Thousands of police recruits sacked in India

AFP, *New Delhi*

Thousands more police recruits have been fired in northern India after being accused of paying bribes and faking educational qualifications to get into the force, a report said yesterday.

In the latest round of dismissals, the government led by Mayawati, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh state and India's most powerful low-caste politician, sacked 7,400 policemen, the Press Trust of India said.

The firings bring to 17,848 the total number of police dismissed in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, the agency said.

They were hired in 2005 and 2006 during the tenure of Mayawati's predecessor, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who has condemned the dismissals as "unconstitutional."

The mercurial Mayawati, who hails from India's most oppressed caste and is touted as a potential prime minister, has vowed to fight corruption.

But opponents have accused Mayawati, whose Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) won a sweeping majority in the state elections last May, of waging a vendetta against officers appointed by the previous government.

Maywati, whose absolute majority has made her all-powerful in the state which was previously ruled by bickering coalitions, has alleged "gross irregularities" in the hiring process.

Mayawati, who goes by one name, has alleged the recruits got their jobs by paying bribes of up to 10,000 dollars and providing false certificates. Marks on police entry tests also were allegedly changed.

Uttar Pradesh has more than 110,000 men and women in uniform but also has one of India's highest crime rates.

The state government said a "detailed probe" into the recruitment process would be conducted by its anti-corruption branch.

A total of 22,000 police recruits were hired by the previous government and Mayawati says most were "irregular."

A slew of police supervisors who oversaw the recruitment have been suspended or fired.

A police job, which offers benefits such as sick leave and pensions, is coveted in India where unemployment and under-employment is rampant. India's law enforcement system is widespread and police can earn large sums in bribes.

Five Afghans kidnapped

AFP, *Kabul*

Five Afghans linked to international groups working in Afghanistan have been kidnapped, officials said yesterday in the latest in a slew of abductions blamed on Taliban rebels or criminals.

Two workers with the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) were abducted on Sunday in the province of Logar about 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of Kabul, their organisation told AFP here.

The two men had wrapped up a water supply project and were heading home when they went missing, said director Arif Qaraeen.

Later Sunday one of their superiors was called by a man who said, "We have taken your people and you have to pay us some money," Qaraeen said.

"We have called the police, the intelligence, the relevant people, the kidnappers, the elders of the community to try to find a solution," he told AFP.

Logar police said the men had "disappeared." "We are searching for them," provincial police chief Ghulam Mustafa said.

A Bangladeshi national working with a microfinance development project was kidnapped in the same area on September 15 by men who demanded ransom through a video clip sent to a local television station.

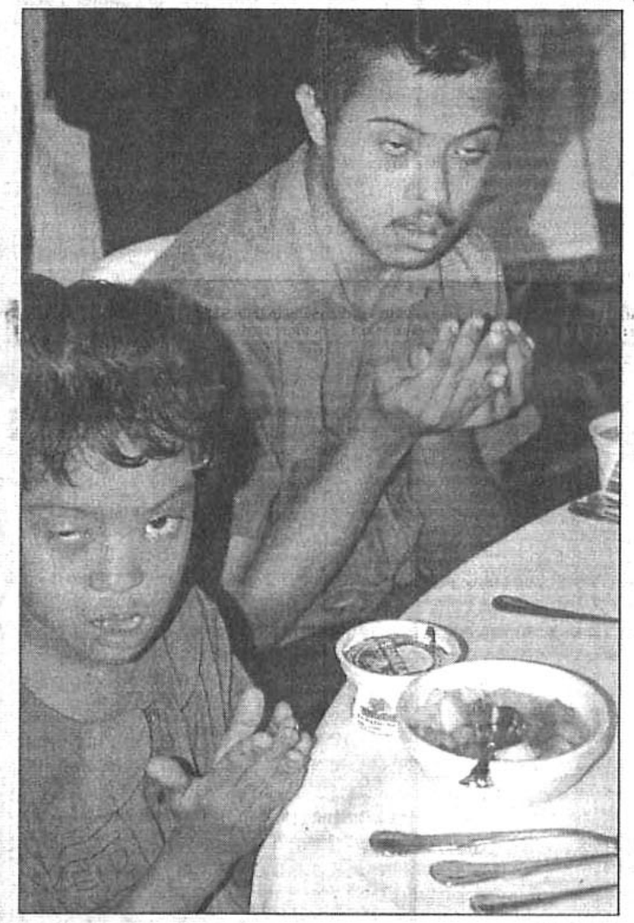

PHOTO: STAR

The Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday arranged an Iftar party for the underprivileged children as part of its community care activities.

Iftar party for underprivileged children

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Like every year, the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday arranged an Iftar party for underprivileged children as part of its community care activities.

Over 500 children from orphanages, madrasas and non-government organisations working for physically challenged children and their representatives attended the Iftar party at the Grand Ballroom of the hotel.

Sheikh Altaf Ali, secretary to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, attended the programme as the chief guest.

The slogan of this year's Iftar party was 'Pan Pacific cares for children'.

Many children told The Daily Star that they have enjoyed the programme very much and hoped that such programmes would be arranged more and more for underprivileged children.

Amirul Islam, a class four student of Rahmat-e-Alam Islam Mission, said he came here for the first time and is very happy to attend such a programme.

"It is a great occasion for us since we do not have the opportunity to go to places like Sonargaon and this kind of occasions should be arranged more for the children like us," he said.

Hidetaka Ishiyama, general manager of Sonargaon, Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed, director, Human Resources, and Mesbah Ul Alam, managing director of the owning company Hotels International, were also present.

3 elderly people honoured for contribution to society

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To mark the United Nations International Day of the Elderly People, the United Nations Association of Bangladesh (UNAB) yesterday honoured three elderly people for their outstanding contributions to the society.

The awardees are Prof Shafiqul Ameen, Musician Sudhin Das and Nurjahan Begum, editor of the weekly magazine Begum.

They received wreaths, crests, books published by UNAB, and UN Charter posters.

UNAB Secretary General Dr Syed Mohammad Shahed, Secretary Syed Abdul Karim, Prof Roisuddin, Executive Committee members Selina Khalek, Majeda Shawkat Ali and Afzal Hossain handed over the awards at the residence of the respective awardees.

Earlier Prof Shams-Ul-Huq, journalist Obaid-Ul-Huq, Prof Innas Ali, educationist Ferdous khan, Prof Akhter Imam, architect Mazharul Islam, media personality Ashrafuzzaman Khan, physician Zohra Kazi and Baul Shah Abdul Karim were honoured by the UNAB in 2004-06.

Musician Sudhin Das receives a crest on the occasion of the United Nations International Day of the Elderly People yesterday. The United Nations Association of Bangladesh (UNAB) honoured three elderly people for their outstanding contribution to society.

Putin to run for parliament

AFP, *Moscow*

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday he would run for parliament in December and had a "realistic" shot at becoming prime minister, dropping a political bombshell that may herald a fundamental change in the way Russia is governed.

"I gratefully accept your proposal to head the United Russia list," Putin told delegates packed in an ornate hall near the Kremlin for the ruling party's annual congress.

"Heading the government is a realistic idea, but it is too early to think about this now," he said.

For this to happen he said two conditions were needed: victory of the United Russia party in the December 2 elections to the State Duma and the election of a president who is an "orderly, capable and effective person."

Putin's announcement stunned political observers in Moscow and came after years of speculation about what the Russian leader, who enjoys extraordinarily high popularity ratings at home, would do after his second and last presidential term ends next year.

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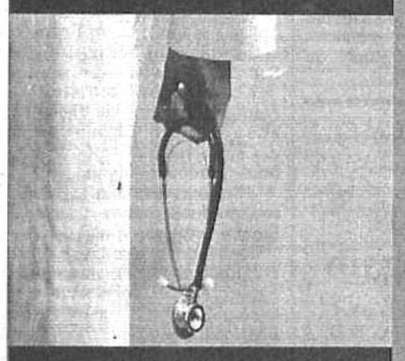

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Abbas urges deal with Israel on core issues

AFP, *Amman*

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas yesterday said he hoped that negotiations with Israel would yield an agreement on final status issues ahead of his talks this week with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

"Such an agreement should include core questions like Jerusalem, borders, refugees, settlements, security and water," Abbas said after meeting in Amman with Jordan's King Abdullah II.

"We are negotiating with Israel to reach a deal that we can take to the international meeting for approval before we start talks on the details," he said, according to a palace statement.

Abbas was referring to a US-sponsored Middle East peace conference, which is expected in November.

"If solutions to these questions, including a Palestinian state, are found, we will take them to the international conference," said Abbas ahead of talks on Wednesday with Olmert.

Abbas, the king and other Arab leaders want the conference to cover the most contested issues of the Middle East conflict, including borders of the future Palestinian state, the status of Jerusalem, and Palestinian refugees.

Abbas and Olmert are due to discuss a joint statement to be submitted at the Middle East conference, a spokesman for the Israeli prime minister said on Sunday.

The negotiating teams established during the last round of Abbas-Olmert talks on September 10 will hold their first meeting in the coming days to work out the wording of the statement, the spokesman said.

But the two sides have been at odds over what they hope to accomplish in the lead-up to the Middle East conference, with Israel warning against overoptimistic targets.

Eight detainees transferred from Guantanamo

AFP, *Washington*

The US military transferred eight more detainees to their home countries over the weekend from its "war on terror" detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the Pentagon said.

Six of the detainees were flown to Afghanistan and one each to Libya and Yemen, the US military said in a statement Sunday.

"These detainees were determined to be eligible for transfer following a comprehensive series of review processes conducted at Guantanamo," it said.

Following the moves, the United States was holding 330 "war on terror" suspects at the US naval base at Guantanamo on the southeastern tip of Cuba, most of them since 2002.

Of those, 70 detainees have been declared eligible for transfer or release.

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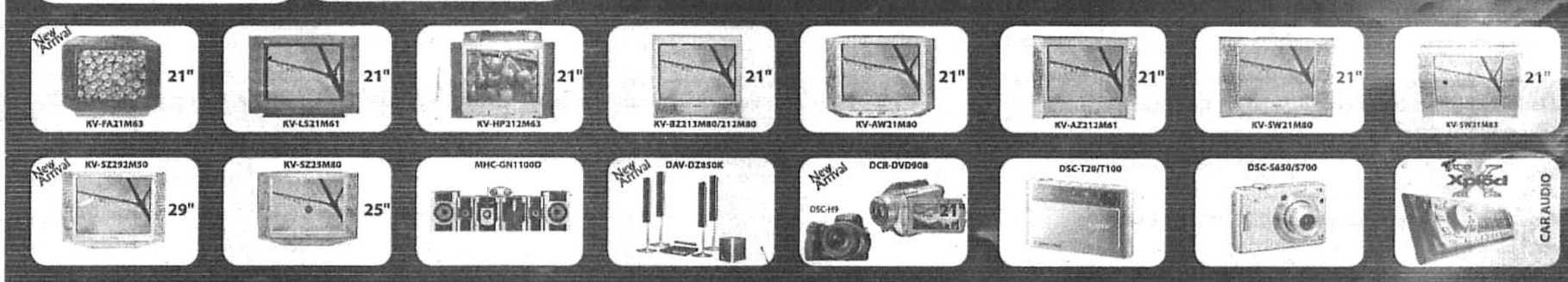

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