

A hospital beset with anomalies

MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT, Cox's Bazar

There seemed to be nothing amiss in the day-to-day affairs of the District Sadar Hospital in Cox's Bazar until the death of an accountant in 2012, which unravelled a series of financial anomalies in the preceding years.

The committee formed to take up the incomplete task of the accountant-cum-chief assistant Abdul Samad, who died while discharging his duties on April 6, 2012, first discovered the financial embezzlement on April 10.

The members of the committee discovered Tk 63.73 lakh in cash carefully stacked in two envelopes in a drawer of Samad's office room.

Sensing massive financial anomalies, the authorities formed another committee on May 8, 2012 to review the previous activities of Samad, who had worked in the same post for 18 years till his death.

According to the financial report of the fiscal year 2011-12,



the total expenses of the hospital amounted to Tk 96.32 lakh.

But the district accounts office, which provides funding to all government offices in the district, showed that more than Tk 2.5 crore was withdrawn in the name of the hospital during the period.

The discrepancy goes with the bill of the nursing institute supervised by the hospital as well.

In 2011-12, the institute's expenses were shown at Tk 18.52 lakh, but the district accounts office in its report put the amount at Tk 26.13 lakh, according to the report of the committee headed by Dr Ayub Ali, junior consultant of the hospital.

The Daily Star had obtained a copy of the report at the time.

The report unveiled the misappropriation of over Tk 1.5 crore from the hospital, strongly indicating serious graft in the preceding years.

In the meantime, the committee discovered a bank

account, no 090333018387, in the name of one "Dr ABM Mostafa, superintendent of Cox's Bazar General Hospital and Nursing Institute" with Sonali Bank, Cox's Bazar Branch. But nobody had worked by this name in the hospital in the previous year.

Interestingly, the account had been operated since 1994, the same year Abdul Samad joined the hospital.

A doctor of the hospital said: "Crores of taka have been transacted through this account over the years, which now has been suspended upon instruction by the authorities."

When the scam was unmasked in 2012, Dr Mahbulul Alam was the superintendent of the hospital.

When contacted, he said: "I inquired about it in the district accounts office, and learnt of Samad's corruption by faking my signature and seal."

He said he had taken the initiative to investigate the

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Killings aim

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flag procession slated for tomorrow and recent deaths of opposition men "in the hands of the police, Rab and the joint force."

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia on January 15 announced the programme protesting the January 5 "farical election" and convening of the "illegal parliament."

To back up his claim, Fakhrul in the briefing referred to the death of Azharul Islam, a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader of Satkhira unit.

"Joint force picked up Azharul on Saturday. Our assumptions came true as his bullet-hit body was found early this [yesterday] morning," he said.

On Saturday, the BNP at a press conference said Azharul might fall a victim to extrajudicial killing as he had been missing since Sunday.

"A reign of terror has been established throughout the country. Over 100 opposition leaders and activists have become victims of extrajudicial killing across the country," complained Fakhrul.

Democracy is not meant for the Awami League only. Rather, it is for

each and every person in the country, he added.

The BNP leader expressed disappointment over the role of media for not giving due importance to the alarming increase in extrajudicial killing. He sought cooperation from media and journalists in stopping such "state-sponsored killing."

Fakhrul urged the government to take initiatives for dialogue and dissolve the "illegal parliament".

In the joint meeting, he asked BNP leaders to make tomorrow's countrywide black flag procession a success, said meeting sources.

The party, he said, has already sought permission from police to hold the procession on city streets.

Contacted, officer-in-charge of Tala Police Station in Satkhira said police rounded up Azharul Islam early on Sunday.

At night, law enforcers took Azharul with them to Kheyaghat area of Magura village in Tala upazila to recover illegal arms. The JCD leader died in a gunfight between the law enforcers and cohorts of Azharul around 5:00am on Monday, added the OC.

Kids not for welcoming ministers

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the roadsides to welcome ministers and lawmakers given reception.

Earlier in December 2009, the education ministry had come up with a similar directive, asking the educational institutions to stop the practice of making students line up on roads to welcome dignitaries.

Following the order, students were rarely seen in such an arrangement. But the practice reappeared as the Awami League-led alliance assumed office for the second consecutive time and the lawmakers and ministers made visits to their constituencies.

By lining up students on the

streets the school authorities hinder academic activities, the primary and mass education ministry stated in the circular issued yesterday.

It added such practice impacts negatively on the body and mind of students, which is undesirable.

The ministry also sought everyone's cooperation to put an end to this practice to ensure learning atmosphere in the schools.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid urged all concerned not to make students queue up on roads, abandoning their classes.

"Any programme can be arranged inside the school pre-

mises to honour a guest," he said while speaking at a workshop at National Curriculum and Textbook Board in the capital.

A total of 34 eminent citizens yesterday demanded an end to the practice and that the ministry's instructions be obeyed.

In a statement, they said children should not be used in political activities.

Prof Anisuzzaman, Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Prof Nazrul Islam, Quazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Selina Hossain, Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, Prof MM Akash, Rasheda K Choudhury, Iftekharuzzaman and Shaheen Anam are among the signatories of the statement.

Near-demise

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scientific journal is predicting the demise of the instrument, as it is overtaken by new technology.

It claims that a new generation of hand held ultrasound devices, modelled on smartphones, are now able to perform the same task of helping to diagnose various conditions.

The article, in Global Heart -- the journal of the World Heart Federation -- says: "At the time of this writing several manufacturers offer hand-held ultrasound machines slightly larger than a deck of cards, with technology and screens modelled after modern smartphones."

There have been concerns that the smaller modern devices offer inferior image quality compared with larger ultrasounds. But the article suggests that these are outweighed by the speed with which some diagnoses can be made.

Indeed, the authors -- Prof Jagat Narula, the editor, and Associate Prof Bret Nelson, both from Mount Sinai School of Medicine, in New York -- claim that ultrasound can diagnose heart, lung, and other problems with much more accuracy than the 200-year-old stethoscope.

They also claim that the high cost of the modern "smartphone-style" devices -- which can cost thousands of pounds -- has been hampering their spread, but predict their growth will continue.

However, they do reflect that some doctors might be unwilling to hang up their stethoscopes, suggesting that "as some audiophiles still maintain the phonograph provides the truest sound", some clinicians may "cling to the analog acoustics of the stethoscope?"

No point

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of land at Sardarpara under Fulchhari upazila of the munga-prone northern district of Gaibandha.

"I cannot afford to buy bullocks. Neither can I hire a tiller. How can I rent a ploughing machine when I cannot even maintain my family?" said the 45-year-old farmer in an almost worn-out lungi and a tattered shirt.

Sabuj Mia, a landless farmer, used to live by selling the only thing he could sell -- his labour.

However, during the last monsoon and after the Aman crop harvesting in November, he hardly found any work. With low demand for labourers like him, he was mostly out of a job and found it extremely hard to provide for his family.

Moreover, he had to borrow Tk 30,000 for his daughter's marriage last year and he was yet to repay the loan.

Amid such tremendous hardships, he saw a silver lining when a local NGO, SKS Foundation, came forward and provided him with the 10-decimal piece of land for five years for free and a hand operated tube-well for irrigation last year.

Now Sabuj Mia and his wife Lalbhanu Begum are preparing the piece of land for Boro farming. After the Boro harvest, they plan to grow vegetables and then go for Aman crops.

This is how they are dreaming of overcoming the chronic poverty that has been plaguing their life for years.

"We hope our worst days will soon be over," Lalbhanu said while wiping her sweating face with the corner of her ragged sari.

Lalbhanu, who too used to work as a day labourer in the harvesting seasons, feels she has nothing to be ashamed of regarding what she is doing.

"I am not ashamed at all. We would sell labour to others anyway. Rather, we are happy that now we are working on our own land," she said with a flicker of a smile on her poverty-stricken face.

UPAZILA POLLS

651 to contest for 98 chairman posts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 651 candidates will contest for the posts of chairman in the polls to 98 upazila parishads slated for February 19 and 24.

Besides, 612 more will vie for vice-chairman posts while 357 for female vice-chairman posts in the first phase of the election, according to the Election Commission (EC).

As many as 692 aspirants had filed nomination papers for the chairman posts while 660 for vice-chairmen and 680 for female vice-chairmen.

Yesterday, returning officers across the

country cancelled rest of the nominations on different grounds, including that for loan default.

An upazila parishad is composed of a chairman, two vice-chairpersons, union parishad chairmen of the upazila, mayor of the municipality, if any, and a certain number of women members from reserved seats.

In the first phase, elections to 97 upazila parishads will be held on February 19 and one on February 24. The last date for withdrawing nominations is February 3.

In the second phase, polls to 117 upazila parishad will be held on February 27.

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Boy found dead

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Police had sent the body to Chittagong Medical College morgue for an autopsy, he added.

Opu's brother-in-law Isa Khan said Opu had gone missing on January 19 while going to a friend's family programme. The next morning Opu's mother received a phone call in which the caller demanded Tk 1 crore as ransom for Opu's safe return. The caller had also warned her not to go to the police.

That night the boy's father had filed a general diary with Patiya police in connection with Opu's

disappearance, said Isa Khan.

On January 25, the abductors called and this time they brought down the ransom amount to Tk 20 lakh. Opu's father that night filed an abduction case, which led to the arrest of neighbours Sagor and Sajjad.

Police said the duo during interrogation had admitted that they along with five others abducted Opu, but they handed him over to one Sohel, 30, and did not know what happened next.

On the morning of January 26, the abductors called Opu's mother again and demanded Tk 10 lakh. They

asked her to go alone to the city's Anwara intersection at 8:30pm with the money.

But on reaching there, Opu's mother found no one. She tried to contact the callers but all the numbers the abductors had used were switched off. After waiting there for more than two hours, she came home around 11:00pm. Three hours later the family learnt that Opu's body had been found.

Opu was the third among four children of the family. The elder two daughters are married, while the youngest son studies in class-III.

PM takes the helm

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In response, Quader said 39km on Dhaka-Chittagong and 19km on Dhaka-Mymensingh had been done and hoped the rest would be completed by this year.

The minister told the cabinet that the Chinese company Sinohydro Corporation is dillydallying in its assignment to construct 140 kilometres of Dhaka-Chittagong four-lane in seven phases, cabinet sources said.

He blamed another Chinese company for the delay in the implementation of the Dhaka-Mymensingh four-lane project, added the sources.

The prime minister will soon sit with the central authorities of Sinohydro, the communications ministry and two local companies, sources said.

The ministry will inform Sinohydro's top officials to come to Bangladesh to attend the meeting to resolve the deadlock.

The Chinese company sought an

additional Tk 361 crore for the job and informally told the government that it had won the contract for three phases at a very low price, Obaidul Quader said at the meeting.

The government rejected outright the plea for extra funds, he added.

The minister told the PM that he had requested the Chinese Ambassador in Dhaka, Li Jun, this week to negotiate with the Sinohydro so that it handed over the work of three phases to Bangladeshi contractors and remained involved as an associated partner.

He said Li had assured him of taking all necessary steps in this regard.

Also at the meeting, the minister said hartals and blockades resorted to by the BNP-Jamaat contributed to the delay in implementation as foreign firms do not work in such a volatile political environment.

The PM expressed dissatisfaction over awarding seven phases' work to Sinohydro after Quader told the

cabinet that the company had got the contract when Abul Hossain was the communications minister.

The PM directed the finance ministry to disburse funds for the Bangladesh army, which has been constructing 34km of Dhaka-Mymensingh four-lane.

She also enquired about the progress of the proposed Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar road connectivity, meeting sources said.

With joint efforts by China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh, a route starting from Yunnan to India via Myanmar has been approved by the relevant departments of the four countries.

The prime minister believes the connectivity will help fight drug and human trafficking, terrorism and intrusion and boost the economy of the region, according to ministers.

The PM also emphasised efforts to establish connectivity with Nepal and Bhutan through India, they added.

HC declares

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However, it also said Jasmine will remain on bail until the lower court passes further orders in the cases.

The HC bench of Justice Md Rezaul Haque and Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore handed down the verdict after hearing the petitions submitted by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in August last year challenging the bails granted by the lower court to Jasmine in the loan scam cases.

Jasmine's lawyer barrister Rafique-Ul Huq told The Daily Star that his client will not have to pay Tk 100 crore a month to Sonali Bank until the lower court comes

up with further orders.

The lower court will now fix a date to hear the cases and Jasmine will have to appear before that court on the day, he added.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan said it now depends on the lower court whether Jasmine will be granted bail, since the commission has already submitted 11 charge sheets in the cases before the lower court.

So far, Jasmine has not paid any instalment to the Sonali Bank, as the ACC's petitions were pending at the HC.

The ACC on October 4, 2012 filed the cases against 27 top officials of Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark

Group for their involvement in the biggest financial scam in the country's history.

Tanvir Mahmud, managing director of the group and allegedly the mastermind, is currently behind bars.

Hall-Mark and five other companies, in connivance with officials of the state-run bank, had withdrawn Tk 3,547 crore in loans from the Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch of Sonali bank, using forged documents.

Hall-Mark, a little known group before the scam came to light, alone took out around Tk 2,600 crore, according to a Bangladesh Bank investigation report.



Robbers bore this tunnel into the Rathkhola branch of Sonali Bank in Kishoreganj. The entrance, seen in the photo, is in a nearby building. Inset, the tools that were used for digging the tunnel.

PHOTO: STAR

Culprits at it for 2 years

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Sonali Bank Managing Director Prodip Kumer Dutta told The Daily Star that breaking into the vault was not an easy task, and it was possible the person who conducted the robbery was a skilled operator.

In Sohel's room, police found bamboo staffs used to reinforce the walls of the tunnel to make sure it did not cave in.

The discovery of the robbery was first made on Sunday when bank staff entering the vault found the money gone and a hole in the floor. Join Custodian (cash) Mohsinul Haq and Joint Custodian General Hasan Ahmed Moin were the first to notice it.

"The money was on a table," they said. However, neither was able to say why the money was kept on the table instead of

securely inside the iron safes.

Twelve bank officers, including the manager of the branch and four neighbours, were also taken in for questioning yesterday.

Eight policemen stationed in the bank have temporarily been suspended for negligence in duty on Sunday night.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday instructed all schedule banks to improve their vault security.

All schedule banks must set up security tested doors with fencing steel walls around the vaults, said the central bank said in a statement.

The BB directed the banks to install CCTVs inside the vaults and ensure security alarm round the clock. They have been also asked to bring everything in a vault under insurance coverage.