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Moudud bent rules to get WorldTel's Nayeem loan

Tk 15cr given without collateral based on forged documents

SHARIEF KHAN

Former law minister Moudud Ahmed bent rules to help WorldTel scamster Nayeem Mehtab Chowdhury obtain a Tk 15 crore loan from Sonali Bank with forged documents and without any collateral in 2005, according to an investigation of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

Arrested on November 6 for large-scale financial crimes, Nayeem wielded so much political influence that he made Moudud use the Ministry of Law to give legal opinion in his favour so that he could obtain the loan, based on forged documents of WorldTel.

Rab brought specific charges against Nayeem, a self-declared managing director of WorldTel Bangladesh, for draining out Tk 15 crore from Sonali Bank and Tk 35 crore from National Bank of Pakistan forging the signature of Sam Pitroda, chairman of WorldTel Holdings Ltd (WTHL).

Rab is now preparing to file another case accusing Nayeem of

defrauding local National Bank Ltd of at least Tk 11 crore," said a well-placed Rab source Sunday.

The source added, "When there is solid proof, we will not spare any political or non-political bigwigs involved in Nayeem's elaborate financial scams."

Documents show that in dealing with the Sonali Bank loan, Moudud bent Chapter III of the government's Rules of Business that allows the law ministry only to give legal advice for other ministries or departments and not for private citizens.

Using his connections with BNP Senior Secretary General Tarique Rahman, son of former prime Khaleida Zia, and ex-state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, Nayeem additionally involved Dhaka deputy commissioner and the finance ministry to help Moudud provide the legal coverage for the loan. All of it happened at an amazing pace in the month of May, 2005.

Nayeem had the law ministry on May 14, 2005 write to the Dhaka deputy commissioner to suggest that the finance ministry ask the law ministry for its legal opinion on the guarantee for WorldTel's Tk 15 crore loan. The deputy commissioner obliged on May 16, 2005. The finance ministry on May 24 asked the law ministry to give a legal opinion.

Under the signature of Moudud Ahmed, the law ministry gave its legal opinion on May 29, 2005 in favour of WorldTel. "The most remarkable thing about this opinion is that it contained seven signatures—all signed on May 29, 2005. The signatories included the then state minister for law Shahjahan Omar and the then secretary Md Alauddin Sarkar," said a source.

WorldTel is a US company that signed a land-phone agreement with the government in 2001 but till date has not brought in any foreign investment or offered its service to the people. But in the last seven years, WorldTel Bangladesh ventures shares were sold out to different people while Nayeem used the name of WorldTel and siphoned off more than Tk 60 crore from various

banks using forged documents. Though the WorldTel's mother organisation in the USA had repeatedly warned Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) that Nayeem Mehtab Chowdhury did not hold any position in the company, the BTRC had been giving him full support without any question and thus allowed him to commit various financial crimes.

Nameem commanded a strong lobby during the four-party alliance government tenure. After the changeover of the government, he still had strong connections at the BTRC. One of his high-paid employees includes the son of a powerful man at the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) and he had long remained untouchable by the law enforcers. The majority shareholder and the genuine Managing Director of WorldTel Amjad Hossain had been accusing him of forgery and cheating since 2006, but even the police would not accept this case.

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Mourners carry the body of drama doyen Selim Al Deen to the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital yesterday to pay their last respect to the great dramatist who passed away Monday.

GP to offload shares by June

UNB, Dhaka

GrameenPhone, the country's leading cellphone operator, yesterday promised to offload its shares for trading on the local stock market by June this year.

Responding to a request by chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) Maj (ret'd) Manjur Alam, the GP owners -- Grameen Telecom and Telenor -- promised to complete all the necessary tasks by June next.

The promise was made at a meeting held at the BTRC office in the morning where the finalisation of process to offload the GP shares was discussed.

GP's consultation firm Citibank NA was asked to prepare all the documents and necessary roadmap by February next in consultation with the Bangladesh Bank, the National Board of Revenue and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Chaired by the BTRC chairman, SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



Dhaka University students have built a mock jail at Aparajeyo Bangla as part of their protest demanding immediate release of detained students and teachers who were arrested after the August campus violence last year.

FREEING DU TEACHERS Advisers making contradictory remarks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Confusion is growing over how the caretaker government is going to settle the issue of detained Dhaka University (DU) teachers and students' release with the advisers giving contradictory versions on the way and timing of their release.

Though the government has repeatedly said since the first week of December that the teachers and students would be released 'soon', it did not make it clear when and how they would be released -- before or after the court judgement in the cases filed against them.

Over a month later, Home Affairs Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) MA SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

DUTA DECISION

No admission tests until teachers, students freed

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) last night decided not to hold any admission test at the university until all DU teachers and a student arrested in connection with the August 2007 campus violence are freed.

"Until the release of the detainees, among whom three are faculty deans who supervise admission tests, teachers have decided that the two remaining admission tests will be withheld," Duta member Prof Muhammad Samad said at a press briefing after an emergency meeting at the university club last night.

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ACC moves to

revive 2 old graft cases against Khaleida

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has taken a move to revive two old graft cases against former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia, which were quashed by the High Court during Khaleida's last regime.

As part of the move, ACC yesterday filed a delay condolence petition in the Supreme Court (SC) so that it can file an appeal against the HC orders that quashed the two corruption cases regarding Airbus purchase and police sub-inspectors' appointment during Khaleida's tenure between 1991 and 1996 as prime minister.

"If they are not freed within the timeframe, we will hold a rally participated by students, family members of the detained teachers and student on the campus on SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Govt may form bodies with advisers for talks with parties

SHAKHAWAT LITON and HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The caretaker government might form a committee comprising some of its advisers to chalk out a plan for holding electoral dialogues with political parties and to formulate its positions on issues the dialogists might raise during the talks.

The government however has yet to decide when and how the dialogues will kick off and what will be the agenda, but a source in the government yesterday hinted that a dramatic development might occur within the next few days regarding the talks.

Meanwhile, Awami League (AL)

yesterday decided to convene its presidium meeting tomorrow to respond to an interim government adviser's phone call on Tuesday to one of its presidium members for the dialogues, and to formulate its position vis-à-vis the talks.

The Office of the Chief Adviser is manoeuvring hard to hold the much talked about dialogues with political parties to ensure holding of a free and fair parliamentary election in line with the electoral roadmap announced by the Election Commission (EC), highly placed government sources said.

It has however yet to decide whether the committee, if formed, will sit with the political parties or the full council of advisers will sit

with them. During the tenure of the immediate past caretaker government headed by President Iajuddin Ahmed a committee was formed comprising some advisers, which held dialogues with political parties to resolve the crisis over the polls prevailing back then, the sources pointed out.

Responding to the rising demand for electoral talks, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed on January 12 in an address to the nation announced that his government would soon take steps to begin dialogues with political parties following a decision of the council of advisers.

Following the announcement, a SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Selim Al Deen laid to rest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The road to Jahangirnagar University Muktamancha (amphitheatre) remained calm and the centre of all cultural activities froze to a condoling silence as a pensive crowd walked beside the coffin carrying the dead body of eminent playwright Selim Al Deen for burial.

Hundreds of teachers, students, cultural and social activists, friends and well-wishers paid their last homage to Selim Al Deen, one of the most important theatre icons in the subcontinent.

Students in tears carried the coffin to the grave near the university central mosque.

Selim Al Deen was laid to rest at 5:57pm.

Before the coffin was lowered into the grave, many gathered to have a last look at the creator of many brilliant pieces of drama, which have contributed to keeping Bangla theatre ever alive.

Earlier in the morning, thousands of people paid tribute to SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Harassed for Saudi Airlines' lone office

PORIMOL PALMA

Saudi Arabia-bound Bangladeshis are subjected to harassment and sufferings just because the kingdom's national airlines has a single office in the country to reconfirm their return tickets while there is a huge rush of passengers.

The passengers, almost all of them workers, have to wait for hours together in long queues time and gain in front of Saudi Arabian Airlines' office at Sonargaon Hotel in the capital. This a common sight round the year -- even in chilly cold and foggy winter nights and on

scorching summer days -- with the workers struggling for ticket reconfirmation.

They come to the capital from across the country, reside in hotels or even under the open sky for days. And many of them run the risk of losing jobs if the airline does not reconfirm their return tickets before expiry of their visas.

In an effort to solve the problems, the Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) proposed to the airline to have a mechanism for allowing travel agents to reconfirm the return

tickets but it rejected the proposal. Recently, it decided to have an office in Chittagong.

About 6,000 to 8,000 workers and others seek to leave for Saudi Arabia per week but the Saudi Airlines can carry only around 4,500 when all its 12 regular flights operate. And due to rescheduling of flights for hajj pilgrims, the number came down to some 2,500 worsening the sufferings of passengers.

There are around 15 lakh Bangladeshis workers in Saudi Arabia.

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Trial of Hasina's extortion case begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Trial of the extortion case against former prime minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina filed by businessman Azam J Chowdhury begins today.

A Dhaka court on Sunday framed charges against Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana and cousin Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim in the Tk 2.99 crore extortion case and fixed today for starting trial through taking deposition of witnesses.

Of the three, Hasina and former health minister Selim are detained while Rehana, who lives in London, was indicted in absentia.

Judge Azizul Huq of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court on Sunday brought charges

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Govt preparing to hold fair, credible polls Says chief adviser

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said the caretaker government is carrying out whatever necessary for holding free, fair and acceptable election following the roadmap of the Election Commission.

Fakhruddin made the remark when the outgoing Philippines Ambassador Norberto R Basilio made a farewell call on him and appreciated his recent address to the nation.

The ambassador said he believed that credible election would be held in Bangladesh, which was reiterated by the chief adviser in his speech.

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Fakhruddin said the government is carrying out measures including reforms -- a demand by all -- to create a level-playing field.

The international community has support to the roadmap of Bangladesh's election and is helping to this end, he said.

The chief adviser hoped that Bangladesh would get support of the Philippines in becoming Dialogue Partner of the Asean (Association of South-East Asian Nations).

He thanked the government of Philippines and its people for their active support towards Bangladesh's membership in the Asean Regional Forum (ARF).

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Gen Moeen rules out army takeover Says he has no plan to become president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed said the army does not want to take over power and he also has no plan to be the country's president.

"No such situation has arisen in the country that warrants army takeover of power," Moeen said in an interview telecast on private satellite television Channel 1 last night.

Channel 1 aired part of the interview for its talk show "Tritiyu Matra" in its prime time news bulletin. The full talk show will be aired at 7:50pm Saturday.

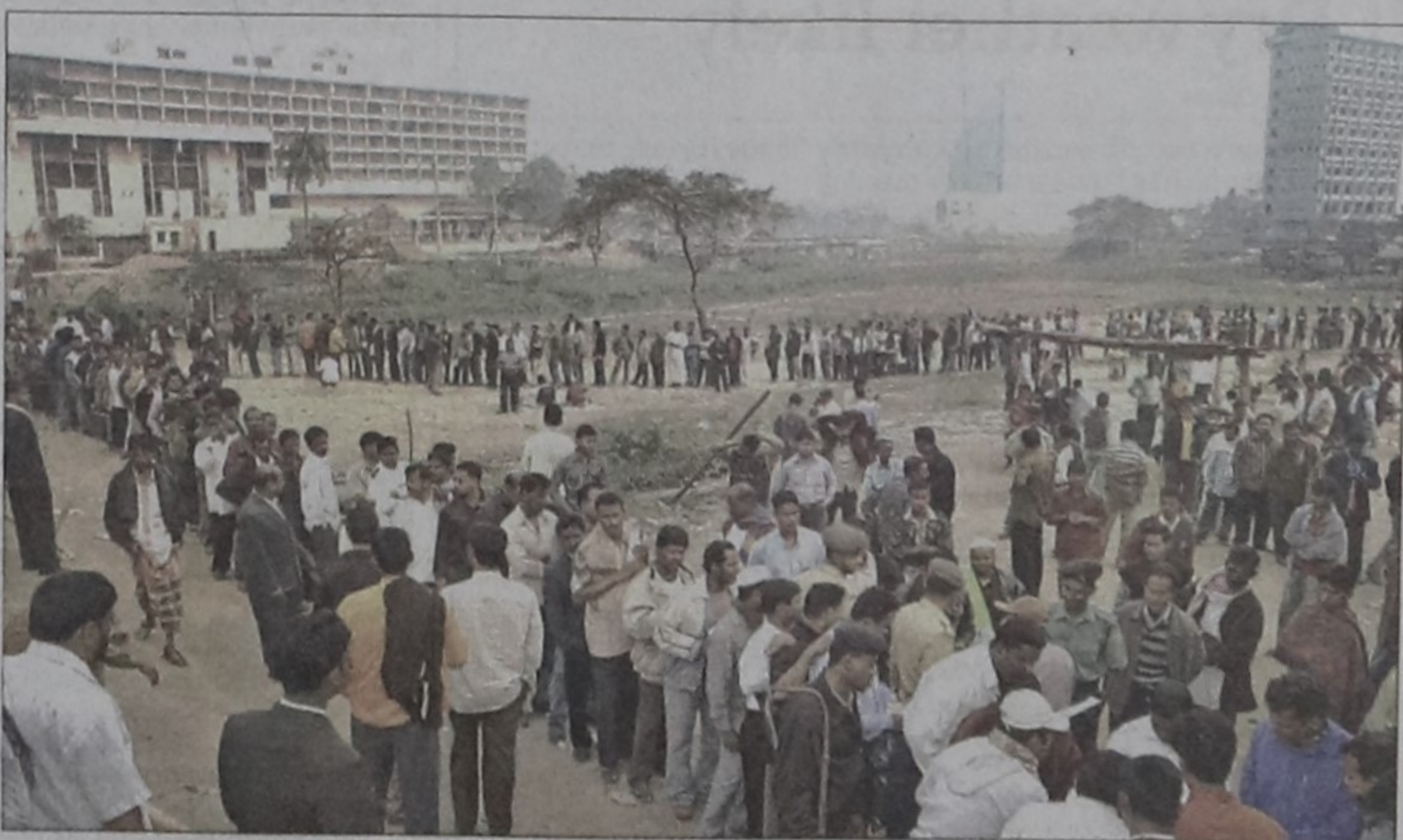
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The army chief emphatically said he does not see any obstruction to holding the general election by December this year. He said the election even could be held before December if all work together.

On trial of the war criminals, Gen Moeen said they should be tried and it should have been done much earlier.

He observed that Bangladesh could proceed towards becoming a failed state if the state of emergency was not promulgated on January 11 last year.

On the situation before that, the army chief said, "I have never seen SEE PAGE 15 COL 8



Hundreds of Saudi Arabia-bound passengers, mainly workers, yesterday queue up on a field behind Sonargaon Hotel as the Saudi Airlines monopolises the ticketing business leading to harassment of passengers.

Polls won't be delayed for redrawing constituencies

CEC assures

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda said yesterday that the next general elections would not be delayed because of the ongoing changes to constituency boundaries.

"The constituency boundaries are being redrawn to end the present lack of coordination and chaos," Huda told reporters after inaugurating a voter registration centre in Narayanganj.

Huda also emphasised on the need for dedicated people to come into politics. He said, "We saw plenty of good Bengali politicians

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