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Unfair practices, neglect cost TeleTalk Tk 200cr

Probe blames ex-telecom minister, 8 BTTB officials

MD HASAN and SHARIER KHAN

A task force probe found that Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board's (BTTB's) mobile phone project TeleTalk incurred losses of over Tk 200 crore due to implementation delay, and blamed it on unfair practices and negligence of the then telecom minister and eight high officials of the BTTB.

Implementation period of the project was 2002 to 2004 but it ended in July 2008.

A bribery involving Arafat Rahman Koko, son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, concerning the project had come to light earlier as foreign investigators probed Germany-based industrial giant Siemens' global bribery scandal to get projects in different countries.

When Siemens' bribery scandal was

revealed globally, a local task force under the National Coordination Committee on Corruption and Serious Crimes (NCC) in a probe report said some high-ups of the previous four-party alliance government including then telecom minister Aminul Haque and now-defunct BTTB chairman Mohammad Nurul Islam and seven other officials were responsible for delaying the project.

Two former project directors of the project, deputy general manager of TeleTalk, former general manager of TeleTalk, former director (procurement), and former director (development and coordination) of TeleTalk were also blamed for the irregularities.

The estimated cost of the once lucrative public mobile project named '10 lakh T&T Mobile Phone Project' (TeleTalk),

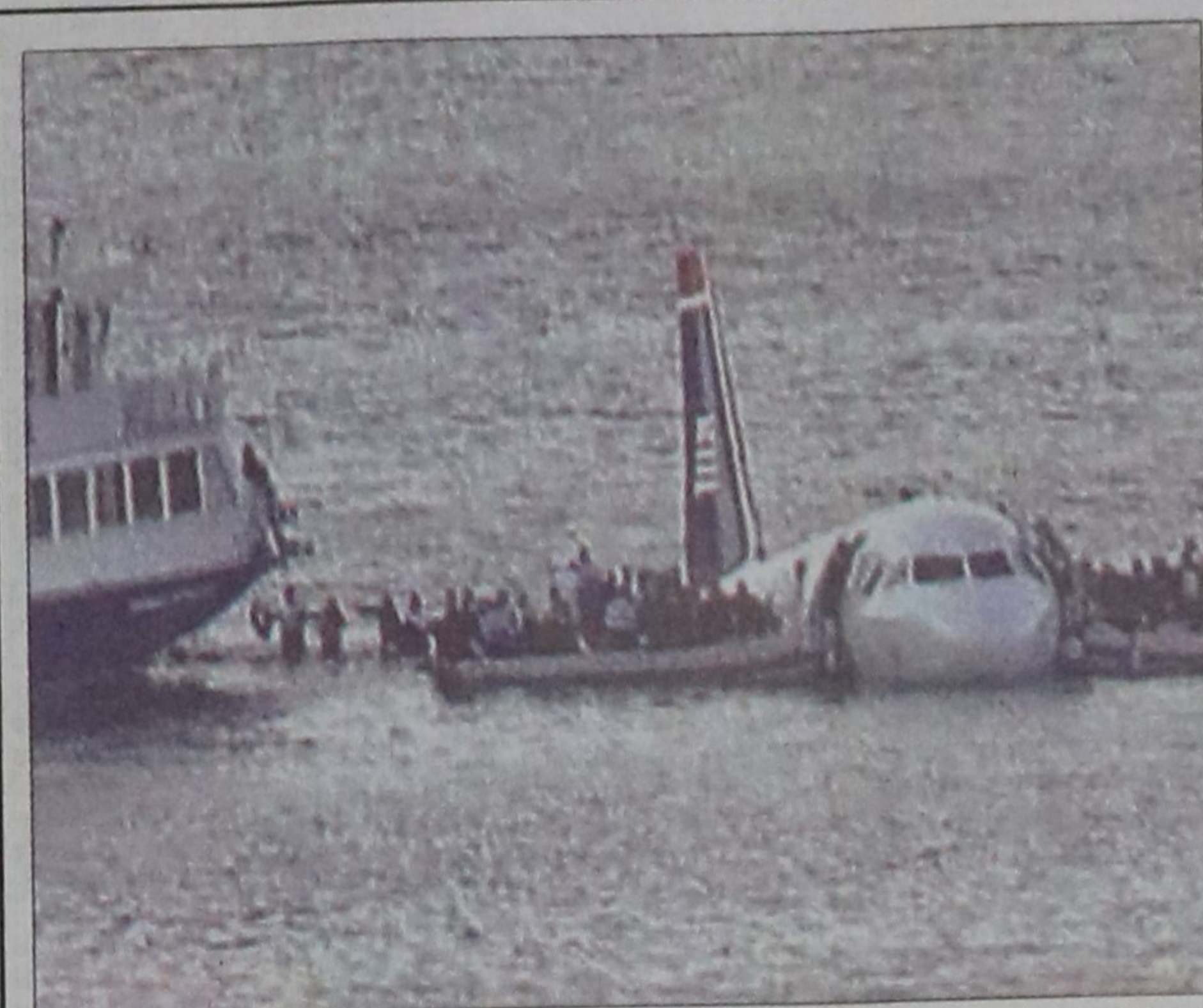
was Tk 594 crore. But the cost finally rose to Tk 801 crore due to unfair practices.

TeleTalk entered market in 2005 but it is yet to make profit or build significant customers base.

According to the probe report, the government had invited bids for the project in August 2002. The telecom ministry took two years to approve the vendor for implementing it. "Basically, reluctance of Ministry of Telecommunication was responsible for slow implementation of the project," it said.

After two years, in June 2004, BTTB concluded a deal with vendors to execute the project. But interestingly, only 16 days were left for it. Siemens was awarded contract for the project, and later Chinese-based Huawei was made a

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Passengers of the US Airways plane that crashed into the Hudson River in New York yesterday are being evacuated on ferries.

Miracle save for 155 as plane dives into river

AFP, New York

A US Airways plane carrying 155 people crashed Thursday into New York's Hudson River, but all aboard made a miraculous escape as the freezing waters rose around them, US officials said.

The Airbus with 150 passengers and five crew lost power in both engines almost simultaneously, a highly rare event, just minutes after take-off from LaGuardia Airport outside New York City.

Initial reports from the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) suggested the plane's engines stopped after a collision with birds, but this was not immediately confirmed.

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POST-ELECTION INSIGHT

Both Awami League (AL) and BNP, the two major political parties in the country, are planning radical changes in their leaderships. While AL's move is sparked by its desire to maintain the momentum it achieved through its recent landslide electoral victory and its professed commitment to the 'charter for change', BNP's springs from its frantic search for remedy following its recent election debacle.

AL looks for fresh blood in quest of change

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

Awami League's (AL) new central committee, which is likely to be elected in April this year by a long delayed national council of the party, might look much younger.

Party sources said most of the incumbent members of the presidium, the highest policy making forum of the party, and some other central leaders might be dropped from the new central committee, as party President Sheikh Hasina wants to bring forward young leaders in a bid to prepare the party for the long run.

Some of the old guards will likely be appointed as members of the party's advisory council to clear the way for the younger generation of leaders who are currently the majority in the AL parliamentary party and also in the cabinet of the new government led by it, the sources said.

Some of the old leaders are even likely to be excluded from

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BNP likely to lean on the young for comeback

RASHIDUL HASAN

The BNP high command plans to have young, honest and competent leaders at the helm at different levels to rejuvenate the rank and file still reeling from the trouncing in the December 29 general election.

Many incumbent standing committee members and controversial leaders of the central committee might be left out of the 'new BNP', said sources close to the party chief.

Some of the old guard, who are not accused of graft, might be given place in the chairperson's advisory council, added the sources.

The party high-ups are also weighing the possibility of a change in the secretary general's post.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia on Thursday dropped some hints about changes in some top positions including secretary general.

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TRI-NATION FINAL So close, yet so far

BISHWAJIT ROY

Bangladesh went ever so close but fell just short of making history as Muttiah Muralidaran's whirlwind with the bat shattered the Tigers dream at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Sri Lanka won the mouthwatering tri-nation final by two wickets to break the hearts of a million cricket fans in the country but credit goes to the Tigers who produced one of the best one-day matches in front of an exuberant holiday crowd.

In the end the locals might have left the field disheartened but as a cricket fan they will definitely remember this match for a long time.

While everybody was

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A BRIDGE TOO FAR: Tamim Iqbal (R) standing at first-slip makes a valiant attempt to hold onto a chance offered by Sri Lanka batsman Jehan Mubarak (C) during the final of the tri-nation ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BCL rivals clash at JU over control of halls

20 injured; gunfire rocks campus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 20 students were injured as two groups of Bangladesh Chhatra League of Jahangirnagar University (JU) clashed over establishing their dominance on campus yesterday.

During the clashes, the students fired at least 25 bullets against each other while police lobbed 42 canisters of teargas to disperse the feuding students.

A large contingent of police and other law enforcement agencies were deployed on campus to avert further clashes. General students were still in panic.

State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj told The Daily Star last night that tough punitive actions would be taken against the people responsible for yesterday's

violence in JU regardless of their party affiliation.

Witnesses said the clashes broke out around 12:30pm between the two groups—one led by Chhatra League JU unit President Sohel Parvez and General Secretary Mahmud Naser Jonny and the other by Chhatra League leader Azibur Rahman.

During the clashes, chases and counter chases took place between them in the space between Bangabandhu Hall and Maulana Bhasani Hall.

Both the groups opened fire on each other and continued their gun battle for over half an hour. Police rushed to the spot and lobbed teargas shells to disperse the feuding students, witnesses said.

Campus sources said Chhatra League

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Plan to find root causes of rural crime

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry is mulling over a plan to dig deeper into the root causes of criminal acts at village level in a bid to improve the law and order situation across the country.

The ministry has already directed the top police officials to take immediate measures in this regard.

Sources said State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj had a meeting with the IGP Noor Mohammad on Thursday that lasted for over an hour where he discussed in details about finding out the sources of crimes at root level.

"Given the safety and

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Criminal killed in gunfight with Rab

Major, four of deceased's family members hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A notorious criminal was killed and four of his family members and an officer of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) were injured in a gun battle in South Keraniganj on the outskirts of the capital early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Abdul Quader alias Baro Miah Shahin, 30, chief of 'Baro Miah Shahin Group' in city's Shyampur and Jatrabari areas and hailed from Palashur village in Sirajdikhan upazila of Munshiganj.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of around 25 members of Rab-10 led by company commander Major Sazzad Hossain raided the house at about 3:00am to arrest Shahin.

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Japan offers \$440m for power, bridge

Japanese PM phones Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Japan has offered a package credit of \$440 million (40 billion yen) for the development of power plants, power distribution project and bridge improvement in Bangladesh.

Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso made the offer as he called Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday afternoon and congratulated her on the assumption of prime minister's office.

Taro Aso described the election victory of Awami League under her leadership as a significant event.

Welcoming the Japanese credit offer, Hasina sought more cooperation from Tokyo in power, agriculture and communications sectors.

Hasina said the tourism sector in Bangladesh will be further developed and requested the Japanese premier to encourage Japanese tourists to travel in greater



Taro Aso

numbers to Bangladesh.

She thanked Taro Aso for the phone call and also for sending election observers by the Japan-Bangladesh Friendship League.

Hasina also thanked Japan's role during the Bangladesh's Liberation War and its contributions to the post-war reconstruction of the country.

Japanese Ambassador Masayuki Inoue was present during the telephone conversation.

Fresh clashes in, around National Mosque

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Baitul Mukarram National Mosque plunged into chaos again yesterday as newly appointed Khatib Principal Mohammad Salauddin conducted his first juma prayers.

There were protests in and outside the mosque against the new khatib. His supporters and protesters even clashed inside the mosque before khutba (sermon) in the presence of religious affairs Secretary Mamunur Rashid Chowdhury and Islamic Foundation Director General AZM Fazlur Rahman.

Salauddin's supporters drove away the protesting group from the mosque and they held a separate congregation on the road in front of the mosque. Later, they brought

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BNP PLACES 'RIGGING EVIDENCE' Votes cast exceed total voters at a Natore-6 centre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP yesterday came up with fresh 'evidence of vote rigging and irregularities' in the recently held parliamentary election, and said these were the main reasons behind the party's polls debacle.

Alleging that ballot boxes were filled with so many fake votes to manipulate the election in favour of Awami League (AL), top BNP leaders termed the poll result 'ghost result'.

To substantiate the allegation, spokesperson of the party Nazrul Islam Khan gave media persons photocopies of the result sheet of polling at Kohelpur High School centre in Raninagar upazila of Naogaon-6 constituency. There were 3,768 voters at the centre but casting of votes was shown to be 3,845.

The result sheet carried official seal and signature of the district election officer of Naogaon, he said.

"How come votes cast exceed the number of voters at a centre?" the BNP joint secretary general questioned at a press briefing at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

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PROTECTING PARTY IMAGE AL to warn Quddus, plans orientation for lawmakers

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

The Awami League (AL) high command will issue a warning notice to its lawmaker Prof Abdul Quddus for receiving 80 gold replicas of boat, the party's electoral symbol, last Wednesday.

The party is also planning to launch an orientation programme for its lawmakers on their dos and don'ts immediately after the inaugural session of parliament on January 25.

Sources said almost all party members and the cabinet were embarrassed by the reception accorded to Natore-4 lawmaker Quddus and that many of them criticised and reprimanded him over telephone.

They said a few close associates of Hasina have advised her to take tough action against those who make derogatory statements or get involved in activities that could tarnish the image of the government and the party.

"We are extremely disappointed by the incident...Party chief and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is seriously annoyed. We will obviously issue a warning to the person responsible," said HT

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Israel hammers Gaza as truce efforts build up

23 bodies pulled out of rubble

AFP, Gaza City

Israel again pounded Gaza yesterday, seeking to ratchet up pressure on Hamas to bow to truce efforts gathering pace in Egypt to end the deadliest assault the Jewish state has ever launched on the enclave.

Hamas's exiled leader Khaled Meshal told an Arab meeting in Doha that it would not accept any ceasefire that did not provide for a full Israeli pullout and the opening of Gaza's borders, including the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

"I assure you: despite all the destruction in Gaza, we will not accept Israel's conditions for a ceasefire," he told an emergency Arab League summit shortly

before Hamas was invited back to Cairo for a fresh round of talks.

Israeli envoy Amos Gilad returned from Cairo after further discussions of Egypt's truce plan as Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni headed to the United States to sign an agreement on preventing arms smuggling from Egypt to Gaza.

Clamping down on the porous Gaza-Egypt border, where hundreds of underground tunnels form Hamas's main rear supply route, has been a key Israeli demand for ending the offensive that has killed more than 1,100 people in 21 days.

"We hope we're heading toward the end," government spokesman Mark Regav told AFP. "There is a lot of diplomatic activity and at the same time the

military pressure on Hamas continues."

Visiting UN chief Ban Ki-moon said that a deal on a truce appeared "very close" and that he hoped it could be sealed within a couple of days.

Calling Israel's offensive an "unprecedented catastrophe," Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad appealed for an immediate halt to the fighting.

"Each passing hour means more people die," he said.

But a senior Israeli official told AFP that the government did not intend to lessen its military strikes in the impoverished territory.

"The prime minister believes that the army should continue pressing Hamas in

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