

Ex-private secretary spills graft beans about Khaleda

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As examples, we can take wheat purchase from the food ministry, the purchase of machinery parts for the civil aviation and tourism ministry, the purchase of pillars and transformers for the power division, and the allocation of abandoned gas fields for the mineral resources ministry. These matters have come under the national media spotlight. But the government's inaction on these matters is particularly noticeable. There is even evidence that there were attempts to cover up these cases by all levels of the government.

Four classes of people close to the government were directly involved with the corruption of the past five years: Firstly, decision-making ministers and government officials; secondly, the ministers' sons and relatives who illegally influenced the decision-making ministers and government officials (socially influential); thirdly, members of parliament (politically influential); and fourth and finally, professional lobbyists, beneficiaries and agents (financially influential).

PA: Who were the most influential among the four classes?

NI: The former prime minister's son and relatives. The prime minister's (eldest) son Tarique Rahman himself used to visit the PMO occasionally. But one of the PM's political secretaries used to implement his agenda. The PM's close relatives used to visit the PMO more frequently if big purchasing decisions were due to be raised in cabinet meetings. They used to influence the PM and several PMO officials on big-money purchases. They would often and openly frequent the restricted red-block of the PMO. The PM's former personal secretary Saiful Islam Duke used to assist them in accessing the restricted zone. He is a close relative of the PM.

PA: Who among the PM's relatives were seen most often at the PMO?

NI: I saw the PM's son Tarique Rahman most frequently right before the Canadian company Niko was allocated the abandoned gas-field for exploration and development. In addition, the PMO used to be frequented by the PM's youngest son Arafat Rahman, her sister's son Shahrin Islam Tuhin, her brother Syed Iskander, and the brother-in-law of the PM's other brother Shamim Iskander.

PA: Did Hawa Bhaban's name come up regarding corruption in the last five years?

NI: I have never seen any direct relationship between Hawa Bhaban and specific corruption allegations. But during this time, a lot of corruption and irregularities have taken place with the help of several ministers and secretaries. These ministers and secretaries maintained uninterrupted links with Hawa Bhaban and enjoyed its support and assistance.

PA: After taking over as PM, Khaleda Zia appointed Haris Chowdhury and Mosaddek Ali Fali as her political secretaries. What was their role in corruption during the last five years?

NI: The first person used to serve the purpose of a 'bhaban' (Hawa Bhaban). He would also be involved in lobbying for (deals) in different sectors. Reportedly, in most of these cases the lobbying was in exchange for large sums of money. He would also implement the wishes of the PM's eldest son. The second person worked as the PM's political secretary for three years. I only want to say that he did not have the ability to legally earn the wealth he stated ahead of the elections. People think that his undeclared wealth far exceeds his declared wealth. He would also manage the illegally earned funds of a special group of people. A lot would be revealed if these matters were investigated.

PA: Can you remember any big case of corruption during the coalition government?

NI: In 2002-2003 after the coalition government came to power, the food ministry started a programme to purchase domestically produced wheat, which created a big scandal. It came under the national media spotlight in a big way. An investigation committee was formed which was headed by a secretary. The investigation report by the committee stated that Indian animal-fodder was passed off as domestically produced wheat and purchased under the national food collection policy. The funny thing is that when the wheat was purchased, domestically produced wheat was not even on the market. The government incurred a massive loss as a result. Along with others, the names of former food minister Abdullah Al Noman and former Bogra MP Helaluzzaman Talukdar were raised.

Helaluzzaman Talukdar was a close associate of Tarique Rahman. Every time Tarique would visit Bogra, Helaluzzaman Talukdar would always be by his side. A number of government officials' names were also mentioned involving this case. Although the PM acted against a number of the government officials, including sacking a number of them, she did not act against any of the political leaders concerned. The issue was then quickly covered up. The government could not take steps against the corrupt politicians, thanks to the Hawa Bhaban influence. The corruption in this case was very clearly proven.

PA: When these corruption cases came to light, did the PM try to suppress them?

NI: If there were clear signs of Hawa Bhaban involvement, then the PM would abstain from taking any action against the accused, regardless of probe reports. If a minister was specifically accused of corruption, other ministers would come out in their support. As a result, no effective measures

were taken in the big cases of corruption.

PA: Can you recall any other instances of covering up investigation reports?

NI: A number of incidents were probed, of which the wheat incident is one. I can recall another incident. In 2002, the police raided Shamsunnahar Hall, which was later investigated by a judicial investigation committee. (The brutality of) A number of police officials close to Hawa Bhaban were mentioned in the committee's report. Under Hawa Bhaban's orders no steps were taken against these police officers and the probe report was not released. I remember one of the police officer's name, the much-talked about Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Kohinor Mia. He was in charge of the scandalous operation. He was transferred to Barguna as a result of the probe report. But he did not have to spend even a day at his new posting as he was transferred to Mymensingh as the superintendent of police under Hawa Bhaban's orders.

PA: What about the irregularities regarding contractual appointments?

NI: Irregularity and corruption in relation to contractual appointments and transfers was one of the most talked about issues of our time. The pre-requisites for contractual appointments were never followed. The government only considered who would be the most helpful in corruption and irregularities; these people were appointed violating regulations and laws.

Ziaul Islam Chowdhury was contractually appointed the chairman of the Rural Electricity Board (REB) for three years. But his past record and capabilities never fulfilled the government's guideline criteria required for appointing an official as the REB chairman. Other officials who received two-year contracts in similar fashion were chief engineer of the Public Works Division Abdul Kashem Chowdhury, Social Welfare Secretary Kazi Manowarul Haq (who was a deputy secretary at retirement), Post and Telecommunications Secretary Mahmud Hasan Mansur (who was a retired official from the audit and accounts cadre).

Several other officials were also given contractual appointments in violation of government guidelines. They were even promoted after retirement, which breaches current guidelines. At least, 200 officials received contracts without fulfilling the requirements outlined in the government guidelines. These appointments need to be investigated for the sake of good governance.

PA: The matter of politicising the administration has been reported by the media a number of times.

NI: The establishment of the Janatar Mancha in 1996 by secretariat officials deeply affected Khaleda Zia and she considered it the prime reason for BNP's defeat in the subsequent elections. After the BNP-led coalition government came to power in 2001, they planned to appoint their trusted people in the administration and the police.

The work to make the administration partisan started from the first week of the coalition government. A former CSP (civil service of Pakistan) led this particular operation. He was closely aided by Kazi Manowarul Haq (Batch of 1977, he was the then PMO Director General and later contractually appointed as the Social Welfare Ministry Secretary, currently retired), Abdur Rashid Sarkar (1979 batch, establishment ministry deputy secretary, later Election Commission Secretary, currently jute and textile ministry secretary), M Shamsul Alam (Former PM's Assistant Personal Secretary), Faridul Islam (former PM's protocol officer), Abdul Matin (former PM's assistant personal secretary) and Md Abdul Bari (former PMO director), among others.

The media reported that most of these men were present at the secret meeting held at Mahmudur Rahman's office in Uttara. These officials jointly created a list bracketing state officials as either Awami League (AL) or BNP sympathisers.

PA: How was the politicisation scheme implemented?

NI: If name of any official from the administration cadre came up for promotion, then it would be sent to Haris Chowdhury to check the person's name against the aforementioned 'list'. Officials classified as AL sympathisers often lost their jobs, most of them, however, were deprived of promotions. A number of them were transferred to inconvenient posts or made officers on special duty (OSD). But, the more clever of these officials developed relationships with Haris Chowdhury, Kazi Manowarul Haq, Abdul Rashid Sarkar, and M Shamsul Alam to gain their desired posts. The discipline and chain of command in the civil administration completely broke down because decisions were made by these junior officers.

The politicisation of the police force was carried out by a number of officers from the 1973 and 1979 batch. Leaders of them were Abdul Quayum, Shamsul Islam, and Khoda Baksh Chowdhury. For the doctors it was, AZM Zahid Hossain (the all powerful Doctors Association of Bangladesh leader) and Firoy Mahmud Iqbal (former PM's assignment officer). For engineers the leading partisan men were, Saiful Islam (former PM's assistant secretary-2), Mahmudur Rahman (former chairman of the Board of Investment) and ANH Akhtar Hossain (former power secretary). These duties were carried out among the agriculturalists by the former PM's protocol officer Faridul Islam, as he was a former student of the agriculture university.

The appointment proposals for

the first class officers were sent to the president for approval through the PM. Khaleda Zia would check with Haris Chowdhury whether these officials were AL sympathisers before sending them to the president. In reality though, finding out the identities and their background from all corners of the country was time-consuming, so Haris Chowdhury would request the omission of some names without checking their identity first. The PM did not consider a large number of candidates because of Haris Chowdhury's instructions. The 'promotion list' would be re-created in accordance with Chowdhury's request. The biggest problems arose when names were taken off from the Public Service Commission's recommended list. The omitted names in most cases were Hindu.

Promotions down to the general manager (GM) level of state-owned banks required the PM's approval. Haris Chowdhury was particularly keen on sniffing out AL sympathisers from these bank officials. We would often hear of large financial transactions related to the inclusion or exclusion of names from this list. If the recommended names from the ministries or the PSB were to be examined, it would be found that the most capable candidates were not selected for promotion. No reason was provided for the inclusion or exclusion of these names. It gradually became a highly automatic affair.

PA: The media has also reported the sale of state resources for next to nothing.

NI: Another sector for government corruption was the works ministries allocation and sale of state-owned houses, land and government mills to the private sector. I specifically recall one specific incident in this regard. A company named Lira Industrial Enterprise manufactures PVC pipes. It is located on a 10-higha piece of land in Tongi. The land was sold to them for only Tk 2.8 crore. In an area like Tongi a higha of land goes for Tk 1 crore. But the property worth Tk 18 crore, including the 10-higha land and fixed assets of a mill, was sold for only Tk 2.8 crore. One KS Alamgir bought the mill. Haris Chowdhury himself was running around to finalise the deal. He was seen to be very active with the files for selling a number of state-owned entities.

Another example of handing over state assets for a paltry sum is the abandoned houses of the works ministry in Gulshan. Former works minister Mirza Abbas played the prime role in these cases. Most of the houses were purchased by businessmen and others close to the coalition government. Only two or three applications would be submitted for each property. A probe now would reveal everything.

PA: There have been reports of getting contracts by favoured companies through irregularities. Do you remember any specific examples?

NI: I clearly remember that Global Agro Trade Private Ltd was given the contract to handle the Inland Container Depot (ICD) for seven years in 2004. But the tender released by the Chittagong Port Authority in 2003 mentioned the contract would be awarded for five years only. Interestingly, this company had no previous experience in this field and did not have the necessary machinery to operate an ICD. I remember, the former prime minister's son Arafat Rahman visited her several times to lobby for the company before the purchase committee made their decision. The purchase committee had once rejected the proposal. But through intensive lobbying the proposal was raised in the purchase committee again and the contract was approved.

PA: What was the PM's reaction if her sons were aggrieved about anything?

NI: At the start of 2003, the PM's youngest son went to Hong Kong with six or seven of his friends. The foreign ministry informed the Bangladesh Consul-General AKM Atiqur Rahman about his arrival, but the foreign ministry did not know friends would accompany the PM's son. The consul-general was also unaware of this detail. Although the Hong Kong immigration authorities quickly gave the PM's son his visa, they were not as prompt in the case of his friends. When an angry Arafat Rahman called his mother, then the PM she ordered immediate dismissal of the consul general. When the PM was informed that the consul general could not be discharged before he had served as a civil servant for 25 years, the PM ordered that Atiqur Rahman be sent back home immediately. The foreign ministry then became busy with the Atiqur-issue for the next two weeks, neglecting other bilateral and multilateral issues. Afterwards, the then foreign secretary asked Arafat Rahman to pacify his mother and the order to withdraw Atiqur from Hong Kong was cancelled. But when Atiqur Rahman was recommended for a promotion to director-general in a few months, the PM blocked it without citing a reason. Her nepotism often sullied her role as the PM.

PA: You have worked closely with Khaleda Zia while she was the PM. How would you evaluate Khaleda Zia as a Prime Minister?

NI: Khaleda Zia has spent two terms as the PM. For the first two years of her first tenure, I was a director at the PMO and later I was the deputy commissioner of Feni between 1994 and 1996. But I did not get the chance to work closely with her during her first term. I was not in contact with her while she won the opposition leader between 1996 and 2001. After she became the PM in 2001, she appointed me as her private secretary-1. That's when I got the opportunity to work closely with her.

Khaleda Zia came to politics suddenly, after the death of her husband president Ziaur Rahman. She was weak in understanding various fundamental and theoretical matters related to politics, democratic system, administration, economics and social policy. Naturally, she had to take others' help in understanding these things. After she had become the PM, numerous individuals who had access to her for different reasons, also tried to mislead her. The PM did not hesitate to often neglect the advice of ministers and MPs to listen to these illiterate, half-educated and ill-motivated associates. Some examples would illuminate these matters further.

The government approved the Planning Ministry Purchase guidelines 2003 under donors' advice. The main goal of this initiative was to ensure transparency and accountability in government purchases and to treat tenders equally. But she was persuaded by her followers to stall approval of the policy for three months. These people managed to stall the process with the help of the Department of Film and Publications (DPP), because they were the sole authority in publishing advertisements for government guidelines. The guidelines were finally published right before an important World Bank meeting later that year.

The Anti-corruption Commission Act suffered the same fate. In 2004, the Bangladesh Development Forum met between May 8 and May 10. The government was severely criticised for not passing the act. The government finally approved the act on May 9, 2004.

A number of the PM's close aides tried to convince her that if the act was approved, the ACC could act against her and her family members. The ACC was then also made ineffective. Begum Zia was blind to the acts of her sons, brother and relatives. She was always desperate to meet their requests, irrespective of how illogical or illegal the requests might be.

PA: Can you remember any particular incident?

NI: The PM became very worried when the proposal for purchasing the machinery for the state-owned Teletalk was rejected twice by the government's purchase committee. One of her sons was involved with the third-lowest bidder to sell the machinery. When the post and telecommunications ministry tried to give the third-lowest bidder the contract, the lowest bidder took the matter to court. The court took steps to resolve the matter. Since the third lowest bidder's asking price was seen to be higher than the approved budget, the approved budget for the project was raised. It was passed in the third meeting of the purchase committee after being rejected twice. But, only former finance minister M Saifur Rahman and former state minister for energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain were present at the meeting out of the ten members. While the others stayed away from the meeting fearing they would be entangled in legal hassles in the future.

When the summary of the committee meeting came to the PM for her approval, I attached a note-sheet for her attention that several cases had already been filed against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and a number of others by the Anti-corruption Bureau. She was then visibly irritated and replied, "Who would file a case against me?" She told Haris Chowdhury to remove my note-sheet from the file and she has not given it back to me since.

PA: Is that what started the degeneration of your relationship with the then PM Khaleda Zia which resulted in you being sent into forced retirement?

NI: These sorts of incidents happened on several occasions while I was working with her. I spoke to another secretary who was working with her about the matter. He said Khaleda Zia did not act this way in her first term. She would pass on her relatives' request straight to ministers. They would assist (relatives) as much as possible remaining within the law. But, during her second term there was a touch of desperation. To me, this seemed to contradict the Prime Ministerial oath in accordance with the constitution, not something I would think under the influence of emotions or ethics. In our country, it is not a crime to breach the constitutional oath; in many other countries it is equal to treason. But, these things were definitely unethical, illegal and assisted in corruption. I saw Begum Zia do these things without hesitation.

While serving as the PM's personal secretary, I tried to prevent the PM from taking decisions that were not legal. There were times she obliged, there were other times when she did not.

PA: For what reason did the former PM take the decision to remove you?

NI: On April 4, 2004, an allegation emerged headlined "Waning coalition government busy hastily misappropriating thousands of crore by signing agreements to big contracts on Chinese suppliers' credit". The PM's eldest son Tarique Rahman's name was in the allegation. At least 50 such allegations arrived at the PMO every day. A director is in charge of the section in the PMO to record and resolve these complaints. The related director, with my approval, sent a letter on April 20, 2004 to the four ministries alleged to be involved with the allegations. It was routine work at the PMO. I became detached from the matter in the middle.

A month and a half later, on June 3, when I went to work, the

PM called me to her office. "You have started an investigation against Tarique. I cannot save you any longer," she said. I tried to convince her that sending the allegation paper to the ministries did not amount to a probe. I told her, this is the traditional process of resolving these matters. The related ministries would take their decisions after examining the matter. I came home after giving this explanation.

Around 7:00pm, a secretary friend of mine called me to tell that the president had signed the document to send me on forced retirement. After a while, I saw hundreds of police assemble in front of my house. Some of them in uniform, some of them in civilian clothes. Around half past seven, a bureau of anti-corruption official asked to search my house along with some police officers. I was accused of saving a photocopy of a note-sheet signed by the PM on a compact disk. I told them that I have no such sheet in my house and it was illegal to search my house without a warrant, after which they stopped searching my house.

Later, the anti-corruption bureau under the 1923 Official Secrets Act, filed a false case against me at the Tejgaon Thana on June 7. But the interesting thing is, the ACC act does not include the Official Secrets Act. The coalition government stayed in power for two years after my removal. But the ACC is yet to file a single chargesheet in this regard. In reality, copying notesheets signed by the PM onto CDs is a regular practice at the PMO. The secretary does not carry out this particular duty. The office has enough human resources to carry out this task. I believe, the PM and her son were involved in the suppliers credit scam. When the allegations were sent to the concerned ministries for investigation, they followed government regulation and created problems for the PM and her son by saying these deals were not transparent. That's why she was so angry at me. So I was sent on forced retirement and a false case was filed against me simply as a part of Begum Khaleda Zia's revenge.

HC asks govt

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including sub-inspectors and sergeants, should not be declared "unlawful".

Following a writ petition filed by 12 of the aggrieved persons challenging the legality of the government action, a division bench comprising Justice Syed M Dastagir Husain and Justice Mamnoon Rahman issued the rule returnable in two weeks.

The petitioners made the home secretary, Inspector General of Police (IGP), additional IGP and DIGs of six divisional ranges respondents in the case.

According to recent media reports, the police authorities, after a probe report, decided to do away with the selection of 757 sub-inspectors (SIs) and sergeants recruited through 'gross irregularities' like 'bribery, political influence and nepotism' in the last days of the immediate-past BNP-led four-party rule.

About 90 percent of those recruits were learnt to have been workers of the BNP, its student wing Jatityatabadi Chhatra Dal and Jamaat-e-Islami's student front Islami Chhatra Shibir and relatives of the then ruling-coalition men, the probe report observed.

Ex-law minister Barister Moudud Ahmed with Barister Mahbubuddin Khokon appeared for the petitioners.

Review appeal

FROM PAGE 1
sentences in the Jhalakathi judges killing case.

"With today's court order, the stay on the execution of the death sentence on the petitioner stands vacated," a court source said.

Now, all judicial processes regarding the death sentences on all the six militant kingpins are exhausted and their destiny lies in the mercy or refusal of it by the president. Their mercy petitions are pending with the presidential jurisdiction.

The seventh condemned militant, Arif, is on the run. He has no chances of court appeal or presidential mercy.

Tigers

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involving India, Sri Lanka and Bermuda looks difficult but the Tigers thought that that would not be impossible.

"We want to beat at least Bermuda and upset any of the two former world champions to make the second round. That is our initial target," told Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar.

"As a team, we have improved and now we are more confident. The '99 World Cup was our best when people did not expect us to win. Now there is expectation that we should win, that's the basic difference of the past and present to me," he added.

During their preparation in the Caribbean, Bangladesh will play a warm-up triangular series with Canada and Antigua & Barbuda before facing Scotland and New Zealand in the two build-up matches.

The Tigers' World Cup campaign

begins against India on March 17, followed by matches against Sri Lanka and Bermuda on March 21 and 25 respectively.

21 killed

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Elsewhere, the US military announced Monday that a US Marine was killed two days earlier during combat operations in Anbar province, a Sunni insurgent hotspot west of the capital.

The latest attacks were a sobering reminder of the huge challenges confronting any effort to rattle the well-armed and well-hidden insurgents.

Just a few hours before the weekend blasts, Lt Gen Abboud Qanbar led reporters on a tour of the neighbourhood near the market-place and promised to "chase the terrorists out of Baghdad." On Saturday, the Iraqi spokesman for the plan, Brig Gen Qassim Moussawi, said violence had plummeted 80 percent in the capital.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki condemned the bombing as a desperate act by "terrorists" and "criminals" who sense they are being squeezed.

"These crimes confirm the defeat of these perpetrators and their failure in confronting our armed forces, which are determined to cleanse the dens of terrorism," al-Maliki said in a statement.

US Ambassador Zalmay Khalizad said the bombings underscore the "increasing desperation felt by criminals" and would only serve to "galvanize Iraqi forces and their coalition partners."

Sunday was by far the deadliest day since the security sweeps began last week. On Thursday, a string of car bombs killed seven civilians on the first full day of the house-to-house searches for weapons and suspected militants.

The US-led teams have faced limited direct defiance as they set up checkpoints and comb neighbourhoods. But that could change as they move into more volatile sections. The next could be Sadr City, a stronghold of the Mahdi Army militia loyal to radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Uttara plots

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journalists, government service holders, service holders in autonomous bodies, armed forces; artists and literateurs and sports personalities.

During the third phase plot allotment at Uttara, the Rajuk authorities changed its earlier guidelines, which had a provision for giving plots to expatriate Bangladeshis. It also increased from 10 to 20 per cent the allotment percentage in the category that involves Rajuk and housing and public works ministry, said a Rajuk official.

Four hundred and thirty-two 2.5 katha plots, 4,996 three katha plots, 872 five katha plots and about 340 plots of 7.5 katha each were allotted under the third-phase plots comprising 2099.56 acres of land to the west of Uttara Sector 12 and the north of Mirpur.

Situated within the city flood protection embankment, these plots are, however, yet to be developed.

The then Dhaka Improvement Trust took the first initiative for plot allotment at Uttara in 1966 and Rajuk completed it in 1992. The work on the second phase began in 1992 and completed in June 1998. About 6,000 plots of different sizes on 950 acres of land were allotted in the first phase while 5,315 residential plots on 438 acres of land were allotted in the second phase.

Slum dwellers

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expert in town planning, the immediate task of the committee will be to find government owned land (khas land) on the outskirts of the capital to rehabilitate the evicted slum dwellers. The committee will present a concrete plan on Thursday on how to rehabilitate these people.

A total of 24 slums in the capital have been demolished in the government eviction drives so far, leaving some 50,000 people without shelters, officials of the rights bodies informed the adviser.

Talking to the reporters after the meeting, Mainul said that the committee was advised to look for secure lands for the slum dwellers in the nearest places of Dhaka, so that they can continue their jobs or business. It was also asked to draw up short and long term plans for the rehabilitation.

The voluntary and rights bodies would provide funds for the construction of houses, he added. The adviser denied that the eviction drives have been stopped and said "We have only asked the authorities concerned to take permission of the law and order review committee in cases of eviction of big slums, as such drives displace many people at a time."

The government will not allow anybody to grab the public lands, Mainul said adding that the demolition of small slums and illegal structures on government land would continue.

Former adviser Sultana Kamal and noted environmentalist Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed were present at the meeting.

DC Kohinur

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Syed Mohammad Mojibul Haq took the complaint into cognizance and ordered a judicial inquiry.

Apu Ukil in her case said a police team led by the OC of Dhanmondi Police Station attacked an opposition procession on Road No 27 in Dhanmondi, leaving former home minister Mohammad Nasim, the complainant and a large number of leaders and activists injured.

The complainant came to know from reliable sources that the day before the incident, at a meeting at the police headquarters where the IGP presided, Kohinur Miah and DB Joint Commissioner Shahidul Islam proposed that the leaders and activists who would join the programme would be crippled.

Wanted ex-Jamaat MP

FROM PAGE 1
Swapan in Tangail town yesterday evening. A listed criminal of Kapashia in Gazipur Golam Mostafa was also arrested.

The joint forces arrested 1,643 people on various charges during their countrywide drive in 24 hours ending at 6:00am yesterday.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reports: Following recovery of 110 pieces of CI sheets of government relief from the Jaldhaka house of former Jamaat MP Mizanur Rahman on Saturday, the joint forces were hunting for him.

They also gave him a 72-hour ultimatum to surrender.

After Mizanur Rahman surrendered to the court at around 3:00pm, First Class Magistrate Ali Ashraf ordered sending him to Nilphamari jail with a 30-day detention, rejecting a bail petition in a case filed against Mizanur for misappropriation of government property.

Mizanur was elected MP from the Nilphamari constituency for two consecutive terms. Several thousand curious people gathered the court area as news spread in the town since morning that he would surrender to the court.

Our staff correspondent in Rajshahi reports: Police filed three cases against former deputy minister for land Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu, his elder brother Rafikul Islam Talukdar and two house-holds for misappropriating 52 pieces of CI sheets of government relief fund in Naldanga of Natore district yesterday.

On Sunday, the joint forces recovered government CI sheets that Dulu and his brother used in their village home at Ramsa Kazipur in Naldanga.

Dulu had been evading arrest since February 4 when the joint forces recovered two firearms and 137 bullets from his houses in Natore town and at Ramsa Kazipur.

Police seized 63 pieces of CI sheets meant for government relief from BNP and Zia Parishad offices in Godagari upazila of Rajshahi yesterday. Former post and telecommunications minister Aminul Haque allegedly controlled the offices.

In another drive, police seized 26 pieces of CI sheets of government relief fund, which Rajshahi

House grabber

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arrested Shafiuddin Proshan, commissioner of Ward-5 and a close aide to Jatiya Party president member Nasim Osman, yesterday morning and interrogated him in the local army camp.

During the interrogation, he admitted to ousting Rekha Begum, the widow, and her two daughters from their DN Road house at gun-point after forcing her to sign a blank stamped paper in 2002. He later sold the house to another man after preparing a fake will.

Rekha Begum failed to get justice then even though she had informed police and local influential people. She later moved to Munshiganj with her two daughters.

Following Shafiuddin's confession, the joint forces took him to the office of Narayanganj Municipality Chairman Selina Hayat Ivy where Shafiuddin was compelled to compensate by handing over Tk 6 lakh to Rekha Begum in presence of law enforcers and local journalists.

State minister

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includes asking for wealth statements from corruption suspects. However the ACC Act demands that such an action must be taken in accordance with the decisions taken by all the commissioners. But these posts have been vacant since the resignations of the chairman and the other two commissioners more than two weeks ago.

"To give legality to my actions, the commission can resort to ex post facto approvals when the new commissioners and the chairman will be appointed," said ACC Secretary Mohammad Delwar Hossain when contacted.

"This is being discussed at the highest level of the government. But there is another idea. The government might promulgate an ordinance to give legality to the ACC secretary's function since February 4, 2007 until the new commissioners" are appointed," he added.

"Emergency works of a state cannot stop in absence of the commissioners. The ACC cannot sit idle when it is facing such an emergency," he pointed out.

The investigation of the 50 suspects was launched in late January. "Now investigators are looking for well-founded evidence to make the cases solid," said an official seeking anonymity.

"So far what we gathered shows that everyone among the 50 suspects own multiple flats. The ex-state minister who owns 132 flats has only a few under his own name while the majority of them are under false names," he added.

"We identified a corruption trend where the powerful did not necessarily take money for doing someone some favours but received flats among many other things," he said.

"We found corruption in