

HARRIS CHOWDHURY

Another rags to riches story

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and SHARIER KHAN

Ex-prime minister Khaleda Zia's one of the closest aides turned a high profile convicted fugitive Harris Chowdhury had become a multi-millionaire from an ordinary car dealer in just five years through corruption and abuse of power.

Using his power as the political secretary to the prime minister between 2001 and 2006, Harris made enormous wealth illegally at home and abroad in exchange for awarding different government and private business projects to inappropriate bidders of small to massive scale, for transfers and promotions of government offi-

cials, and for expediting approvals by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) of various proposals, etc.

Harris took bribes in forms of cash and kind both. For instance, he received a Tk 4 crore Infinity sport utility vehicle from Obaidul Karim of Orion Group in exchange for awarding the deal of Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover project to the company.

Sources said his rampant corruption contributed to the creation of the current administrative chaos, left by the immediate past four-party alliance government, and it also left the country with innumerable low quality business deals for high costs aimed at benefiting people like Obaidul Karim.

Harris has been the only high profile corrupt BNP leader who had access to both Hawa Bhaban led by Khaldi Zia's elder son Tarique Rahman, and the then PMO. BNP sources said that was possible because Harris was strategically backed by various senior leaders of BNP to prop him up against Mosaddak Ali Falu, who enjoyed the maximum access to and influence on Khaleda Zia.

Investigators so far detected cash and properties of Harris worth Tk 22.5 crore in Bangladesh under other peoples' names. Besides, they found that Harris has a house and a shopping mall in London under a different person's name, SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



A one-year-old picture, left, of Osmani Udyan in the capital, a spot of greenery in the rapidly growing concrete jungle. Soil dug and dumped there to create an artificial lake under the park's beautification project has left many trees dead. The project workers attributed the deaths to dumping of extra dirt at the base of the trees. A bulldozer is seen removing the soil that has come too late for some trees.



PHOTO: STAR

Reforms in govt, JS also needed

Says Jalil

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday said reforms will have to be brought in the government as well as the parliament in line with the reforms in political parties.

Jalil suggested not allowing a political party without having political activities of three to five years to participate in the election. The party will tell the people about its aims and principles during such period, he added.

"If a political party is formed today and participate in the elections tomorrow, then there will be no transparency," he told journalists at his Mercantile Bank office.

He said the government should give donation for political parties to ensure transparency in their funding systems and strengthen SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

JMB men regroup at chars in N region

STAR REPORT

Leaders and suicide squad members of banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) regrouped at remote chars on the Padma, Brahmaputra and Teesta across the northern region.

Sources in the intelligence agencies said that the far-flung chars (shoals) spread over Sirajganj, Jamalpur, Sherpur and Pabna districts have long been used as training camps by the JMB. Those are considered safe haven for the militants as it takes the law enforcers hours to reach there and thus allowing the JMB operatives enough time to flee a raid.

"We have kept our eyes on the northern region following the May

1 blasts at three railway stations and threats to blow up Hardinge Bridge," Director General of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Hasan Mahmood Khandkar told The Daily Star Monday.

He said the Rab is working to bust the militant remnants seeking to reform the fresh recruits into organised units. The elite force will soon go on an operation against them.

Recently, a JMB leader, under interrogation by Rangpur police, has admitted that Joyprotap Madrasa at a char on the Teesta under Pirgachha upazila functions as a militant training camp, reports our Rangpur correspondent.

Abdul Quddus Khan Salafi, an Afghan War veteran, and another

militant leader Abul Kalam Azad had trained a huge number of recruits there. Of the two, Salafi has been detained while Azad is still at large.

Police sources said most of the recruits disguise themselves as madrasa students coming from the adjoining districts.

Superintendent of Police in Rangpur Hasif Aziz this week told The Daily Star, "We are pretty sure that Salafi is an Afghan War veteran. He used to train militants at the Teesta char. A huge number of JMB cadres had received training there."

Our staff correspondent from Bogra adds: Intelligence sources said about a week ago a group of 20 SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Writ petition against CG's validity rejected

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday rejected a writ petition challenging the validity of the current caretaker government.

A division bench comprising Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury rejected the petition, as it was not pressed by the counsel for the petitioner.

On May 6, Josne Ara Chowdhury, wife of Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia, filed the writ challenging the validity of the current caretaker government.

Before rejecting the petition, the court inquired about details of the petitioner whether she was a Bangladeshi citizen, voter and taxpayer, but the counsel, Syed Golam Mostafa, failed to satisfy the court.

Donors ready to fund voter list, national ID

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 23 donor agencies have agreed to provide funds for the Election Commission's (EC) project for simultaneously preparing the voter list with photographs and national identity cards at an estimated cost of Tk 450 crore.

Donor agencies agreed to provide financial assistance for preparing the voter list with photographs on the assurance that all eligible people will be listed as voters, British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury told reporters yesterday.

Choudhury was talking to the press after a meeting of the Economic Relations Division (ERD) with representatives of

different donor agencies including United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Commission, and Department For International Development (DFID).

EC Secretary Humayun Kabir was also present at the meeting held at the National Economic Council conference room.

This was ERD's second meeting with the donor agencies since the EC asked it to initiate moves to collect funds for the voter list project. The first meeting was held last Sunday.

The British high commissioner yesterday said the EC told them that the voter list will be prepared by setting up voters' registration

centres. "It's a good idea. The Election Commission assured us that all eligible people will be registered as voters," Choudhury said, adding, "We want the preparation of the voter list to be completed as soon as possible."

The major political parties, however, have been opposing the EC decision to prepare the voter list by setting up registration centres instead of visiting door-to-door.

Asked if yesterday's meeting discussed the timeframe for holding the next parliamentary election, Choudhury said, "We did not say anything about any timeframe. The government however promised not to go beyond 2008 for holding the election. We hope the SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

HYDERABAD BLAST

Foreign adviser trashes Indian media reports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday dismissed reports appeared in a few Indian newspapers recently that some Bangladeshis were involved in planning and execution of recent bombing in the Indian city of Hyderabad.

"The accusation is purely speculative and unsubstantiated. Finger pointing of this kind without adequate proof is extremely unhelpful to the spirit of good neighbourliness," Iftekhar told the media at his office.

He asserted, "Bangladesh condemns all terrorist activities" and reiterated that terrorists have no nationality whatsoever.

A number of Indian newspaper reports have linked the May 18 bombing in Hyderabad with an Indian militant group who allegedly imported chemical from Bangladesh and used Bangladesh territory to execute the bombing. SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Aminul Haque sued again for extortion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

One more extortion and land grabbing case was filed with Godagari Police Station on Monday night accusing 15 persons including former post and telecommunication minister barrister Aminul Haque.

The other accused include Kakonhat Municipal Chairman Abdul Majid Master, Tanore Municipal Chairman Mofiz Uddin, Rishikul Union Council Chairman Jahangir, former BNP lawmaker Nadim Mostafa's personal secretary Aminul Islam Jewel and BNP leader Sirajul Islam Chand.

Alauddin, a disabled freedom fighter of Palashi village, filed the case.

In the complaint, he said the accused illegally grabbed a land, which the government offered him SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Six of a family brutally murdered in Narsingdi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Police yesterday recovered six decomposed bodies of a family, murdered several days back, from a house in Bhelanagar area of the district town.

The victims were identified as Rais Uddin, 52, his wife Salma Begum, 46, their son Rajib and daughters Yuona, 28, Swarna, 18 and niece Urmi, 8, who was also adopted as a daughter.

Police recovered the bodies in the afternoon breaking open the doors locked from inside and sent those to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. The brutal murders might have taken place some six days back, the police believe. The murderers entered the house cutting open the grills of a window, it was found.

Two of the victims were slaughtered while the rest were strangu-

lated to death and bore deep wounds in the foreheads. The bodies of two females were undressed. Quoting hospital officials, police said that one of them might have been raped before killing.

"It is a case of cold-blooded and well-planned murders," Mohammad Shahabuddin, superintendent of police (SP) of Narsingdi, told The Daily Star. Dispute with someone might be the cause behind the murders, he suspects.

Police picked up Abul Kalam, a nephew of Rais, for interrogation. The district administration formed a three-member committee with Additional District Magistrate Kazi Nazir Hossain as its chief to probe the murders.

The gruesome incident came to notice when Abul Kalam came to SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Shahriar Kabir, 4 others discharged of sedition charge

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday relieved writer-columnist Shahriar Kabir, two journalists of British Channel 4 and four others of sedition charges filed against them five years ago.

After scrutinising the case docket (CD) and other relevant documents, Metropolitan Magistrate Mir Ali Reza accepted the final report and discharged them from the charges.

On May 17, Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police submitted a probe report exonerating Shahriar Kabir and six others.

CID Inspector Masud Karim, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted the final report before the Court of Chief SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

DHAKA-CTG EXPRESSWAY

Scheme stalled, govt to go for int'l tendering

RAFIQ HASAN

The caretaker government has stalled the much talked about investment proposal of a foreign company for constructing the first expressway in the country connecting the capital and port city Chittagong with an estimated expense budget of over \$900 million.

The proposal from a Malaysian construction group Azimat Consortium, got consent from a cabinet meeting in July last year during BNP-led four-party alliance government's rule.

The proposal had also been approved by the Ministry of Communications and a high-

powered private infrastructure committee (PICOM) before it was placed for the cabinet approval, according to sources.

Azimat Consortium was supposed to start constructing the expressway by the end of last year. A formal agreement was also expected to be signed between the government and the construction company finalising the terms and conditions.

But the present caretaker government took up a seven-month long feasibility study of the project with assistance from Asian Development Bank (ADB), which is unlikely to be finished before the end of this year.

After finishing the feasibility

study, the government will go for an international tender inviting foreign investment for the project.

"We are not cancelling the investment proposal of Azimat Consortium but they will have to go through all government procedures regarding foreign investment in the infrastructure building sector," said a high official of the communications ministry.

"It will take at least another year to get the final approval as the feasibility study is unlikely to be finished this year," the ministry official said requesting anonymity.

The official also said Azimat qualified in the preliminary bid and it will be allowed to participate SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

PALTAN KILLING CASE

Hearing on charge framing against Nizami adjourned

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday adjourned the hearing on charge framing against Jamaat-e-Islami chief Matiur Rahman Nizami and nine other leaders of Jamaat and Islami Chhatra Shibir in connection with the killing of a Workers Party activist in Dhaka on October 28 last year.

Judge Mohammad Azizul Haq of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the adjournment order and fixed June 3 for submission of the High Court (HC) stay order following a time petition by the defence lawyers.

Moving yesterday's petition, the defence lawyers argued that they had earlier submitted a criminal review petition to the HC seeking stay on the proceedings of the case.

Following the hearing, a division bench of the HC stayed the proceedings of the case and directed the trial court to proceed with the case filed against Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina and 45 others and the case against SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

2 outlaws killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, PABNA

Two regional leaders of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Red flag) were killed in an encounter with a joint team of police and Rab in Pabna Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon.

The dead were identified as Bishu Pramanik, 35, son of Nafeez Pramanik of village Ranigram in Ataikula upazila, and Jamal Uddin, 38, son of Abdur Rashid of village Jalalpur in Pabna Sadar upazila.

Rab sources said Bishu was wanted in ten cases including five for murder, while Jamal in seven cases including three for murder.

Acting on a tip-off, the joint team raided a place at Harinarayanpur village under the upazila at around 6:00pm where Bishu and Jamal were holding a secret meeting with their comrades.

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