

Black flags wave in JS as indemnity law passed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad passed the controversial 'Joint Drive Indemnity Bill, 2003' last night with effect from January 9, 2003.

The passage gives the joint forces immunity to legal proceedings in civil courts for their deeds during the nationwide "Operation Clean Heart" anti-crime drive between October 16, 2002 and January 9, 2003.

The bill was passed in an amended form amidst stormy walk-out by black-flag waving opposition deputies. However, it allows the Army Act to take its own course in handing down any punishment to the members of the forces who took part in the

drive.

This is a sharp departure from the previously promulgated the 'Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance, 2003' which had exempted the members of the armed forces from trial in accordance with the defence forces' laws.

Neither the Leader of the Opposition the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia nor the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina was present during the passage of the bill. Khaleda is now in Malaysia on a state visit and Hasina in Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj.

While proposing the passage of

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Moudud's U-turn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Many senior ministers and ruling BNP policymakers were against indemnifying the joint forces, but the party high command finally gave in to the hardliners.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed earlier told the media that the government would not promulgate any indemnity ordinance.

He made the statement after several persons died in army custody during the joint anti-crime operation styled Operation Clean Heart from October 17 to January 9.

"No indemnity for custodial deaths," Moudud told a questioner at a news briefing on November 12 last year.

But he failed on his words and

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PM arrives in Kuala Lumpur

UNB/BSS, Kuala Lumpur

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was warmly received at the Kuala Lumpur Sepang International Airport yesterday as she flew in there to attend the 13 Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Malaysian Minister at the Prime Minister's Department Pengu Anan Mansor welcomed her at the VVIP tarmac of the airport as she got off a VVIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines along with her entourage at about 4:10 pm local time.

Khaleda Zia was given a guard of honour at the airport. She then drove in a ceremonial motorcade to Hotel Renaissance where she would be staying during her four-day stay in Malaysia.

She will lead the Bangladesh

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12 landports to go to private sector

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twelve landports will be handed to the private sector for development and cargo operations to improve efficiency, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain said yesterday.

"Tender is likely to be floated by June," he told the inaugural session of an investment-promotion meeting at the IDB Bhaban.

The biggest landport at Benapole, however, will be in state control and the government will have regulatory authority over all landports, he added.

The landport at Teknaf has already been transferred to the private sector for development and

the facilities should be in place within a couple of months, Akbar said.

The others are Darsana, Hili, Banglabandha, Haluaghat, Akhaura, Bhomra, Sonamasjid, Birol, Burimari, Tamabil and Bibir Bazar.

As per the liberalisation plan, private operators will play royalties to the Bangladesh Landport Authority (BLPA) for cargo operations and transfer all assets to the government after 25 years.

Proper facilities at the landports will benefit both the government and the businessmen, he said. "However, it would take the government 8-9 years to put the facilities in

place." The BLPA and the Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Centre (IIFC) jointly organised the meeting to get suggestions before finalising the leasing procedure for land customs stations.

At the business session, speakers said the government plan to allow private enterprises in port services would enhance national income through increased trade and reduce smuggling.

Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed, BLPA Chairman Sharif Atiqur Rahman and IIFC Chief Executive Nazrul Islam addressed the session, chaired by former shipping secretary Gulam Rahman.

Blast in Rajshahi village leaves three injured

Ammunition, explosives seized

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

A bomb went off at a thatched house in Dangipara village, Rajshahi, leaving three women injured yesterday.

The blast that took place at around 7.30am created a large dent on the floor and cracks in the shed, said witnesses.

Zarina, 28, her mother Sakhina Bawa, 45, and Sanwara Khatun, 30, wife of Saiful Islam, were admitted to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) with burns and splinter injuries.

Police seized 100 bullets, two grenades, ten cartridges and huge

bomb-making equipment and electric wires from the houses of Zarina and her neighbour Abdul Mannan.

Police arrested the injured and two others on suspicion - Mannan and Husna Ara, wife of Rajshahi city Jubo League General Secretary Sirajul Islam Khokon.

Assistant Commissioner of the Detective Branch of Police Wazed Ali confirmed involvement of the Jubo League leader.

Police raided almost every house of the village and several platoons of armed police were deployed after the bomb blast.

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Pension scheme tax withdrawn

STAR REPORT

The government has finally decided to backtrack from bringing the income from interests of the Deposit Pension Scheme (DPS) under its tax net.

The Internal Resources Division (IRD) of the finance ministry issued an order recently imposing 10 per cent tax on DPS returns.

"The finance minister had asked for withdrawal of the tax and the decision would be announced within a couple of days. It was a mistake and it will go shortly," Dr Shoab Ahmed, chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), told newsmen at Sheraton Hotel after a meeting yesterday.

Acknowledging the pains of the small savers, the NBR chairman said it was a mistake to impose 10 per cent tax on DPS interests.

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80 hurt as cops, criminals clash in Ukhia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

At least 80 people including 15 police officers and eight polling officials were injured in clashes between armed miscreants and law enforcers at two UP poll centres of Jalia Palong under Ukhia upazila yesterday morning.

Elections were postponed at Monkhal and Motherbonia polling centres.

A rumour spread at Cox's Bazar town yesterday evening that Helal Uddin, 15, and Nurul Alam, 32, were killed in police firing at Motherbonia centre.

But police and the district administration could not confirm the deaths.

Local people, police officials and district administration officials told this correspondent that a group of armed members of the

notorious 'Jamir Bahini' attacked the Monkhal primary school centre at 10.00am and looted six ballot boxes and 600 ballot papers, after assaulting the police personnel and polling officials.

Bhupendra Nath Roy, the polling officer, was seriously injured in the attack. The armed gang fired at least 60 rounds of bullets and police returned 10 rounds during the clash.

After an hour, the armed men attacked Motherbonia polling centre. They looted two ballot boxes and 600 ballot papers and beat up the polling officials and police personnel. The jeep of the Motherbonia polling centre was hijacked by the miscreants.

The injured were admitted to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, Ukhia Upazila Health Complex and different clinics.

Govt hobbles on hollow top

REZAUL KARIM

A vacuum in top administrative positions has slowed down activities of the government.

Officials fear the promotion backlog at the lower level as well may deepen the crisis.

Besides, the government faces shortage of competent officers for vital posts in the administration.

Although around 60 officers, from joint secretary to above, are officers on special duty (OSDs), the government does not want to give them posting because of their incompetence or serious political bias, said highly placed sources.

Nearly 100 senior administrative positions, including 15 of secretary, 25 of additional secretary and 44 of joint secretary, have remained vacant for over a year, said the sources.

Secretaries and additional secretaries appointed on contract run most ministries. Around 25 secretaries and additional secretaries are on contract.

The crisis may turn acute when 22 secretaries, 33 additional secretaries and 57 joint secretaries are due to go on leave preparatory retirement (LPR) by the yearend.

The number of vacancies will increase further with the expiry of many contractual appointments, said the sources.

The government created a serious backlog at the lower level of the administration by not promoting officials especially to joint secretary and deputy secretary.

Any delay will force a large number of officials to go on retirement without promotion to higher posts.

An initiative to appoint the OSDs to joint secretary and additional secretary stalled as ministries, divisions and departments did not accept them for their incompetence.

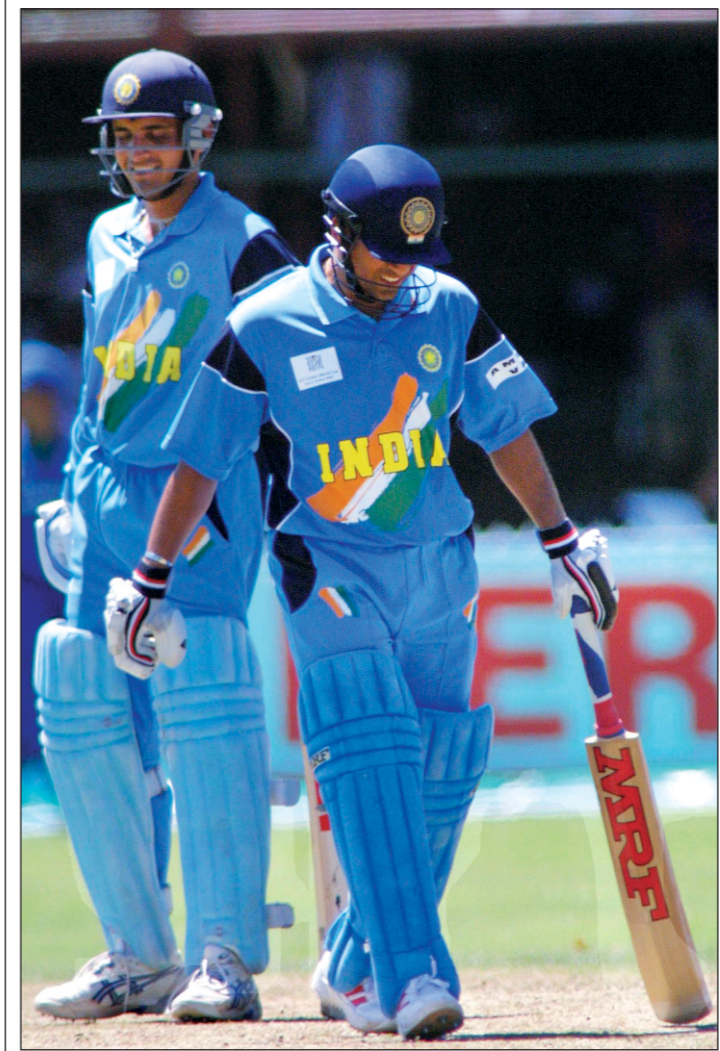
The joint secretary is crucial for the administration and each ministry has shortage of more than one joint secretary, said senior officials.

Experienced serving and retired bureaucrats feel that the government should immediately promote senior assistant secretary to deputy secretary and deputy secretary to joint secretary.

However, they objected to wholesale promotion and suggested that officials should be appointed on

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Ganguly, Tendulkar toy with Namibians



AFP, Pietermaritzburg

Indian batting maestro Sachin Tendulkar walks back to the crease after a mid-pitch discussion with his skipper Saurav Ganguly during their 244-run stand against the minnows Namibia at Pietermaritzburg yesterday.

Sachin Tendulkar and Saurav Ganguly hit centuries as India's batting might crushed minnows Namibia by 181 runs in the World Cup here on Sunday.

Tendulkar hit 152 and Ganguly returned unbeaten on 114 following a run-a-ball stand of 244 for the second wicket as India piled up 311-2 after being sent to bat in overcast conditions.

Namibia found India's spin too hot to handle and folded up for 130 in 42.3 overs to suffer their fourth consecutive defeat in their maiden appearance in cricket's show-piece.

Meanwhile, the West Indies defeated Canada by seven wickets in the World Cup Pool B match at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Sunday.

Part-time spinner Yuvraj Singh was the unlikely hero, claiming four wickets for six runs, while Harbhajan Singh, Dinesh Mongia and Zaheer Khan bagged two apiece.

India, however, suffered an injury scare when left-arm seamer Ashish Nehra limped off the field after slipping on his delivery stride with his first ball of the innings.

Ganguly said Nehra was feeling better but preferred to keep him in the dressing room for the rest of the day so that the injury was not aggravated.

India's third win in four matches still left them the task of beating both England and arch-rivals Pakistan to ensure a place in the Super Sixes from Pool A.

"It was important to put runs on the board. Sachin and I got them and that's good for the team," Ganguly said.

"The ball did a bit at first but the wicket was slow. It's the end of the season here now and there's been a lot of cricket played, therefore they are slower."

Tendulkar's 34th one-day century emulated Australian Mark Waugh's feat of four World Cup hundreds and put the Indian star's amazing batting records even beyond the reach of other contemporary batsmen.

Ganguly moved to second place behind Tendulkar with 20 hundreds, surpassing Pakistani Saeed Anwar's tally of 19.

"The last nine or ten one-dayers have not been good for me but I have always believed in myself and I knew that once I got in, I would get a big score," the Indian captain said.

Virender Sehwag was the only batsman to miss out in the run feast,

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