

Obama strikes chord with Russian youth

AFP, Moscow

It seemed to be change they could believe in: Students at this Russian university burst into applause yesterday when the US presidential seal was hung on the podium before Barack Obama's speech.

Young, well-dressed and poised to join Russia's capital elite, the graduating class of the New Economic School in Moscow also gave a standing ovation to President Obama.

Obama's speech and its message of US-Russian reconciliation was aimed at a nationwide audience, but for the lucky students receiving their diplomas, the visit by the US president was a special graduation present.

And few of them were happier than Oksana Sytnova, who was personally handed her *summa cum laude* diploma by Obama himself.

"This is a huge honour for me and I didn't expect that such a wonderful event would happen in my life," Sytnova gushed afterwards.

"I am very happy that President Obama came to our graduation and it was very pleasant for me when he congratulated me in Russian," she added.

When asked how Obama pronounced the challenging Russian word "pozdravlyayu" (congratulations), Sytnova said that he spoke "with a slight accent, but very clearly."

Sytnova, who plans to work for Russia's Economic Development Ministry after graduation, was nervous when she learned a week earlier that she would receive the honour from Obama.

"It was very unexpected for me and I got very worried," she said.

Obama's speech in the cavernous Gostiny Dvor convention centre in central Moscow, a stone's throw from Red Square, was part of a broader effort to improve strained relations with Russia.

US-Russian ties plunged to a post-Cold War low during the administration of Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, who was loathed around the world for his emphasis on unilateralism and military force in US foreign policy.

In contrast, Obama has called for a "reset" in relations with Moscow and has stressed interests shared by the United States and Russia -- a message warmly greeted by students on Tuesdays.

"I think what President Obama said about our common interests was very important," said Yelena Neumoina, a first-year student at the New Economic School who

TIB shows

FROM PAGE 1

But the current data was not available to us. So, we did the calculation as per the rate of the 2004-05 budget," TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said yesterday.

Lawmakers yesterday heavily came down on the TIB report "Parliament Watch 2009", which revealed the wastage. The TIB, which has been playing as a catalyst for social movement against corruption for over a decade in Bangladesh, made the report public on July 4.

Iftekharuzzaman, however, said this parliament has taken many positive initiatives like the question-answer session with the prime minister and forming almost all parliamentary committees.

He said the performance of this parliament is better than that of the eighth parliament.

The TIB official said their de-natured staff followed the entire parliament session broadcast on radio and calculated the delayed time at the beginning of each sitting and after prayer breaks. He said they have record of each working day of the first JS session.

"We did not include the prayer breaks in the average 40 minutes," he said.

The total working hours in the first session was 145 hours and 22 minutes--three hours and 43 minutes daily on an average. The total time of delay is 25 hours and 48 minutes.

"We calculated the working hours of the parliament session and divided the revenue budget of parliament with it to get the per-minute expense," said Iftekharuzzaman.

This expense covers mainly salaries of parliament staffs, utility services bills and maintenance costs, he said, adding that the development expense of parliament was not taken into account.

attended the graduation.

"Many students, many of my friends, have been waiting for big changes compared to what there was before in the relations between our countries."

The students of the New Economic School are far from typical Russians, being more likely to work in big business or continue their studies at a prestigious Western university.

Founded in 1992, the school has trained a number of top businessmen and government officials, including some close to President Dmitry Medvedev.

But Sergei Guriev, the rector of the New Economic School, said he did not think Obama was seeking to reach out to one segment of Russian society or support one politician over another.

"He wants to send a signal to all of society, to show that he does not just want dialogue between politicians, but between people. That's why he spoke to simple students," Guriev said.

The graduates who clinked champagne glasses and posed for photos once their graduation was over did undergo some hardships to see a visiting US president address their class.

Tight security created long lines and forced the young men and women to rise early in the morning for what they still called a "graduation evening," using the usual Guriev's.

And Obama's late arrival -- his speech began an hour late after talks with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin overran -- meant a lengthy period of suspense, prompting the excitement when the presidential seal was hung upon the podium.

JMB offshoot

FROM PAGE 16

forces and he sustained a bullet wound in his leg, said Rab sources. They also recovered a pistol, nine bullets, three bullet shells and two empty magazines from the scene and his possession.

Immediately after the arrest of Islam O Muslim chief Abdur Rahim alias Shahadat, Selim fled to India. An intelligence agency finding out that he was back in Bangladesh informed Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) that he was hiding at his father-in-law's in Belpara, Shibganj.

Rab and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) team surrounded the house of Selim's in-laws around 1:00pm. Selim fired three shots at the team in a bid to avoid arrest and the team retaliated with five shots.

In a press conference last night, Director of Rab-5 Lt Col Israt Hossain said, "Selim, expert in light weaponry, used to collect arms for JMB."

He said Rab tracked Selim down based on Boma Mizan's confessional statement.

Arrested Islam O Muslim chief Abdur Rahim alias Shahadat and two of his associates also confirmed Selim's position in the new offshoot, said Lt Col Israt.

While describing the arrest, Rab officials said Selim used to go to India frequently. He used to provide Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj JMB and its new offshoot with arms.

After the execution of JMB top leaders Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhui, JMB leaders were divided over ideological, economical and different other issues.

The Rajshahi Rab chief said, "The divided leaders later formed new outfits and were engaged in recruiting fresh members across the country."

Shahadat and Selim were trying to reorganise the inactive JMB members across the country under the new banner of Islam O Muslim, sources said.

Meanwhile, police yesterday arrested Nazmul Haque Tuhin, a convicted JMB member as he came out of Rajshahi Central Jail on a High Court bail.

Tuhin, 34, of Harail in Jyopurhat Sadar, was sent to jail after he surrendered before a court on October 12, 2005. He was later convicted in a case filed in connection with the August 17, 2005 serial blasts and sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment by a Rajshahi court.

Talking to the press, Tuhin protested his innocence and said he was framed by a businessman who had strong ties with some rogue policemen.

HR Commission

FROM PAGE 1

proceeded.

It will however recommend measures for the government to take on the matter if necessary.

In that case, the government will have to turn in a follow-up report within six months.

The standing committee report placed in parliament yesterday afternoon cites article 152 (1) of the constitution that says the disciplined forces mean the armed forces and police and "any other force declared by law to be a disciplined force".

It recommends that the commission be comprised of not more than seven members including a chairman. The original bill proposes the rights body to be made up of a chairman and two members.

The committee proposed some changes in formation of the selection committee as well.

It wants a seven-member selection committee and the speaker be at the helm. The law minister, home minister, Law Commission's chairman, cabinet secretary, and two lawmakers nominated by the speaker to represent the treasury and opposition benches will be the other members.

The bill says the selection committee will have six members. It will be headed by an Appellate Division judge nominated by the chief justice.

The cabinet secretary, attorney general, comptroller and auditor general, chairman of the Public Service Commission and law secretary will be the other five members.

Suranji Sengupta, chairman of the parliamentary body, said the committee members had visited five countries during scrutiny of the bill and made the recommendations in the light of nature and activities of the human rights commissions in those countries.

The last caretaker government had the National Human Rights Commission Ordinance 2007 promulgated during its tenure and accordingly formed a commission. But that ordinance ceased to be in effect on February 25 as it was not ratified in parliament.

Later, the government placed the bill modelled on the ordinance.

The bill proposes giving a legal coverage to the commission's activities under the now ineffective ordinance.

Suranji said the standing committee tried to get rid of the bureaucratic tangles the ordinance had presented in formation of the commission.

Sohel Taj

FROM PAGE 16

said when contacted yesterday.

The state minister left for the US on June 9 to stay with his family.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Sahara Khatun is in Singapore for treatment since July 2. She suffered waist injuries as she fell in the washroom of her official residence.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is now looking after activities of the home ministry.

Sources said she might give charge of the ministry to a minister for an interim period.

Prior to leaving for the US, Sohel Taj had reportedly resigned on June 1. The PM however did not accept his resignation, and asked him to go on leave.

He said Rab tracked Selim down based on Boma Mizan's confessional statement.

Arrested Islam O Muslim chief Abdur Rahim alias Shahadat and two of his associates also confirmed Selim's position in the new offshoot, said Lt Col Israt.

While describing the arrest, Rab officials said Selim used to go to India frequently. He used to provide Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj JMB and its new offshoot with arms.

In a press conference last night, Director of Rab-5 Lt Col Israt Hossain said, "Selim, expert in light weaponry, used to collect arms for JMB."

He said Rab tracked Selim down based on Boma Mizan's confessional statement.

Arrested Islam O Muslim chief Abdur Rahim alias Shahadat and two of his associates also confirmed Selim's position in the new offshoot, said Lt Col Israt.

While describing the arrest, Rab officials said Selim used to go to India frequently. He used to provide Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj JMB and its new offshoot with arms.

In a press conference last night, Director of Rab-5 Lt Col Israt Hossain said, "Selim, expert in light weaponry, used to collect arms for JMB."

He said Rab tracked Selim down based on Boma Mizan's confessional statement.

Govt's Tipaimukh

FROM PAGE 1

a conspiracy. It knows that people in Bangladesh or India to be affected by the proposed dam will protest against the construction if they have got the actual information about the dam," said Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury at a dialogue.

Samaj Rupantor Oddhyan Kendro (study centre), a socio-political think tank, organised the dialogue titled "Tipaimukh Dam and our role to protect national interests" at the National Press Club.

Prof Choudhury said the dam, if constructed, will affect wetlands and agriculture in the country's northeastern part and hamper water flow of Meghna river.

"We cannot depend on our government because it serves the purpose of vested quarters instead of serving the interests of people. So our role is to wage movement against the construction of the dam at all levels," said the professor, also the president of the study centre.

Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh, said Tipaimukh Dam will seriously affect the lives and livelihoods of the country's northeastern region that depends on the water flows of Kushiara and Surma rivers.

During yesterday's demonstration, JCD activists chanted slogans against the decision and vowed to continue their protest against the new leadership.

Both Firoz and Rashid condemned the expulsion, terming the move a conspiracy against JCD.

Regarding the visit of a parliamentary delegation to Tipaimukh, the leftist leader said mere visit would not work. "We need concrete information -- how much water would be contained and how much would be released and how the dam will impact on us."

Engineer Sheikh Shahidullah termed maintaining secrecy by India about the dam a crime that cannot be forgiven. "We cannot believe India because of its past records."

Constructing Tipaimukh dam for hydroelectric power plant also brings huge threats of earthquake for the region, he said adding that historical evidences suggest Tipaimukh was the source of huge earthquakes.

Jahangirnagar University Professor Anu Muhammed said the damages that Tipaimukh dam will cause couldn't be compensated with the money equal to 10 times of the immediate past.

Internal conflicts has dented JCD seriously as a large section of its activists rejected the newly formed committee, alleging that top JCD leaders have links with militancy and were involved in the conspiracy against BNP during its challenging period in the immediate past.

Asked if forming such companies will improve the situation arising out of the bad culture of defaulting on loans, he said the initiative would be successful. "In many countries including Malaysia and Thailand, the system is very popular as an answer to bad loans."

The parliamentary standing committee also asked the finance ministry to appoint an ombudsman who will work to resolve banking related conflicts and problems and protect interests of clients.

"The ombudsman will work under the central bank," Kamal said.

The committee recommended that the finance ministry introduce cash incentive packages for exporters, under which an exporter will receive Tk 1 against each dollar of their net export. The incentive will be deposited in their bank accounts.

"Besides, those who were made leaders of the committee are not students at all. None but students have the right to do student politics in an organised way," Malik said referring to newspaper reports.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain however said the formation of the committee did not violate RPO provisions.

He said the new committee has been formed as per BNP's present constitution that recognises JCD as its "student front".

"We have yet to change our constitution as per the provisions of the RPO. After changing the constitution, the JCD committee will be formed as per the changed constitution," Hossain said.

Officials at the EC Secretariat however said BNP in its provisional constitution de-links JCD as its front organisation and made provision for allowing JCD to run its authority.

The ordinance promulgated by the past caretaker government bringing reforms in the electoral law empowered EC to cancel registration of a political party if it forms front or affiliated organisation comprising teachers, students and labourers.

But the bill passed in parliament ratifying the ordinance dropped the provision that empowered EC to take action in case of violation of registration provisions. But EC did not send the proposals to the government till yesterday.

At the end of February EC decided to ask the government to reinstate the provision empowering the commission to take action in case of violation of registration provisions. But EC did not send the proposals to the government till yesterday.

He said the 'khadem' informed the matter to his wife Nadia Alo. She later phoned Yusuf and soon after receiving a reply from him, she heard a voice that someone was threatening him for putting the phone off. After five minutes, the criminals called back and said "Yusuf has been killed."

The body of Yusuf was found on the premises of a house at East Monipur, about a kilometre away from his residence.

Sumi Begum, one of the tenants of the house, said she heard sounds of three gunshots and later saw the body lying on the premises.

On information, police rushed in and recovered the body along with Tk 4,000 and his cell phone set.

OC of Mirpur Police Station Nazimuddin said the engineer might have been killed over a feud as the killers did not take away anything from victim's possession. Police were investigating the incident, he said.

Source at Dhaka City Hospital said Yusuf received three bullets at his forehead and abdomen.

The victim's family members said they could not ascertain whether Yusuf had any enemies who might kill him.

He is also a taxpayer and his TIN number is 110-105-6411-contra-7.

In the parliamentary election, Tuhin, also the younger brother of former BNP deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu, the prime accused in August 21, 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League rally case, was defeated to AL candidate Khandaker Asaduzzaman.

When his attention was drawn to the issue, Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussain said yesterday the electoral reforms were done before the ninth parliamentary election to encourage democratic practice within the parties and to de-link front organisations from the