong, and two each in Khulna and Rajshahi, the state minister told

the House.

Steps have also been taken to keep the banks open at ports, particularly at the Benapole land port, on holidays to facilitate unloading of consumer goods during Ramadan, he said.

The rationing programme began on September 12 and will continue until October 17. Some 350 open market sale dealers in Dhaka, 40 in Chittagong, 25 in Khulna and 25 in Rajshahi have been employed for this operation.

The Fisheries Development Corporation and Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation will also take measures to increase the supply of fish and vegetables across the country.

CAB MEETING

Speakers at a meeting of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) on Saturday said extortion at different points of highways has caused the continued price spiral of essentials.

Extortions, allegedly by the police in most cases, constitute 45-68 per cent of the total transportation cost from any part of the country to the capital, they said.

The speakers observed that the measures taken by the government to rein in the prices of essentials are ineffective as they are mainly town-centred. Moreover, the government is also not taking any punitive measures against the hoarders, they said.

The CAB meeting demanded action against the syndicates that are controlling the commodity markets, creating equal opportunity for all importers, checking extortion and activities of the middlemen across the country, and immediate legislation of the Consumer Right Act.

Consumers

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The power produced in the plants in Chittagong is sufficient to meet the demands of the port city but a large chunk of it is very often routed to the national grid leaving Chittagong in darkness, the speakers alleged.

CRPC Chairman Khorshed Alam Sujan, also the secretary for environmental affairs of Awami League Chittagong city unit, presided over the rally attended by several hundred aggrieved power subscribers.

The siege was withdrawn after Superintendent Engineer of PGCB Fayezul Kabir assured them of improved power supply during the month of Ramadan.

He said defective transmission lines, old plants and outdated power generation systems were causing the load-shedding.

Several areas of the port city have been suffering six to seven hours of power cuts every day since mid September.

Around 536 megawatts (MW) of power was generated in the four plants in Chittagong yesterday. Of this, 120MW was routed to the national grid.

Sources said Chittagong requires around 600MW of power every day and the city suffered almost 200MW of load-shedding yesterday. On Saturday Chittagong power plants produced 550MW while 146MW was routed to the national grid, they added.

Fugitive

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Nurul Haq was accused in fifteen criminal cases. He had been running from the law ever since he was sentenced to a four-year rigorous imprisonment.

Meanwhile, a report from Khulna says, a divisional operations commander of PBCP Janajuddho faction was killed in 'crossfire' between the police and his accomplices at about 3:30am yesterday at Bashtali Chandaitala area under Rampal upazila of Bagerhat district.

The killed is Abid Hasan alias Sohail Gazi, 35, son of Jail Gazi of Sholakuria village under Rampal upazila of Bagerhat district.

Abid was arrested on Friday at an under construction house at Guakhola village under Abhoyanagar upazila of Jessore district.

According to police, Abid was wanted in several criminal cases filed with different police stations in Jessore and Bagerhat including three murder cases.

Police recovered a revolver, one shotgun and six bullets from his possession.

Hannan's brother

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Ten people died and several others were injured on April 14, 2001 when bombs went off amid the crowd gathered to celebrate the Bangla New Year near the Batamul inside Ramna Park.

On September 10 and 14, Hannan and his accomplice Mamun were shown arrested in the same case and were remanded for interrogation.

In the forwarding report placed before the court, CID Inspector Abu Hena Mohammad Yusuf, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, said Mofiz gave important information about the blasts and he needs to be interrogated intensively to find out more information about the blasts.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Zahangir Alam granted a four-day remand.

The police so far arrested 12 people in connection with the Ramna Batamul blasts but all of them obtained bail from the High Court.

On June 14, 2001, one of the arrestees, Moulana Akbar Hussain, gave a confessional statement to a metropolitan magistrate and disclosed names of Mufti Hannan and others involved in the blasts.

5 JMB men jailed

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The two cases -- one under the Arms Act and the other under the Explosive Substances Act -- were filed with Uttara Police Station on January 5.

The convicts are Wahidul Islam, 20, Shafiqul Islam, 30, Hafez Ibrahim, 30, Abdullah Al Faruq, 21, and Hanif, 22.

Judge Mohammad Rabiul Hassan of the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court handed down the verdict in presence of the convicts.

The judge gave 54 years' rigorous imprisonment for possessing illegal firearms, ammunition and 34 years' rigorous imprisonment for possessing explosives.

During the trial, prosecution and defence completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 36 prosecution witnesses in each case.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) raided the house of Ruhul Amin Bhuiyan at Courtbari in Uttara in the capital on January 5 and seized 19 items of arms, explosives, books on jihad and bomb-making materials. They also arrested Wahidul Islam, Shafiqul Islam and Hafez Ibrahim.

Following information extracted from them, Rab arrested Abdullah Al Faruq and Hanif.

The team also seized 24kg of explosive, gunpowder, 1,200 grenade safety-pins and 100 grenade-heads.

On March 30, Rab pressed charges against the five JMB members, showing 36 people as prosecution witnesses.

The investigation officer dropped the name of Shakil, also known as Mollah Omar, from the charge sheet as he was killed in a fight with the law enforcers in Comilla on March 12.

Assistant Public Prosecutor Shahidul Islam Sardar appeared for the state while state appointed lawyers defended the accused.

VERDICT OF A CASE AGAINST SUNNY

ADhaka court will deliver today the verdict of an August 17 bomb blast case filed against Ataur Rahman Sunny and five others.

Judge SM Mojibur Rahman of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court will deliver the verdict at 11:00am, court sources said.

The five others accused are Rezaul Haq Reza, 25, of Jamalpur, Mustafizur Rahman Musa, 22, of

Ershad

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country's southern region. He urged the government to send relief materials to the affected people.

JP Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader presided over the function which was addressed, among others, by JP presidium member Abdus Sattar, MA Hannan, Syed Abu Hossain Babla, Golam Kibria Tipu, Sheikh Shawkat Hossain Nilu and Abdur Razzak Khan.

Naogaon, Habibur Rahman Habib, 23, Abdullah Al Shohail, 25, of Gazipur and Mohammad Sagir Hossain, 35, of Dhaka.

Of them, Musa, Habib and Sagir are on the run while the rest are in the custody.

The prosecution and the defence completed their arguments earlier and the court recorded statements of 47 prosecution witnesses.

Reza had given a confessional statement to a magistrate, naming the other JMB militants involved in the blasts.

Detective Branch (DB) of Police on November 24 last year pressed charges against the four in connection with a blast near Zia Concourse Hall around 11:25am on August 17 last year.

Investigation officer (IO) of the case and DB Inspector Mohammad Fazul Haq submitted the charge sheet to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka.

The IO dropped the names of former Islamic Foundation director Maulana Fariduddin Masud and Israaq Ahmad Siraji, accounts officer (part-timer) of Masud's Islahul Muslimeen Parishad of Bangladesh, and Sayeed Nizami, co-ordinator of the Parishad.

The IO said he dropped their names as the charges brought against them were found to be false, baseless and concocted.

BNP gets tough

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against party lawmaker Jahir Uddin Swapan. Besides, a senior party leader in Babuganj-Jipjur constituency has been suspended as local lawmaker Moazzem Hossain Alal complained against him for opposing him.

Both lawmakers are known to have close links to Hawa Bhaban high-ups including BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman.

BNP Sathkira district committee has been dissolved following complaints from lawmaker Habibul Islam Habib that some leaders of the party were creating a lot of problems for him. These leaders were opposing Habib, who is very close to Hawa Bhaban, as general secretary of the district unit.

Meanwhile, Jessore district BNP President Chowdhury Shahidul Islam Nayan issued showcaused five leaders of Jhikorgachha BNP on instruction of party high-ups for opposing the local four-party alliance lawmaker, who is a Jamaat leader. The five are Jhikorgachha Thana BNP President Jalal Uddin Ahmad, General Secretary Mortaza Elahi Tipu, Organising Secretary Shafail Azam Rumi, Paurasava unit Secretary Mizanur Rahman and organising secretary Mahmudunnabi.

Sources said the BNP high ups are planning to take action against the defiant leaders quickly but not at a time to maintain party discipline ahead of the election.

2 more upazilas

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implementation of case management and court-administration reform under the project. The project will continue till 2008.

The other proposals approved in the meeting are relocation of assistant judge court from Satkania of Chittagong to the previous place in Bashkhali upazila, setting up police investigation centre at Kachua Bazar at Shailakupa in Jhenidha and upgrading Naruchi police outpost in Tangail district to Hemnagar police investigation centre.

The meeting also approved creation of 19 temporary posts in revenue sector for Donarchar 20-bed hospital in Daudkandi upazila in Comilla and creation of new posts in revenue sector at 250-bed upgraded Noakhali General Hospital.

Cabinet Secretary Md Abu Solaiman Chowdhury briefed newsmen about the outcome of the meeting.

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, Health Minister Khandokar Mosharrar Hossain, Industries Minister Matiar Rahman Nizami, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Huq, State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar, State Minister for LGRD Ziaul Huq Zia and concerned Secretaries were present at the meeting.

Manpower export

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to Tk 2 lakh, whereas a worker should not need more than Tk 50,000 for going to Malaysia," said a recruitment agent requesting anonymity.

The manpower export to Malaysia might halt anytime if the dispute is not resolved immediately, he said adding, "Especially those who had already paid a substantial amount of money to the middlemen or the agencies will be in great trouble."

Sources in the expatriates' welfare ministry said the Malaysian government too has expressed disgust over the reports that the Baira was having extra money from the workers saying that they need that for the lobbyists working in Malaysia.

Under these circumstances, the government should oversee the manpower export instead of Baira, suggested a recruiting agent preferring anonymity.

It was for the first time that Malaysia had signed an agreement with a trade body like Baira for manpower. According to the agreement, an online system is to be employed to avert any forgery and irregularities in the process.

The country, which has long been in want of skilled workers for its industries, also agreed to employ 50 percent of the total foreign workers from Bangladesh.

"The prevailing deadlock might lead to an extensive damage to manpower export from Bangladesh if the government fails to address the issue properly, feared a recruiter.

Junta steps

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appointed them last week to the National Counter-Corruption Commission.

"One reason they gave to justify the coup was corruption," said political scientist Thitinan Pongsudhirak of Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University. "Now they have to prove it. They also want to make sure Thaksin doesn't come back."

The new leaders said they were also finalising a temporary draft charter to replace the 1997 constitution that was scrapped with the takeover, which will be used until a new one is drawn up.

Acar said: "We are working on the draft of the interim constitution so it will meet the deadline of two weeks."

So far the junta has sacked an elected government, imposed martial law, purged Thaksin loyalists, scrapped planned elections, banned public gatherings and threatened relations against foreign media.

Some 300 community radio stations in the country's rural north, the heartland of Thaksin's support, have been closed down.

The men in uniform also plan to install a new "civilian premier" tasked with restoring unity and running the country until elections postponed by the junta until October next year, 12 months later.

Iraq war

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President Bush's phony argument about the Iraq war," Democratic Sen Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts said.

"... The fact that we need a new direction in Iraq to really win the war on terror and make Americans safer could not be clearer or more urgent -- yet this administration stubbornly clings to a failed 'stay-the-course' strategy."

Some of the estimate's conclusions confirm predictions in a January 2003 national Intelligence Council report that said a war in Iraq might increase support for political Islam worldwide, according to the newspaper.

"It also examines how