

## Story of a skewed deal

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defaulter and award Orion Group the work," said the DCC source, adding, "A few top men of the DCC made quick cash out of the deal."

The task force sources said they are still investigating the matter.

The DCC floated a tender on May 11, 2003 asking for design and financial proposal for a tower on the DCC land. Five companies took part in the bid.

GBB Ltd in its project proposal offered DCC 40 percent of floor area of its 26-storey tower on the city corporation's land. Al Amin Ltd offered to give DCC 30 percent of a 34-storey building and Belhasa offered only 21 percent of a 37-storey building.

The two other companies that participated in the bidding were announced defaulter for not submitting proper designs of their proposed building.

"These companies could not protest the DCC decision," the source said, adding that the highest bidder was not even asked whether it could offer 40 percent of the total floor area if it were asked to build a 37-storey building.

When the task force recently contacted the company it came to learn that the company was ready to offer 40 percent of floor area if it were asked to build a 37-storey building, the source added.

Belhasa got the work order within just 19 days of advertising the tender in newspapers although it offered the DCC less share.

On May 19, 2003—just after eight days of floating the tender, the DCC officials evaluated the proposal. They sat to evaluate the financial proposal on May 25 and handed over the work order to Belhasa on May 29, the source said.

Citing the taskforce investigation, the source said if the DCC had got 40 percent floor area instead of 21 percent, it would have gained 81,000 square feet more floor area worth at least Tk

50 crore.

The total floor area of the City Centre with its 33 floors, the ground floor and three basements is 4,79,500 square feet.

The DCC technical committee comprised the then project director Engineer Ashiqur Rahman, then chief engineer Dr Golam Kadir, additional chief engineer Idris Miah and superintendent engineer Lutfar Rahman.

Of them, Golam Kadir went to the USA in 2004 and never came back. Engineer Idris Miah and Lutfar Rahman are now in retirement and Ashiqur Rahman was suspended recently for his involvement in corruption in the Jatrabari-Gulistan flyover project.

Orion chief Obaidul Karim, who has been absconding since January last year, has recently been convicted in the Oriental Bank forgery case. He is also the main accused in another forgery case involving the Oriental Bank from where he siphoned off almost Tk 600 crore during the rule of the alliance government. Obaidul is also accused in a case regarding ill-gotten wealth and another for evading import duty for a luxury car.

Task force sources said investigations into different bank forgery by Obaidul are going on.

The Anti-Corruption Commission is investigating Obaidul's ill-gotten wealth under a case for failing to submit his wealth statement.

Besides, the task forces are investigating different large-scale deals the Orion boss bagged during the alliance government's rule. These include the Jatrabari-Gulistan flyover project and the Meghnaghat power project.

"It will take time to complete all investigations because all these projects are big and some involve foreign investors. But there are huge corruption in each of the projects and there will be more cases against Obaidul Karim in near future," said a source.

## 5 held

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officials seeking anonymity.

Police investigators said arrestee Swapan admitted his involvement in the theft. He told investigators that he received Tk 1,000 for the job from another arrestee Saiful, a security guard of Max Automobiles, sub-contractor of Chinese company which was awarded the job of converting the metre-gauge lines to multi-gauge from Joydevpur to Dhaka.

He said he assisted in stealing as a member of a professional gang of thieves led by Liton. He could not say where the stolen clips were.

Police arrested Saiful at Banani but could not glean any information from him as of 8:00 last night. They also arrested Liton and were interrogating him.

The other arrestees are Abul Hossain and Jamal. All five were arrested from Tejgaon Railway Station and Banani areas yesterday.

"Swapan admitted his involvement in the theft but we are yet to recover any stolen goods," Officer-in-charge of GRP Police Station Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star last night.

Investigators and railway sources suspect involvement of low-level serving and retired railway staff in the stealing, as they believe such a massive job could not have been possible without their knowledge.

"It is taking 50 workers two days to install the metal clips. It is hard to believe that without the involvement of railway staff, such thing could happen," said an investigation-seeking anonymity.

Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Railway Abul Kashem, however, said investigation is going on and proper action would be taken against the offenders, whoever they may be.

Railway officials said there is over 2,800km of railway tracks across the country. There are employees responsible for examining five to seven kilometres of track each. They examine the lines for faults during the day. There is no way to oversee the lines after dark.

**ENQUIRY COMMITTEE**  
A three-member enquiry committee headed by Abul Kashem was formed late on Friday.

The committee has been asked to submit its report with recommendation within three days. The two other members of the committee are Bangladesh Railway's Chief Engineer (Eastern region) Noor Mohammad and Chief Commandant (Eastern region) Faruq Ahmed.

Earlier, another committee headed by Assistant Superintendent of Railway Police Rakhal Chandra Sutradhar was formed to investigate the incident. The committee was given 10 days to submit its probe report.

## War criminals

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forces AK Khandker said, "This country is an unsuccessful state as it has failed to try the war criminals so far."

Khandker, also president of the Sector Commanders Forum, urged the present caretaker government to form special tribunal and start the process of trying the war criminals without delay.

He strongly demanded banning of political activities of those parties that acted as auxiliary to the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971.

"The next election would not be free and fair if the war criminals and anti-liberation elements are not barred from taking part in it," the war veteran observed. He said they had taken the vow to win in the "battle" of bringing the war criminals to justice.

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, former vice-chancellor of Jahangirnagar University, said the government must recognise the nation's demand for the trial of the war criminals.

No one would blame this government if it cannot end the process of trying the war criminals, he added, stressing the need for starting the trial.

Lt Gen (ret'd) Harun-ar-Rashid, chief coordinator of Sector Commanders Forum, expressed surprise that the war criminals and anti-liberation elements dare to speak against the country's Liberation War even when freedom fighters are still alive.

"We have got honour and independence at the cost of lives of freedom fighters but we could not yet bring the war criminals to justice even after long 37 years of independence," he said.

The 25 freedom fighters and dignitaries given reception are Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Col (ret'd) Shawkat Ali, Shahriar Kabir, Gazi Muhammad Rahmatullah, martyred subedar Ilias Khan, Dr ABM Zafar Ullah, Joyal Abedin, Golam Kuddus, Advocate Habibur Rahman Shawkat, Muhammad Ali Chowdhury Mangal, Advocate Dhali Moazzem Hossain, Abir Ahad, Prof Montaz Begum, Dr Makhduma Nargis, Farida Khanam Saki, Fazlul Haq, Borhan Uddin Ahmed, Jagadish Chandra Biswas, Taher Hossain Bhuiyan, Gazi Muhammad Delwar Hossain, Ahmed Ullah, Abdur Rahim, Mofizuddin, Selim Bhuiyan and Abdul Kadir.

The programme was presided over by Shajahan Kabir, president of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Nou Commando Association.

## Electoral reforms

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group editorial adviser of the Star (Malaysia) NG Poh Tip, Deputy Managing Director of the China Daily Zhou Li, Deputy Editor of the Straits Times (Singapore) Felix Soh, Editor-in-Chief of the Korea Herald (South Korea) Choi Nam-hyun, Editor and Managing Director of the Statesman (India) Ravindra Kumar, President of the Nation (Singapore) and Executive Director, ANN, Pana Jansiroj, Editor, Political Section, of Rasmei Kampuchea (Cambodia) Serath Nguon, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Vietnam News Nguyen Tien Le, Editor-in-Chief of Vientiane Times (Laos) Savankhane Razmoung, Asia Komar Adenauer Foundation Werner Vom Busch, were among others, on the delegation.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim was also present.

The CA told the media personalities that the Election Commission is about to finalise the electoral reforms through discussion with political parties, civil society and media people.

He mentioned reform measures taken as per demand of the people including a recast of the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, and Public Service Commission and separation of the judiciary for sustainable democracy and good governance.

Regarding fair and neutral election, he said numerous questions were raised in 2006 about the stalled election scheduled for January 22, 2007. Accuracy of voter list is one of the preconditions for free, fair and neutral election, he added.

The Election Commission, now equipped with independent secretariat, has been working to this end, he told the eminent journalists of the Southeast Asian region.

He said preparation of voter list with photographs is going on in full swing. The Election Commission has completed 50 percent of the task and the EC is confident about completing it within next few months.

Regarding the ongoing anti-corruption drive, he said those

## Barakat

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Barakat was speaking at a roundtable titled "Women Empowerment in Bangladesh" organised by BEA at its auditorium in the capital.

He demanded the government provide sufficient health care for women and special loan facilities for women entrepreneurs at five percent interest to recognise women's contribution to the economy.

President of BEA, Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad said the state itself has to take the responsibility to establish the rights of women and improve women's rights.

"The government should have a clear stance on implementing women's policies to ensure a sustainable economy," he added.

In her keynote paper, Prof Hannana Begum observed the allocation for women development in the national budget is very poor and rests underutilised every year due to lack of proper planning.

In another paper, Mahmuda Khatun observed that women are widely discriminated against in the country. They receive poor health care and low wages in jobs that men do. She blamed the government for not taking stronger steps against crimes against women.

"Women do not contribute less to the national economy. So, the government should seriously think about proper framing and implementation of the women policy," she added.

Khondoker Ibrahim Khaled, chairman of Rupali Bank, said the government should not surrender to any kind of agitation while framing the policy for developing women and increase the quota for women in government jobs.

## AL to observe

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Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam declared the mass hunger strike, saying the planned hunger strike is the beginning of the future "constructive movement".

The meeting strongly demanded unconditional release of Sheikh Hasina and other party leaders.

"Earlier, we had sent an application to the chief advisor with a request to release Sheikh Hasina and arrange her proper treatment in US. But, the government didn't pay heed to our demand... Now we strongly demand her unconditional release," Ashrafur said.

The meeting approved the signature campaign programme announced by the City Awami League and Jubo Mohila Awami League and hailed the organisations for taking such programme aiming at releasing Sheikh Hasina.

Awami League called for starting proposed dialogue between the government and the political parties ahead of the parliamentary election but cautioned that if the war criminals are invited to the dialogue, the party will boycott it.

"We want bilateral dialogue like that of the Election Commission and we hope the government will refrain from any move that may hamper the dialogue process and it will not bring any good for the nation," Ashrafur said.

The central working committee asked the caretaker government to lift the state of emergency and ban on political activities across the country to create congenial atmosphere for holding the elections.

The meeting decided to exchange views with divisional level leaders of the party to know

accused of corruption are being brought to justice under the normal law of the land. The present caretaker government did not enact any new law for trial of the corruption suspects.

He further said the government is also trying to find out ways to curb corruption by taking preventive strategies like simplification of rules and regulations and posting those on public domain.

He also mentioned the setting up of the national human rights commission, formulation of Right to Information Act, constitution of the Regulatory Reforms Commission and Better Business Forum.

The CA said the government also wants to strengthen local government system to strengthen the foundation of democracy is working to this end.

He said the government also is carrying out efforts for socio-economic development and hoped Bangladesh would be able to become a middle-income group country in the near future.

On business and investment, he said the government will play regulatory role transparently for fast growth of private sector.

About the locus standi of his 14-month-old regime the chief adviser said the caretaker government is a constitutional government and he was sworn in according to provision of the constitution.

## Rice price

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price. A wholesale trader said price of rice will drop when locally-produced rice enters the market in mid-April.

Food Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman told The Daily Star that Bangladesh has food reserve for three months and Boro rice will start entering the market soon. The international food crisis and the Indian price hike will not impact Bangladesh, he said.

Mohammad Tipu Sultan, a rice importer, said hiking export price to \$1,000 per tonne indicates that the Indian strategy is not to export rice.

"We can start collecting rice from the local market from April 15," he said.

Private traders have rice reserve for one and a half month, said Tipu Sultan, adding, "Therefore, there is no reason for immediate price hike of rice."

Bangladesh Economic Association President Prof Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad said the Indian price hike proves that food crisis has become a global issue.

It may not influence Bangladesh market immediately since there is food in reserve but the problem is the already high price of rice. People of low and limited income group struggle to buy food, he said.

"Price hike of rice in such a way would not have happened if the government had recognised the problem on time and imported food when its price was low," Kholiquzzaman said.

The only way out for the government is to give special emphasis on food production, he said. He suggested allocating more money in the next budget for agriculture, providing farmers with agriculture loans and buying food early from local and foreign markets.

## RICE PRICES IN CITY

Prices of Indian rice in wholesale markets in the city dropped by Tk 10 to Tk 20 a mound, just over 37kg. A mound of Indian rice was selling yesterday between Tk 1,180 and Tk 1,220.

Prices of locally-produced coarse rice, however, increased by Tk 10 to Tk 20. A mound of these rice was selling yesterday between Tk 1,160 and Tk 1,180.

their opinion about the elections and the movement.

"The only task of the caretaker government is to hold general elections and hand over power to an elected government and for this the government should announce election schedule immediately," Ashrafur said.

After the observance of the planned mass hunger strike, the party is likely to announce programs like wearing black badges and hoisting black flags across the country and forming human chain to speed up the movement on the street.

At the central committee meeting, some leaders expressed their dissatisfaction at the activities of its student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League. They suggested reconstitution of the Chhatra League to make it effective.

The leaders underscored the need for keeping party united at any cost, shunning differences of opinion.

## Security upped

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create a situation that might lead to untoward incidents," Deputy Inspector General (prisons) Major Shamsul Haider Siddique was quoted as saying by private television channel Ekushey TV yesterday.

Inspector General (prisons) Brig Gen Zakir Hassan however told The Daily Star that they do not have any such information. Besides, he added, they always maintain strict security surrounding the VIP inmates.

## Govt to supply

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would raise the number of OMS outlets to 6,530 across the country next month. Currently 2,730 OMS outlets are in operation, and 3,800 more will beset up.

Of the total OMS outlets, 510 will sell rice in six city corporations, 580 will operate in 58 districts and the rest will be activated at upazila levels and at places with many industrial units.

The food secretary said if the ministry cannot appoint new dealers at places, the Directorate of Food will continue sale in those places by sending trucks.

A total of 1.2 lakh tonnes of rice will be sold through OMS, and the food ministry will increase per head sale to five kg from four kg while dealers' commission will be enhanced to Tk 1.5 per kg from Tk 1 perkilg.

At present, the government has VGF programmes in 14 Sidr and Monga (famine like situation) affected districts and it will bring another 37 districts under this programme, the food secretary mentioned.

"The government will provide additional 54 thousand 463 tonnes of rice to expand the VGF programme in April," Wahiduzzaman said.

The government will not increase the existing 15 kg rice per head for VGF.

## Foreign envoys

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National Press Club yesterday, held to launch the organisation.

Former energy adviser and executive chairman of the Board of Investment Mahmudur Rahman is the convener of the organisation. Farhad Mazhar, columnist and poet, Ataus Samad, adviser of Daily Amar Desh, professors Talukder Moniruzzaman and Razia Akhter Banu of the Political Science department of Dhaka University, Sabihuddin Ahmed, a former ambassador, Dr Anwarul Azim, vice-chancellor of Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology (DUET) and MA Hannan, rector of the Engineering Staff College are the members of the newly floated organisation.

They condemned the government for inviting Indian war veterans of 1971 to the 38th Independence Day celebrations, terming the move disgraceful and against the sovereign interests of the nation.

Mahmudur Rahman, convener of NIG, in his speech said the independence, sovereignty and dignity of the people cannot be protected if interference by foreign envoys in the nation's internal affairs is not stopped.

Farhad Mazhar said the Indian Army personnel might have been invited to the Victory Day celebrations, but they had nothing to do with the Independence of the nation.

Other NIG members echoed his sentiments, saying India did not take part in our liberation war to help us but rather in their own interests. NIG will publish a quarterly report on "interference by foreign diplomats in the country".

## Akbar Ali

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was submitted to the PSC chairman on March 6. The report discussed in details the existing quota system and recommended reforms.

Termining the present system faulty, Akbar Ali Khan said, "Quota system for civil service recruitment cannot continue for an indefinite time. There should be a mechanism for rearranging the system. Otherwise there may be an impression that those recruited are not competent."

Percentage of recruitment under quota system should never be higher than that of recruitment on the basis of merit, he said. But cancellation of quota system fully might create social unrest, he said, adding that the system therefore should have legal basis.

The RRC chairman said under the present quota system, children of poor people do not get jobs, rather children of those comparatively rich get jobs.

Of the 55 percent quota for recruitment in civil service, 30 percent is reserved for freedom fighters, 10 percent for district level candidates, 10 percent for women and five percent for indigenous communities while 45 percent appointments are made on the basis of merits.

"As a freedom fighter, I support quota system for children of freedom fighters but there is a question how this can be justified by the constitution. If children of freedom fighters are considered people of backward sections, they may be given the benefits of quotas," Akbar Ali said.

Termining the recommendations for reducing quota positive, and more appointments on the basis of merit, the PSC chairman said they will hold discussions outside Dhaka to seek public opinion on the issue.

Others who spoke at the seminar included PSC member Mohammad Nurunnabi and secretary Mohammad Abdus Sattar, acting law secretary KH Awai, former secretaries Kazi Rakib Uddin Ahmed and Mahfuzul Islam, women's rights leader Ayesha Khanam, Bangladesh Observer Editor Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Maj Gen (ret'd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury, PSC former member Prof Khandkar Bazul Haque and former ambassador Mohammad Afzarul Kader. Saadat Hussain moderated the seminar.

## Arab summit

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reporters ahead of the two-day gathering. "Their aim is to divide the Arab world,"

"There will be a very successful summit," he added.

Several Arab officials have expressed frustration at the West's "interference" in Arab affairs.

"There has been US pressure on Arab countries to reduce their participation," Libyan Foreign Minister Abdel Rahman Shalgah told reporters in Damascus on Saturday.

"We as Arabs do not interfere in European summits. It has become a farce and this situation must be remedied by a joint Arab effort," he said.

Egypt sent a junior minister, while powerhouse Saudi Arabia and Jordan were represented by their ambassadors to the Arab League.

"There will be no trace of the United States on the summit's work or agenda," Muallem told his counterparts on Thursday in a preparatory meeting for the summit.

Lebanon has been without a president since the end of November and has been mired in political crisis for more than a year because of feuding between the Western-backed parliamentary majority and the Hezbollah-led opposition, backed by Syria and Iran.

In a televised address on Friday ahead of the summit, Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora said his government had decided to boycott the meeting because of Syrian meddling in his country's affairs.

"Lebanon has had a presidential void for more than four months. Before and during that period Syria played a leading role to exacerbate the crisis... interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs and blocking the election of the consensus candidate to the presidency," he said.

The crisis, the worst since the end of Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war, is widely seen as an extension of the conflict pitting the United States and its regional allies against Syria and Iran.

On Thursday, Muallem urged Riyadh to use its influence to help solve the problem.

"Saudi Arabia must use its influence over the majority in

## Tarique

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Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004, section 109 of the Penal Code and section 15 of the Emergency Power Rules, 2007.

"The charge sheet is likely to be submitted tomorrow. If not, it'll be submitted on Monday," a competent source told the news agency.

The ACC on Thursday approved the submission of charge sheet against Tarique, his wife Dr Jobaida Rahman and mother-in-law Iqbal Mand Banu for acquiring wealth worth about Tk 2.75 crore illegally and concealing information of assets worth over Tk 2.16 crore.

Twelve cases have been filed against Tarique Rahman since his arrest in the early hours of March 8, 2007.

## Terrorism first priority

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eight years of military rule under Musharraf.

Underlining the transformation of Pakistan's political landscape, lawmakers on Saturday gave a unanimous vote of confidence to Gilani, a loyalist of assassinated former premier Benazir Bhutto.

In a gesture to Western nations concerned that Musharraf's decline could result in an easing of Pakistan's efforts to counter al-Qaeda and Taliban militants entrenched along the Afghan border, he announced that "fighting terrorism" was his government's "top priority."

"The war against terrorism is our own war," Gilani told lawmakers, who repeatedly thumped their desks in approval as he outlined his priorities.

But he also said authorities were "ready to hold talks with those who will lay down their arms" in order to restore peace.

Gilani promised to develop the impoverished frontier region's economy and abolish criminal codes dating back to British colonial rule that contribute to its isolation.

However, he gave no indication whether his government was prepared to negotiate with hardcore militants blamed for a wave of suicide attacks in Afghanistan and, increasingly, in Pakistan.

Deputy US Secretary of State John Negroponte cautioned on Thursday during a visit to Pakistan that some militant groups were "irreconcilable" and had to be fought.

Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party and that of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif finished first and second in Feb. 18 parliamentary elections, trouncing Musharraf's political allies.

The country faces gathering economic problems, including double-digit inflation, electricity shortages and deteriorating state finances. Gilani announced a government austerity campaign,

Lebanon to help find a solution," he said.

The summit is due to re-endorse an Arab League initiative for Lebanon which calls for the election of army chief General Michel Sleiman as president, forming a national unity government in which no single party has veto power and a new electoral law.

On Thursday, Arab foreign ministers also agreed to re-endorse the 2002 Arab initiative for Middle East peace but expressed their frustration at Israel's refusal to follow up on their plan.

## Violence

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and perpetrated by the separatist forces for "Tibetan Independence" both in and outside China.

The statement said the incident has again exposed the separatist nature of the Dalai clique, as well as the hypocrisy and deception of their claimed "peace" and "nonviolence."

The statement said the violent crimes committed by the Dalai clique aroused grave indignation and strong condemnation among the people of all ethnic groups in Tibet.

The competent authorities of the Tibet autonomous region have dealt with the incidents in accordance with law to maintain social stability and the sanctity of law and safeguarding the fundamental interests of all ethnic groups.

It said the law enforcement personnel exercised maximum restraint during the whole process. Now the situation in Lhasa has calmed down and law and order has returned to normal.

"The Chinese government is fully capable of maintaining law and order in Tibet and protecting the fundamental interests and security of the people of all ethnic groups in Tibet," the statement said.

The embassy said it is universally recognised by the international community that Tibet is an