



New ACC to spare none, frame tough laws

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The newly formed Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) will seek to have stringent laws and a sea change in the way things are done so that no one could get away with graft.

"They will also propose that the government introduce some laws necessary for the commission to be tough on everyone irrespective of position, status or political affiliation," said sources close to the newly appointed ACC chairman.

The government on Thursday appointed ex-army chief Lt Gen (retired) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury as the chairman and former district judge M Habibur Rahman and former National Board of Revenue (NBR) member Abul Hasan Manjur Mannan as the commissioners.

The three will join their new jobs tomorrow.



Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury

On entering the office, Hasan Mashhud, also a former adviser to the caretaker government, will submit his wealth statement.

Before agreeing to take up the position, he had a series of discussions with the government high-ups on issues like obstacles to curbing corruption and how those could be overcome, said a source in

the administration.

He had a firm assurance from the government that the ACC would be given full rein in its efforts to combat corruption effectively.

He was also told that they would be allowed to maintain an even-handed approach to containing the graft menace. The commission would be free to act against anyone no matter how influential they might be, added the source.

With Mashhud at the helm, it will first assess how much room the existing system gives it for exercising the powers against corruption.

It will turn to the government if the task ahead warrants radical reforms in the relevant laws and procedures.

There's already a broad consensus of opinion about making some major amendments to the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004. Some other laws that have provi-

sions pertaining to graft would also be reviewed and if needed amended.

The former army boss has already had an informal talk with ACC Secretary Delwar Hossain, said sources adding that he has been doing homework and weighing how to go about the new job.

Initially, the commission will have a target set for six months and after that it will evaluate the performance and the effectiveness of the mechanisms it adopted during that period.

They will proceed if the progress is satisfactory or otherwise they will work to overcome the shortcomings.

The reorganised ACC will get on with its work bearing two things in mind—it will strive to revitalise the commission and give people the impression that no one is beyond the reach of the law.

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PHOTO: STAR

Language Movement veterans Imdad Hossain and Rawshan Ara give hands-on lessons to kids as Karak Natya Sampraday arranges a programme on 'Introduction to Bangla alphabet' on the Central Shaheed Minar premises yesterday.

Wadud's palatial house seized, Babul sent to jail

Mir Nasir's son held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police took control of the luxurious house of former BNP lawmaker Wadud Bhuiyan in Khagrachhari yesterday and joint forces recovered more relief materials from different places in the country.

Meanwhile, arrested Chairman of Jamuna Group Nurul Islam Babul was sent to jail.

The joint forces arrested barrister Amir Helaluddin, son of former state minister Mir Nasiruddin, and handed him over to the Gulshan Police Station. They also arrested Jahangir Alam, Daudkandi upazila Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal president and brother-in-law of BNP leader Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, early yesterday.

Police headquarters in a press release said they recovered firearms, nine other arms and one cocktail-bomb and 15 bullets.

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STAR FILE PHOTO

Front view of former BNP lawmaker Wadud Bhuiyan's luxurious Khagrachhari residence that was taken away by the joint forces yesterday.

Dhabi Group to set up hospital as proposed by Prof Yunus

UNB, Dubai

Dhabi Group is willing to set up a world-class medical college and hospital in Bangladesh to provide better medical treatment as many people go abroad for treatment spending valuable foreign currencies.

Sheikh Nahayan Mabaruk Al Nahayan, the owner of the group, expressed his desire as Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus proposed him to set up a world-class medical college hospital in Bangladesh.

Yunus made the proposal when the owner of the Dhabi Group and Warid Telecom expressed interest to do something in Bangladesh during their meeting at his residence in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

"I've told him that the medical college can be named after him or jointly after him and me, and said the announcement for setting up the medical college will be made

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MEGHNAGHAT 2 POWER PROJECT

Belhasa gives cheque to PDB to save contract

SHARIER KHAN

Middle Eastern Belhasa group, which is partnering with Oriental Bank scammer Obaedul Karim in multiple ventures in Bangladesh, submitted a cheque of Tk 6.22 crore to Power Development Board (PDB) to save the Meghnaghat 2 power project contract on February 22, the deadline for its cancellation.

Belhasa is one of the three partners in the BON Consortium—a shell company of Obaedul—that won the Meghnaghat 2 bid through gross irregularities.

Although Belhasa owns majority shares of this consortium, it is officially "led" by German power company Steag and actually run by Obaedul himself with the project's so-called lead contractor Steag nowhere in the scene.

The PDB was not in a position to

comment on whether Belhasa's submission of the cheque for BON was acceptable or not. "The submission was done at the last moment and we will take a decision on this Sunday morning," said a source.

Another source pointed out that Obaedul is trying to save this contract from his hideout, possibly in Malaysia, by mobilising his Belhasa partners. A senior Belhasa executive came to Dhaka early this week and met with the energy adviser on Tuesday and high officials as part of that strategy.

The Belhasa executive told the PDB that his company would like to take over Orion's 16 percent share and drive the project on. He said his company guarantees the project's implementation.

The Independent Power Project (IPP) Cell of the PDB then sought suggestions from the energy

adviser, who asked it to follow the contract between the PDB and BON and take legal advice.

Sources said a lead sponsor contractor can take over shares with permission of the PDB. The contract does not give Belhasa the room to take over Orion's shares. "There is a host of legal issues here," said a PDB expert.

But such anomaly took place before in the BON's bid in the bid selection process and the government had swallowed the wrongdoings because of Obaedul's connection with Hawa Bhaban.

On January 21, the PDB served Obaedul's shell company BON Consortium Power Company Ltd with a Project Company Event of Default notice, asking it to pay up Tk 6.22 crore as the Meghnaghat 2 project's land rental by February 22 or face cancellation of the contract.

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Delhi for stable, democratic Bangladesh

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India yesterday said it was interested in a democratic, stable and prosperous Bangladesh and would strive to ensure Saarc becomes a vehicle for peace and development in the region.

"As a friend and neighbour, India is interested in a democratic, stable and prosperous Bangladesh," said President APJ Abdul Kalam inaugurating the budget session of Parliament.

On Nepal, the President said, India has reiterated its full support to the restoration of multi-party democracy and the success of the peace process.

On the situation in Sri Lanka, he said, "we have conveyed at the high political levels to Sri Lankan leaders the need for a negotiated, political settlement to the ethnic issue that is acceptable to all sections of the Sri Lankan society".

Expressing happiness at Afghanistan joining Saarc as its

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From a clerk to CBA leader, now a millionaire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sonali Bank trade union leader BM Bakir Hossain raked in crores of taka in the last few years using his trade union influence with the backing of BNP.

The man, whose name is on the Anti-corruption Commission's (ACC) list of 50 corrupt persons, joined Sonali Bank as a clerk in 1977, where he is now a deputy accountant with a salary of Tk 7,500 per month.

No matter what is the amount of his salary and what his official designation is, he is now a millionaire who enjoys a large number of properties including a six-storey building at Malibagh in Dhaka and a market in his village home in Narail.

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Confusing reports on Bakir's whereabouts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) will investigate whether wanted Sonali Bank trade union leader BM Bakir Hossain slipped through their dragnet due to the elite force's failure to reach the spot on time.

Asked whether the authorities are going to investigate the matter and punish the officials concerned, Director General of Rab Hasan Mahmood Khandaker yesterday said, "We have noticed newspaper reports regarding the matter. After taking a breather we will investigate whether the newspaper reports are true."

Meanwhile, a top Rab official wishing anonymity yesterday confirmed that they did not arrest Bakir. He however said he did not

know whether Bakir had been arrested by any other government intelligence agency.

Sources on Thursday said a team of Rab personnel, which was not assigned to arrest Bakir, caught the wanted CBA leader when he was returning from the ACC office after submitting his wealth statement there, but the battalion later released him as he managed to convince them that he should not be arrested since he had submitted his wealth statement in line with ACC requirements.

The sources also said another Rab team was assigned to the ACC premises to arrest Bakir, but he had left the area before the team could reach the spot.

Meanwhile, another source hinted that officials of an

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AL not a party of relief looters, says Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the caretaker government (CG) not to compare her party with 'wheat and corrugated iron sheet thieves' of the immediate past BNP-Jamaat coalition government.

"They [BNP-Jamaat] came to power only for looting and stealing. But we (AL) do politics for the people and when we were in power, we served them. So, please don't compare us with relief looters," she said.

The AL chief was speaking at an exchange of views meeting at her Dhanmondi office with the family members of Adabor Thana unit Motor Sramik League leader

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ORIENTAL BANK SCAM Former top official's bail prayer rejected

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court on Thursday rejected the bail petition of a former Oriental Bank official, who was arrested on January 22 on charge of misappropriating Tk 40 crore.

Judge Momin Ullah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order following a criminal appeal filed by the lawyers for Muhammad Muktar Billah, former executive vice-president of the bank, against bail rejection order of the lower court.

On January 22, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM's) Court rejected Billah's bail petition, saying that the case was at the primary stage of investi-

gation. Former executive vice-presidents Sabbir Ahmed Siddiqui and Muktar Billah and former executive official Ashfaul Hakim were picked up from their houses in the early hours of January 22 after a graft case was filed against them with Tejgaon Police Station the same day.

Later, they were brought to the CMM's Court with a forwarding report where an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) official, Zahangir Alam, who is also the investigation officer of the case, appealed to detain them in the jail custody until the investigation was complete.

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Demand for early election getting stronger

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

The demand for an early election is getting stronger day by day among the political parties, and the two major parties, which are known as traditional archrivals, are increasingly singing the same tune regarding the matter.

BNP and Awami League (AL) do not want to see the interim government in power for more than six months since it had taken over the reins of the country.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and AL President Sheikh Hasina already expressed their views in favour of an election as soon as possible. Sheikh Hasina last week even said voter identity cards are not necessary now, as introduction of it will take a long time. Earlier, AL-led grand alliance however had demanded the ID cards before holding an election.

Meanwhile, US Congressman Steve Chabot during his visit in Dhaka also hoped that the election will be held sooner than later. He however told the reporters that the timeframe depends on the people of Bangladesh. Earlier, US Ambassador Patricia

A Butenis also expressed her position favouring an early election during meetings with the top two rival political leaders and with the advisers to the caretaker government.

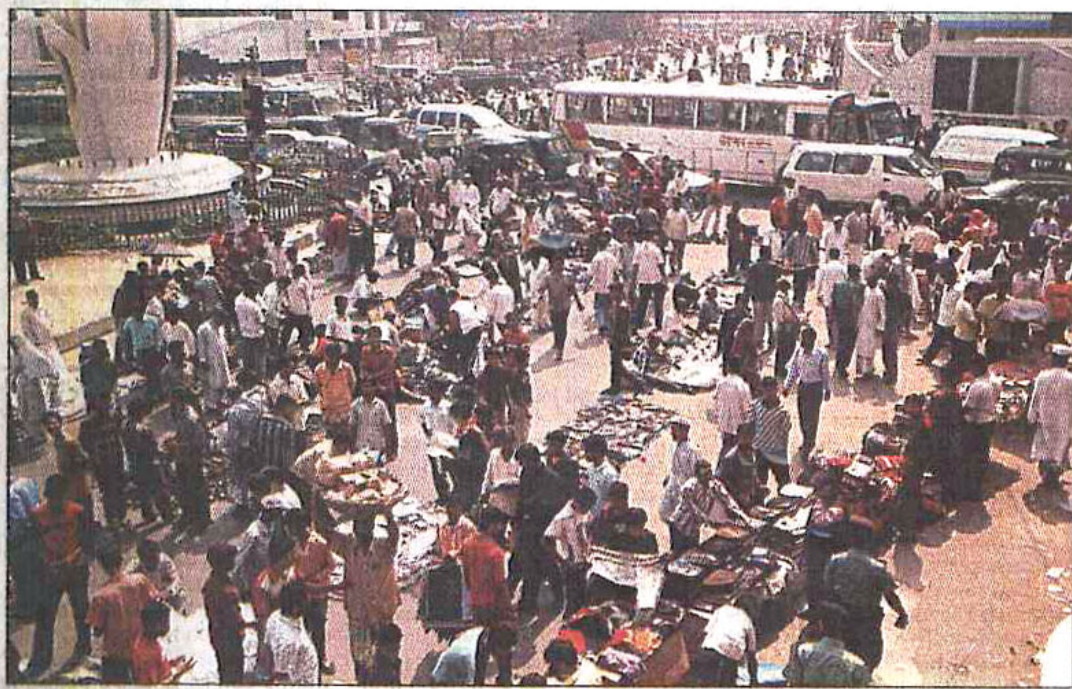
Most of the political leaders are confused whether the election will be held soon or not as a few advisers had said the poll will be held after the reforms are successfully instituted. The advisers however also said the government is working for holding a free and fair election as soon as possible.

Some senior political leaders said holding the election should be the top priority of the interim government but it is still busy with other matters, which are not related to the election at all.

"The steps taken against corruption received public support

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Notice
A roundtable on "The state of power sector and the way forward" was organised by The Daily Star on February 17, 2007. The proceedings of the discussion will be published tomorrow.



Holiday markets in the capital are gaining ground as people crowd one on the road adjoining the Gulistan underpass, left, and blacksmiths evicted from unauthorised markets in recent drives allowed to work on the space near the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

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