

## AL accuses BNP of making parliament dysfunctional

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) yesterday accused the ruling coalition of making parliament dysfunctional for what it said was its lack of belief in parliamentary democracy.

"The Prime Minister's Office -- not parliament -- has become the centre of all national issues, crippling effective functioning of the House," Suranjit Sen Gupta, AL presidium member, said at a press briefing.

The briefing was held to critique the functioning of "Parliament, Law and the Judiciary" during the first two years of the BNP-led coalition government.

Suranjit said the BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami-led coalition has been autocratic in its running of parliament and has not sought opposition participation. "Indeed, [the government] forced the opposition to boycott the House as they do not want to see us there," he added.

On joining the coming session of parliament, the AL leader said, "We did not boycott parliament, nor did we resign." Reiterating his party's three-point demand, the AL leader urged the leader of the house and the speaker to apologise to the AL. Unless the demand is met, "It is not possible on our part to join an ineffective and farcical parliament," he said.

The AL declared an indefinite boycott of parliament on June 26, saying its lawmakers would not return until a state minister apologised for his negative remarks against the leader of the opposition, and the speaker expunged the remarks and upheld the relevant rules of parliament. The AL also urged the speaker and the leader of the house to say sorry before parliament.

Suranjit said, "Neither the speaker nor the leader of the house heeded to our demands and that has led to a standstill in parliament."

"A total of 54 bills have been passed until the seventh session of the current parliament without any discussion," he said, adding that five ordinances were promulgated by the president in the meantime, circumventing parliament. "Bills were even passed without the requisite number of MPs necessary for a quorum," he alleged.

He said the parliamentary standing committees were formed in violation of the rules and without opposition representation.

Suranjit said the House cancelled 345 adjourn motions out of 357 submitted by the AL, 2,580 notices out of 3,668 and 104 public interest notices out of 111. "Such behaviour is nothing but a plan to keep the opposition out of parliament," he contended.

The AL leader demanded the immediate publication of a white

paper on expenditures for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) meeting held in Dhaka earlier this month.

"Following newspaper reports about misuse of CPA conference funds, people are suspicious and angry," said Suranjit, adding that everyone should be accountable when it comes to expending public money.

### Law and judiciary

At the briefing, former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru said the ruling alliance would separate the judiciary from the executive wing of the government only when its scheme to appoint partisan people to the posts of chief justice down to assistant judges and munsifs would finish.

"They are destroying the judiciary in a planned way and politicising it to cling to power," he said.

Khasru accused incumbent Law Minister Maudud Ahmed of violating the constitution by mentioning the president as head of the government in a booklet published by the law ministry on the occasion of the government's completion of two years in office.

The booklet read the Law and Judiciary Wing of the ministry controls the Supreme Court and appoints chief justice, he said pointing out that it is not true and contrary to the constitution.

Opposition Chief Abdul Shahid and party leaders Obaidul Kader, Shudhangshu Shekhar Halder and Abdul Mannan were also present at the briefing.

## Tk 10 lakh cell phone set haul at ZIA

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday seized cell phone sets said to be worth about Tk 10 lakh.

The customs team found two abandoned suitcases near the conveyer belt. The suitcases arrived at the ZIA by Malaysian airlines flight No. MH-196 from Kuala Lumpur.

Directed by Assistant Commissioner Mohammad Abdur Rakib, the customs officials scanned the suitcases and located the mobile phone sets. There were 60 cell phone sets along with charger.

Meanwhile, customs officials on suspicion stopped an incoming passenger at the green channel. They recovered 20 mobile phone sets reportedly worth about Tk 2 lakh from his luggage.

The seized mobile phones sets were deposited to the airport warehouse. Two separate cases were filed.

### PDB

#### FROM PAGE 12

ing 55 MW of power each, he said. "For some technical reasons, power supplied from these units heated up a cable of the bus-bar and the cable broke down. This caused an earth-fault and the two units tripped. The other plants soon followed," he explained.

"The quick restoration was possible as power failed during day time. It would have been much more difficult if it had happened at night," he added.

Meanwhile, two investigation committees, one headed by an energy ministry joint secretary and the other by the PDB's member of planning division, have completed their probe into Wednesday's power outage. They were supposed to file their findings last night, sources said.

## Tigers in trouble

#### FROM PAGE 1

not out) gave him fine support.

Earlier, Bangladesh bowlers took the last five England wickets for just 15 runs as the visitors failed to put up an overwhelming score.

Resuming the day on 237-4, England lost only Clarke to a Hannan catch at first slip off fast bowler Mashrafe bin Mortuza for 57 in the morning session and had gone to lunch at 311 for five. Clarke played 144 balls but more importantly supported Nasser Hussain in a 126-run stand, the highest against Bangladesh for the fifth wicket.

For the second consecutive day, the post lunch session provided the entire spark with six wickets going down for a mere 40 runs in 23.3 overs.

Left-arm spinner Enamul Haque prompted the collapse by having Chris Read (37) caught at forward short-leg. Mashrafe then bowled a hostile spell and unsettled Hussain with a barrage of short-pitched deliveries. The former England captain, who made a sedate 73, couldn't score a run against Mashrafe for six successive overs and was soon taken by Khaled Mashud behind the stumps.

Mohammad Rafique and Mushfiq then polished off the tail as England were all out an hour and 17 minutes into lunch.

## Khilgaon police

#### FROM PAGE 12

of the probe body headed by Deputy Inspector General of Police Abdul Mannan visited Sumon's residence and quizzed his parents and other relatives.

The probe body was formed on October 28 following allegations that Sumon died from police beating. The committee is supposed to submit its report on November 1.

Khilgaon police arrested Sumon with four others allegedly during a robbery bid on October 24. He died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital the next day.

Police said that Sumon died as he jumped from the roof of a six storied building but autopsy report found marks of torture on his legs and hands.

The victim's parents, however, alleged that police beat Sumon to death before their eyes as they failed to provide Tk 1 lakh on police demand for his release.

## UN staff

#### FROM PAGE 12

An agency spokeswoman said the Red Cross faced a dilemma, needing both to provide essential services and to keep its staff safe.

"If you want to be accessible it means that you cannot have concrete walls," Nada Doumani told the BBC.

"We will never ask for armed protection because this means that we are putting aside our neutrality, and this is unacceptable not only in Iraq but anywhere else in the world where we are operating," she said.

"So we just still hope that the message can be put through to the people who did this that in fact we are neutral, we are impartial, we are not linked to the coalition forces. We have no political agenda in this country."

The Red Cross has about 30 foreign workers in Iraq, plus about 600 Iraqi employees.

US troops have carried out raids in Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, arresting a number of people they suspect of planning to carry out attacks on coalition forces in Iraq.

"We were targeting what we suspect was a terrorist cell network," Colonel Steve Russell told the Reuters news agency.

The raid came as the US voiced suspicions that a former senior member of the Saddam Hussein government was co-ordinating attacks from the area.

A senior defence official in Washington said there was evidence that Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, who was officially number two in the former regime, was helping direct the insurgency.

Ibrahim is the highest-ranking official still at large other than Saddam Hussein himself.

There has been debate about the degree of co-ordination behind the attacks on foreign troops and aid workers in Iraq.

But as attacks continue, the US is reportedly considering shifting resources from the hunt for banned weapons to fighting the insurgency.

As US led forces try to stem the attacks on them and their allies, intelligence has become a key area of concern.

The US troop death toll since President George W Bush declared an end of major fighting reached 115 on Wednesday - passing the number of troops killed during the war itself.

## Tripathy for joint approach

#### FROM PAGE 12

Tripathy ruled out the notion that regional cooperation in South Asia was hampered due to big brotherly attitude of India towards its small neighbours.

"India is big, yes. But no, there is no big brotherly attitude... We always want a relationship based on complete equality and reciprocity. We should treat each other as twins. This is what I told your prime minister when I met her to hand over our prime minister's message of felicitation on the day results of your parliamentary election were announced in October 2001," he said.

Tripathy, who leaves for New Delhi today, ending his tenure as Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, answered to wide-ranging questions.

Asked about transit, Tripathy said the way public debate takes place here gives an impression that India is putting undue pressure on Bangladesh for a unilateral facility.

Tripathy, a career diplomat, referred to the 1972 Trade Agreement that had been reaffirmed in the 1973 and 1980 Trade Agreements that, he said, contained specific commitment to provide India with transit facility.

"Waterway transit is already in place," he said, adding, "We now need to work out details in regard to rail and road transits. This will benefit both and should be done as early as possible."

Asked about implementation of the Mujib-Indira Land Boundary Accord, Tripathy said India did not forget the treaty.

He said India offered a package proposal to the Bangladesh foreign ministry in March 2002 regarding demarcation of the remaining 6.5 km border and New Delhi was waiting for

Dhaka's response to that. "I am sure that this work can be completed as soon as Dhaka is ready with a response."

Asked if India would proceed with its planned river-linking project disregarding its adverse impact on Bangladesh, he said, "While our government will consider adopting measures necessary for the welfare of our people, we will naturally be mindful of our responsibilities and obligations as a responsible member of the world community."

He noted that Bangladesh had raised the issue during the Joint River Commission (JRC) meeting held recently in New Delhi. "The Indian side stated in reply that the proposal was only at a conceptual stage and that there was nothing to discuss on this matter."

Turning to bilateral trade relations, the Indian envoy said bilateral free-trade agreements (FTA) are the only way forward in the near future, given the stalemate in international and regional trade arenas.

He cited the India-Sri Lanka FTAs as an encouraging example and hoped that India-Bangladesh FTA would open up the vast Indian market for Bangladesh exports, thus helping reduce the trade gap between the two countries.

Although there is formal bar on Indian investment here, Tripathy said India-Bangladesh FTA would make investment in Bangladesh more attractive as outside investors, including Indians, would get unhindered access with their products to the vast Indian market.

"It will attract investment from India and elsewhere and will create a win-win situation for both parties," the outgoing Indian envoy said, citing the

case of Sri Lanka where Indians set up industries on buy-back basis.

About the non-tariff barriers that hinder entry of Bangladeshi goods into India, he said substantial progress was made in this regard at the official-level trade talks held recently in Dhaka.

"I have learnt from my experience here that our relationship has a self-sustaining logic... I am leaving Dhaka with the conviction that the very nature of our relationship is the source of its strength which will protect it against distortions by vested interests."

## Three acid burnt in city

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three persons including two members of a family were acid burnt in separate incidents at Khilgaon and Salehpur village in Amin Bazar, on the edge of the capital, yesterday.

Piara Begum, wife of garment worker Abul Khair, suffered severe burn injuries in her back and right hand when her husband's first wife Rehana poured a bottle of acid on Piara's neck at Khilgaon.

"Rehana got furious with me as my husband divorced her and married me in 1992," Piara said.

Shahnaz Begum and her sister-in-law Salma were seriously burnt within a gap of 15 minutes when Uzir Mian, a 15-year-old unemployed young man, splashed acid on them in Amin Bazar.

Uzir threw acid on Shahnaz at 12:15pm and then on Salma leaving her whole body severely burnt. Salma is a student of class six at Amin Bazaar High School.

"Uzir threw acid on my daughter as we refused his marriage proposal with Salma," said her mother Zohra Begum.

## BB axes 10

#### FROM PAGE 1

national police apparently ready to arrest CBA leaders responsible for Tuesday's siege.

The BB filed a case with Motijheel Police Station on Wednesday for the unruly behaviour of some CBA leaders.

The bank will start full implementation of the staff regulations on Saturday in its efforts to bring order to the central bank, a high official said.

He said action would be taken against the lawbreakers, based on reports from intelligence agencies who began investigating all untoward incidents at the BB since 2002.

The CBA has not yet decided whether it will go to court, challenging the central bank decision.

## L/C margin

#### FROM PAGE 12

The IMF mission also discussed reduction of lending rates with the officials concerned and met some leading private bankers to know what is holding them from cutting rates.

## Khosru tags

#### FROM PAGE 1

"We had excessive rain which damaged crops and shot up prices," he said. "It is no way possible to control vegetable prices."

"There are also times when the market witnesses harvest glut and tomatoes and other vegetables rot in the field as prices plummet," he pointed out.

Asked what his ministry's role could be in controlling price upswing, he said: "The government has a role to play in keeping prices within the people's purchase limit. We need to have a long-term tariff policy and decide how much we want to earn from import of essential food items. In the process, the interest of the growers must be taken into consideration."

Khosru also said a consumer bureau to research on production, supply, international and retail levels prices, cost and tariff would be set up. At the same time, the Consumer Council, a watchdog, will be set up to monitor market price, weight, hoarding and adulteration.

To a question about his frequent foreign trips, Khosru said the role of a trade minister has now changed.

"He is not only concerned about his own country, but because of bilateral, regional and multilateral systems, he will have to travel a lot. Last year, the Thai trade minister

## Govt believes

#### FROM PAGE 12

and Gender Issues Through Department of Mass Communications" programme of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).

Documentaries, spots and films will be projected with the projector-mounted vans in remote areas of the country to make people aware of reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and the negative aspects of early marriage.

Information Minister Tariqul Islam, UNFPA Country Representative Sunita Mukherjee and Information Secretary Nazrul Alam Siddiqui also addressed the function.

In her address, the prime minister said dissemination of information is a science having a deep relation with human psychology.

"If a campaign is not convincing and acceptable, it's not only useless, but also damaging," she said and asked the officials concerned to be cautious in disseminating information.

Recalling the contributions of the Mass Communications Department to create awareness among the people, the prime minister called upon the members of the department to immediately get over their shortcomings to revive its lost glory.

She asked the officials to be more creative and innovative in ideas to create mass awareness.

Information Minister Tariqul Islam asked the information officers to work sincerely and said there should not be any difference in what we say and what we actually do.

UNFPA Country Representative Sunita Mukherjee said despite sustained increase in contraceptive use, fertility rate remained stagnant over the last eight years in the country.

travelled 53 times in 52 weeks. The Canadian trade minister has to stay abroad for 7-8 months. Indian and Pakistani trade ministers are also travelling a lot. This is needed because of globalisation and trade diplomacy."

## Rajuk projects

#### FROM PAGE 12

Housing Project, but Rajuk has already spent Tk 102 crore. Hena questioned the additional expenditure.

Abdul Gani, convenor of the other sub-committee, told the meeting that Tk 36 crore has already been shown spent in Kamapur-Sayedabad road construction project. But on their visit, they found no work has been done.

Gani also pointed out that Tk 351 crore has been shown spent in Uttara Ideal Housing Project. But they assessed during a spot visit that a maximum of Tk 65 crore might have been spent. The project's most of the land is still under water, he said.

Both the convenors said they have been investigating the irregularities and corruption. The committee extended one and a half months' time for submission of final reports.

The committee also discussed the electrification across the country. Officials of the Rural Electrification Board (REB) told the committee that it needs 20,000 more megawatt electricity to meet the demand the country will have by 2020.

The committee asked the power ministry to take steps to produce more power.

## Rejoinder

#### FROM PAGE 12

the violation of government rules on foreign visits does not arise, he said.

On the use of more than one vehicle, the rejoinder said: "As a joint secretary she is in charge of supervision, monitoring and inspection of various projects. She uses the transport of projects only for official purposes and duly related to project work."

**Our reply:** The rejoinder did not contradict our report that said she made 13 foreign trips from May 2002 to October 2003.

An office order of the ministry on December 21, 2002 clearly states "any official of the ministry and its subordinate departments/organisations cannot be selected more than 3/4 times in one year for participation in any programme abroad."

She travelled eight times before the order was issued and five times after it. She is scheduled to visit the Netherlands from November 3-21 this year.

About the use of multiple vehicles, the rejoinder also did not contradict our report.

We consider her frequent foreign tour highly irregular and pointed out that the ministry is bending its own order.

We stand by our report.

## Job seekers

#### FROM PAGE 12

Malaysia within 45 days after getting the report, he will have to get checked up again," said a medical officer of International Health Centre at Banani.

Mizanur Rahman from Bogra, Idris Ali from Sonargaon and Abul Kashem from Noakhali also had similar stories to tell. They were among thousands of prospective job seekers who crowded different city clinics and made advance payments from Tk 10,000-60,000 for potential jobs overseas, mostly in Malaysia.

These job seekers are allegedly being forced to make advance payments and get advance medical reports, allowing clinics to make a fast buck, a percentage of which reportedly goes to the recruiting agent.

"Before the job and salary are confirmed, and all other related formalities are complete, medical checkups are useless," said a leading recruiter.

Abdul Matin, administrative officer of International Health Centre, was busy signing hundreds of medical reports piled high on his table. "We are authorised to carry out medical checkups and we are doing just that," he said, but declined to comment on checkups in advance.

Sources said some 20,000 Malaysian-job hopefuls have been checked up at the centre over the last seven months.

On the other hand, State Minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam warned of stern action against those conducting medical checkups in advance or taking down payments on recruitment fees.

"None has permission to conduct medical checkups or receive passport and money for sending workers to Malaysia," he said.

"Recruiting agencies or local agents found taking advance payments or authorising advance medical checkups will have their licences cancelled," the minister told The Daily Star.

But dozens of recruiting agents in Banani, Gulshan, Moghbazar and Fakirerpu continue to receive passports and booking money

ignoring the minister's warning.

The minister paid surprise visits to some medical centres and recruiting agencies at Banani Monday and found several hundred people lined up for checkups.

Banani's International Health Centre, Medinova Medical Services Limited and National Medical Centre were among the clinics the minister visited Monday.

Sources at the ministry said although a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed with Malaysia, fresh manpower export will take few more months to begin.

In 1997, Malaysia imposed a ban on manpower export from Bangladesh following a huge inflow of undocumented workers.

Currently, 1.30 lakh Bangladeshis work in Malaysia.

## JS body blames

#### FROM PAGE 1

The committee's lone opposition member Noor Mohammad Mandal echoed the sentiment of Ebadur and said, "The prime failure of the government is an uncontrolled market. It is now clear the government does not have the power to control prices of essentials," the Jatiya Party lawmaker said.

BNP lawmaker Abul Khayer Bhuiyan demanded subsidy to reduce prices of essentials.

Ruling alliance component Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Maulana Abdul Khaleque Mandal explained the reasons behind the price upswing of essentials, specially vegetables. Elected from Bagerhat, Mandal said extortion on the highways from the south-west region to Dhaka has led to rise in transportation cost that eventually increased market prices.

"It is possible to reduce prices of vegetables by stopping such extortion," he suggested.

The parliamentary body also discussed the food stock. The food ministry informed it 6,26,463 tonnes of rice and 2,33,948 tonnes of wheat are now in stock. The committee expressed satisfaction at this.

Committee Chairman Mosharaf Hossain Mongu chaired the meeting attended by its members and officials concerned.

## World Economic Forum

#### FROM PAGE 1

political influences of members of the government and citizens of firms. "The survey suggests that the independence of judiciary has eroded further as comparable figure for 2002 was about 48 percent."

Presenting the study, CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya said an increased percentage of companies consider competence of the government sector very poor.

Most companies (87 percent) also stated that administrative regulations are burdensome, 85.2 percent stated that government officials usually favour well-connected firms and individuals while deciding upon policies and contracts and 82.7 percent thought that the competence of public sector personnel are lower than the private sector.

Three out of every four companies stated that unfair or corrupt activities of other firms impose large costs on their firms. Ninety percent of respondents indicated that they made extra payments for getting connections to public

## Bail fixing

#### FROM PAGE 1

an inquiry, nor does the council have any rules to go by to make such an inquiry.

The constitution says, "The council shall regulate its procedure and shall have, in respect of issue and execution of processes, the same power as the Supreme Court."

If the council, after making the inquiry, reports to the president that in its opinion the judge has ceased to be capable of properly performing the functions of his office or has been guilty of gross misconduct, the president will, by an order, remove the judge.

Supreme Court Bar Association President Rakanuddin Mahmud at a meeting of the association on October 1 alleged that Judge Syed Shahidur Rahman received Tk 50,000 from a client for fixing a bail from the court of a judge friend in a woman repression case.

utilities like telephone and electricity.

Among 65 respondent executives, two-thirds observed that the frequency of additional payments or bribes has increased significantly and about 75.3 percent thought that organised crimes impose significant costs on their businesses. About 89 percent companies stated unreliable police protection to business.

A decline in cooperative relationship between labours and employers was observed in the study. It was stated that payments to workers are not related to productivity.

## Prices slow down

#### FROM PAGE 1

"I am selling cucumber at Tk 48 a kg, borboti Tk 27 and brinjol Tk 34," said a retailer at the market, Amin.

A trader at Mirpur market said, "Potato is being sold at Tk 15 a kg, cucumber Tk 48, home-grown onion Tk 30 and green chilli Tk 35."

## Sangsad