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Govt's silence ominous CEC concerned at no decision on army deployment



MA Syed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed senses a "very bad omen", as the government has not yet complied with his request for army deployment in the Union Parishad elections.

"I requested for army deployment even before the elections start. It's now only 10 days to go, but the government has done nothing. The signal is ominous," he told filed-level election officials yesterday, who have been attending a five-day training at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city.

Coming from various cadres of the civil service, the officials contested the government's claim that the existing law and order is suitable for peaceful polls. Officials from

Sylhet and Barisal divisions attended the training yesterday, the third day of the five-day course.

Election officials from Khulna and Rajshahi also held the view that peaceful polls were not possible and suggested army deployment for safety of the voters as well as the election officials.

However, the government rules out any possibility of military deployment, terming the situation 'normal'.

In yesterday's meeting, the election officials showed full support when some of their fellow colleagues once again demanded army deployment and protested claims by some high officials that law and order is now conducive to holding polls.

The CEC also shared their views and said without army, security of 75 million voters and the election

officials might not be ensured, which may vitiate the atmosphere.

Referring to press reports indicating a breakdown in law and order in many areas following the army pullout, Syed said, "It is a matter of concern that the situation is getting worse."

"In this context, it is necessary to deploy army along with other law enforcing agencies during the polls to ensure fair polls as in the last parliamentary elections," the CEC said.

More than two weeks ago, the EC at a meeting decided to deploy army during and before the polls and accordingly wrote to the government.

But the government questioned whether the EC has the authority to

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A water cannon (not seen) jets cold and dirty water on leaders of the Mahila Awami League as they try to reach the party headquarters on the Bangabandhu Avenue in the city on the eve of the countrywide eight-hour hartal today.

PHOTO: STAR

Hartal today Riot police swoop on procession

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Riot police used water cannons and batons to break up processions of the Awami League (AL) in the city yesterday.

The police action came a day before an eight-hour countrywide hartal to be enforced by the AL today.

Earlier on January 9, the AL announced the 6.00am-2.00pm hartal in protest at the price hike of fuel, essentials and utility services. The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) joined hands with the AL in the strike.

However, the AL kept Narayanganj out of the purview of today's hartal due to municipal polls.

A huge contingent of police had

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SHAZNEEN C

Cross-examination of elder sister ends, hearing resumes Jan 19

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Cross-examination of Simeen Hossain, third prosecution witness in the Shazneen rape case and elder sister of the victim, by lawyers of the three accused -- Hasan, Minu and Parvin--was completed yesterday.

Kazi Rahmat Ullah, Judge of the Second Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka recorded the statements during the cross-examination for over three hours.

After the cross-examination by the lawyers of the accused--Hasan, Minu and Parvin--Simeen was cross-examined by the lawyers of the accused Badal and Shaniram.

The court then adjourned the hearing till January 19.

During the cross-examination Simeen told the court that on September 27, 1998, police took Shahid to her parents' house where he narrated the incident voluntarily. Shahid said that Hasan, another accused in the case, hired him (with

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WB warns against rising inflation

STAR REPORT

The World Bank (WB) has cautioned that inflation rate, now on a northward trip, may hurt economic growth, if not arrested right now.

It also said it would be critical to keep inflation under control.

In its latest economic update, the WB also said inflation appears on the rise, albeit from a low base. The overall inflation rate through October 2002 almost doubled to 4.5 per cent from 2.4 per cent in FY02.

During the first quarter of FY03, the WB said, inflation increased further to 4.6 per cent.

"This is still modest by international standards," said the WB but cautioned if the trend is not prevented it may hurt economic growth.

"Building on the improvements in fiscal and monetary outcomes achieved in the second half of FY02, targets will be critical for preventing inflation from rising to a level where it starts hurting economic growth," the bank said.

Non-food inflation has picked up relatively more, doubling from 3.1 per cent in the first quarter of FY02 to 6.3 per cent in the first quarter of FY03.

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Md Alamgir

First one on death row in acid crime tribunal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

The Tribunal for Acid Crime Control, Chittagong yesterday sentenced one person to death in the first verdict under the Acid Crime Control Act, 2002.

The acting judge of the tribunal, District and Sessions Judge Abdur Rahman Patoari also fined the convicted, Md Alamgir, Tk 1 lakh. In default, his property will be attached.

The court also ordered that the penalty money be given to the vic

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Commentary

PM will be wise to withdraw the ordinance

It is a shame for the nation, for the govt and for the armed forces

MAHFUZ ANAM

A place in the Guinness Book of World Records is now virtually assured for us. Once again Bangladesh is about to become (we speak in the future tense because it is still not a law but only an ordinance, and we hope that the prime minister will withdraw it) perhaps the only country in the present-day world to have a law to protect killing, torture, jailing of thousands and random beating and public humiliation of many. A great boost to Bangladesh's image abroad is all but assured now. We obviously should not ask ourselves what the world will think when it sees that we indemnify crimes which the rest of the world tries so hard to punish. (Just a side story. The outgoing President of South Korea Kim Dae-jung on November 5 accepted the resignation of the justice minister and the prosecutor general, compa-

able to our attorney general, for the death in custody of a murder suspect. "How can such a thing happen in a democratic society?" he asked angrily. "As the President I feel wretched that the prosecutors, who should defend the law and human rights, tortured a suspect to death." - Source: Joong Ang Daily, November 5, 2002.)

Obviously, our prime minister had no such compunctions, nor did our law minister, home minister or attorney general think of resigning for the custodial deaths and torture happening under their very nose. The 'stupid' Koreans are just too sentimental and obviously don't know how to promote international image for their government and the country.

Before we discuss the issue at hand, we must say a few words about the president himself. A well respected academician that he is, couldn't he have sent it back (as the

constitution permits him to and as was done by President Shahabuddin Ahmad in the case of the Public Safety Act), considering the ordinance's questionable nature? If that is too much to expect, he could have at least counselled rethinking.

Alternatively, he could have suggested why pass it in the form of an ordinance when the parliament was to come into session within two weeks anyway. (The link between the timing of the withdrawal of the joint forces and the chief election commissioner's request for the presence of the army for the Union Parishad elections is not lost on discerning observers). Instead, he signed it just as fast as it was sent to him. Doesn't our scholar president have any idea of the moral authority, and of the 'moral duty' of the position he holds?

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Benapole customs employees, C&F agents on strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Employees of Benapole Customs and C&F agents began an indefinite strike from Tuesday morning demanding removal and exemplary punishment of joint commissioner of customs Masudul Kabir.

Import and export activities through Benapole land port remained suspended since yesterday morning in support of the strike.

Nuruzzaman, general secretary of C & F Agents' Association and Shafauddin, president of Benapole Customs House Employees' Union accused the joint commissioner of rude behaviour with C & F agents and employees of the association, sparking strong resentment among port employees.

Leaders of these two organisations alleged that high-handedness of the joint commissioner has exceeded the limit triggering the strike call by the aggrieved employees.

Some officials of the Benapole Customs House however said that a section of dishonest importers are fanning trouble to create deadlock at the land port after failing to get the joint commissioner to soften his stance against financial offences

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