

Politician-police-criminal nexus jitters donors



PHOTO: STAR

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman speaks at a press conference after the end of a two-day Bangladesh Development Forum meeting yesterday.

BDF meet ends questioning indemnity to army

STAR REPORT

Donors yesterday expressed concern over a nexus between some politicians, police and criminals that provides a protective umbrella for criminals.

They also questioned indemnity to army for the deaths in custody during the Operation Clean Heart and said this proves limited access to justice.

Donors expressed concern over mistreatment of journalists and demanded of the government a timetable for presenting a bill on an anti-corruption commission to parliament. They warned that aid level could be "compromised" unless governance improved.

The views came at the end of a

two-day Bangladesh Development Forum meeting yesterday.

"Concern was also expressed that there is a nexus between some politicians, some police and criminals that provides a protective umbrella for criminal activities," said Frederick T Temple, country director of the World Bank, said in his closing address.

"This situation has been sustained because both parties have tolerated it. A good example was the Dhaka City Corporation elections in which candidates with criminal records were nominated and elected. The development partners would encourage political leaders and parties to discipline anybody known to be associated with

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Donors to bankroll uplift efforts: Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Development partners have endorsed the Interim-Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) and expressed interest to fund Bangladesh's uplift efforts, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman said yesterday.

"The donors have endorsed our three-year strategy paper, prepared to attain economic development and eradicate poverty," he said.

Funds for implementing uplift programmes, including those in the IPRSP, would not be a problem, Saifur said while speaking at a press conference immediately after the close of the two-day Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting in the city.

The press conference was also attended by World Bank (WB) Country Director Frederick T Temple, Cabinet Secretary Dr Sa'adat Hossain and Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary

Anisul Hoque Chowdhury.

Saifur said: "Donors are happy with our reforms and excellent changes on the macro-economic front and they have shown keen interest in providing us with all-out support," he added.

He said all major issues including the financial sector, governance, law and order, infrastructure, corruption, education and health figured prominently in the two-day meeting.

The members of the BDF lauded the macro-economic stability, low level of inflation, containment of bank borrowing and upswing in school enrollment, he said.

They, however, expressed concern over the issues of governance, law and order and corruption, the minister added.

"We are trying to bring about changes on law and order and corruption fronts," he said, adding the menaces could not be wiped

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Construction of Speaker's house in JS area stayed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday stayed the construction of the speaker's and the deputy speaker's residences in the Sangsad Bhaban area.

A bench comprising Justice MA Rashid and Justice Siddiqur Rahman Miah also issued a rule nisi asking the government to explain why the construction project should not be declared illegal and violative of the law and fundamental rights guaranteed in Articles 27, 31 and 32 of the constitution.

The HC interim stay order was issued upon a writ filed by the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon and Institute of Architects, Bangladesh and moved by Barrister Tanjib-ul Alam.

According to an allegation, the construction project not only violates famous architect Louis Kahn's

1973 master plan but breaches the Building Construction Act 1952, the Town Improvement Act 1953 and the lowland and open space protection act 2000.

The order asked the government to make sure no further unnecessary and thoughtless construction beyond the 1973 master plan takes place in the Sangsad Bhaban complex.

The government should also explain why appropriate legal measures should not be adopted to prevent encroachment on the complex, the order added.

The bench said the government must say why the complex should not be declared a national heritage site.

Also, the government must explain why it should not be directed to apply to the UNESCO to declare the complex a World Heritage Site.

Saifur goes to Delhi today on trade tour

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman leaves for New Delhi on a four-day official visit today.

During his stay, he would discuss economic and trade issues with India.

Sources said India was interested in discussing free trade with Bangladesh. Besides, it would discuss some of the outstanding economic issues on which the two countries so far could not reach any consensus.

Bangladesh is likely to discuss tax and no-tax barriers faced by Bangladeshi exporters in India.

The finance minister is expected to visit Ameer Sharif in Delhi today. He is scheduled to meet opposition leader Sonia Gandhi and Finance Minister Jaswant Singh tomorrow and other ministers on Tuesday.

The meeting with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is to take place on Wednesday.

The finance minister will return home on Thursday.

Court stops screening of videos seized from Shahriar without lawyer

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka, yesterday stayed an order on screening of the videocassettes seized from writer-columnist Shahriar Kabir implicated in a sedition case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shafiq Anwar issued the order following a petition by defence lawyers seeking a stay on the screening. The court also directed the investigation officer (IO) of the sedition case to follow its order of March 3, 2002 regarding the screening of the videocassettes. On March 3, it asked the IO to take necessary steps for screening of those cassettes in presence of the two defence lawyers -- Zead-al-Malum and Khondaker Abdul Mannan.

However, following a petition filed by the IO, the court ordered on May 7 that the screening would take place in absence of two of the defence lawyers.

Yesterday, the CMM's Court fixed June 28 for screening of the cassettes in presence of two lawyers. It also directed the authorities concerned to return Shahriar's passport for eight weeks.

The lower court order followed a High Court ruling on May 14 directing the relevant authorities to return the passport to Shahriar.

Shahriar was arrested at Zia International Airport on November 22, 2001 on his return home from Kolkata. Police also seized a passport and videocassettes from him.

Later, a sedition case was filed against him with the Airport Police Station.

Rejoinder and our reply

The Ministry of Information in a rejoinder on a news item ran by The Daily Star on its May 6 edition titled "Money skimmers take DFP for a ride: Outsiders make documentary to siphon off fund" differed with the report.

The ministry claimed the documentary was made by the

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PHOTO: AFP

An Israeli policeman, second left, surrounded by dead bodies still in their seats, inspects the damage after a suicide attack on a passenger bus in annexed east Jerusalem yesterday. Nine people were killed in the double attack.

Suicide bombings kill 9 in Jerusalem

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli-Palestinian peace seemed remote as ever yesterday as a double suicide attack killed seven people plus the bombers in Jerusalem, prompting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to put off a crucial trip to Washington.

The blasts came hours after Sharon had his first talks with Palestinian prime minister Mahmud Abbas on implementing

an international peace plan known as the roadmap, which ended inconclusively.

One suicide bomber blew himself up after boarding a number 6 bus in the city's French Hill area, killing seven other people, and a higher death toll was narrowly avoided when a second attacker exploded prematurely just a stone's throw away, police said.

Police Chief Shlomo Aharonishki said the first bomber

was disguised as an Orthodox Jew and that a skullcap and prayer shawl were found on him.

He told reporters that the second assailant was caught in the security net set up in the area and only killed himself when he detonated his bomb.

The deadly blast in the annexed east Jerusalem neighbourhood was the first suicide attack in Jerusalem in six months and the first inside

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Another cop killed in city shootout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police constable was gunned down and some other law enforcers including a sub-inspector were injured during a shootout with criminals in front of Azad Cinema Hall in the old part of the city last night.

Constable Noor Jahid was shot in the head during the incident at about 8:30pm.

Fatally injured Jahid was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he was declared dead. The body was sent to the

DMCH morgue for autopsy.

Injured Sub-inspector Mujibur Rahman and ansar personnel Mostafa were admitted to the hospital.

Tipped off that Minto, a notorious criminal, was hiding behind the cinema hall, a team of Kotwali police went there. The team raided the area and exchanged fire with the gangsters.

The criminals left the spot leaving behind Jahid and two of the injured law-enforcers.

Hearing the news, senior police

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Class II girl raped, killed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khuku Moni, a student of class two at Narayanpur Government Primary School of Batiaghata upazilla, was raped and stabbed to death on Saturday.

Police recovered her body from a paddy field.

According to police, the girl is an adopted daughter of grocer Khalilur Rahman of Hadirabad village under Batiaghata upazilla.

The incident occurred while she was returning home from her father's shop. Two alleged rapists killed her as she could recognise them, sources said.

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HC notice on ministers in charge of districts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday served a notice on the government asking it to explain why delegating ministers, state ministers, deputy ministers, chief whip and whips in charge of 62 districts would not be declared illegal.

The court gave the government two weeks' time to clarify.

The show cause followed a writ petition by Anwar Hossain Monju, the member of parliament (MP) from Pirozpur-2 constituency.

Monju on Saturday filed the petition challenging the constitutional validity of a November 12, 2001 government notification that empowered ministers and others as representatives of different districts to take care of development works

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PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

A caged bear dips in the water of a well at the Chittagong Zoo yesterday to beat the heat as hot climes have entered an unbearable phase.

Tongi-Ashulia road wrapped in waste

RAFIQ HASAN

Construction of the Tongi-Ashulia Road under the Roads and Highways Department (Dhaka) drained Tk 8.98 crore in misuse and waste, says an audit report.

The financial corruption and mismanagement crept into the project because of earth-filling at higher rates than approved in the work schedule, payment of compaction bills to constructors without work and more-than-needed earthwork.

Earth-filling at rates beyond approval cost the exchequer Tk 3.82 crore. The constructors were paid at the rate of Tk 55 per cubic

metre, while the rate was Tk 29 in the work schedule, according to the audit carried out in 1999-2000.

The constructors were given Tk 8.09 crore in which Tk 3.82 crore was additional.

The earth-filling was done in 1989-90 by 41 groups of workers. The report showed the extent of corruption pointing out that the earth-filling rate increased to a maximum of Tk 45 per cubic meter in eight to nine years.

The higher rates were fixed to misappropriate public funds in connivance with the constructors, says the report.

In another earthwork of the

same project, the constructors were paid 86 to 92 per cent higher than the approved rates, which misused Tk 3.86 crore.

The higher rates were also given on construction of the Ashulia-Dhaka-EPZ portion in 1989-1990. An additional Tk 1.21 crore was paid by the roads and highways department for Ashulia-Dhaka-EPZ roads, and 15 per cent more was added to compaction charges, but no work was done, the report said.

The department paid an additional Tk 8 lakh for repair of a damaged approach road to a culvert on

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Separation of judiciary will take 6 years, Moudud tells BDF

UNB, Dhaka

Law Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed yesterday told the development partners that separation of judiciary is a long and arduous process that will take at least six more years to complete.

"The process took 15 years in India... We've already initiated the process, which may take six to seven years," he told reporters after emerging from a session of Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) that picked up human security issues, including custodial deaths, during the Army crackdown on crime.

In the second day's proceedings, development partners sought

specific timeframes for the government to complete some reforms in the judiciary, including separation of judiciary, and establishment of Human Rights Commission and the office of Ombudsman.

Moudud did not give any specific timeframe, but assured the meeting of the government's firm commitment to complete the judicial reforms 'as early as possible.'

Some BDF members inquired about official investigations into the custodial deaths during the Army crackdown from mid-October last year to early January, meeting sources said.

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