

BNP-backed CBA finally moves its office at BB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP-backed Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) at the Bangladesh Bank (BB) finally gave in to the pressure of the central bank authorities and moved its office out to the annexe.

In early November, the BB served a notice on all unions and associations asking them to relocate their offices from the executive floor of the main building within 24 hours.

All but the BNP-backed CBA complied with the order.

The BB even offered the CBA to bear the relocation cost. On Wednesday, the CBA foiled such a BB attempt by keeping its office locked up.

The adamant CBA leaders finally decided to back out following a press report Wednesday.

PM urges judges to ensure speedy trial

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said sufferings of the people seeking justice could be greatly reduced if the judges took sincere initiative for quick disposal of the cases pending with different courts.

"Your role is very important in establishing the rule of law and justice in the country. We have enacted the Speedy Trial Act and set up tribunals where sensational cases are being disposed of. But many other cases pending with courts for long need speedy disposal," she told the 53rd annual general conference of Bangladesh Judicial Service Association at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital.

Chief Justice of Bangladesh KM Hasan, Law, Justice and

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed and State Minister for Law Shajahan Omar, among others, addressed the function. Ministers, MPs and judges of the Supreme Court and lower courts and officials of the judicial service were present in the first session.

Khaleda said law is the principal instrument in the delivery of justice while the honesty, skill and knowledge of a judge are also very important.

"I hope you will be sincere in acquiring skill and knowledge alongside maintaining honesty in judicial work," she told the judges.

The prime minister listed various legal steps, particularly the Speedy Trial Act, speedy tribunal, and law reforms for ensuring justice to people and curbing crimes.

"People's confidence has also increased in the judicial system because the act was never applied in political interest," she said.

The prime minister noted that any good law can turn into a repressive law, if misused.

Importance will have to be given in formulating new laws in future as well as their proper application for ensuring good governance and justice in society, she said.

The government has taken the initiative to form an independent anti-corruption commission and a bill is lying with the relevant parliamentary committee for vetting, she said, adding that the matter of setting up a human rights commission and the appointment of o m b u d s

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Govt still sits on FTA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government still ponders over the free trade agreement (FTA) despite formal talks with India and two other South Asian countries.

The cabinet committee meeting on economic affairs with Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman in the chair yesterday failed to make a decision on the agreement.

"We have discussed the positive and negative aspects of the FTA," Saifur told reporters, adding that a final decision will come following a discussion with the prime minister.

"We have to consider how much we will be benefited from the FTA when fresh talks on Safta (South Asian Free Trade Agreement) are impending," he said.

The commerce ministry at the meeting placed some guidelines, which said the list of negative product items must be prepared carefully before signing the FTA to prevent negative impact on import revenue and domestic industrialisation.

FTAs account for 70 percent of the world trade volume, the commerce ministry papers pointed out.

RISING CRIMES IN SOUTH-WEST

New crackdown planned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The government plans to launch a fresh anti-crime drive soon with 'new strategies and tactics' in the wake of continued slide in law and order in the south-west, highly placed sources said.

The officers-in-charge of all police stations of Khulna Division have been asked to submit to the police headquarters in Dhaka a fresh list of extremists and their godfathers for the planned operation.

The Rapid Action Force (Raf) is likely to be involved in the next operation.

Two special operations in the past -- Operation Clean Heart and Operation Spider Web -- and the ongoing drive by the joint forces

have failed to combat crimes committed by the extremists including outlaws and armed political cadres.

Recurrence of armed and bomb attacks on members of the law-enforcing agencies, political leaders, union parishad chairmen, journalists and businessmen and murders and other crimes proved failure of the drives so far, sources pointed out.

"So, it is now our first and foremost duty to sort out the reasons behind the repeated failures," said a top official.

An intelligence agency has attributed the failures of the operations mainly to 'political and police connection' of outlaws and other cadres.

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Newsman assaulted for reporting on wild bird trade

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Miscreants assaulted a correspondent of a local daily yesterday at Banshdaha Bazar in Satkhira for reporting on illegal trade in migratory birds at local markets.

Quoting locals police said Saiful, Rabiul Islam, Tamejul Islam, Budu, Abu Taher, Babu and some unidentified youths roughed up Abdul Jalil, reporter of Daily Kafela, at about 10:30am, injuring him seriously.

On December 26, Jalil photographed Safiul, a resident of Salani village, when he was unlawfully selling migratory birds at a local market and ran a report with the photo in the daily, police added.

A case was filed with Sadar Police Station but no-one was arrested till the writing of this report at 6:00 last evening.

Meanwhile, local journalists in a statement condemned the attack and demanded exemplary punishment to the attackers. They also demanded immediate arrest of the culprits.

Ministries now to liquidate laid-off factories

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Citing obscure reasons, a cabinet committee yesterday decided that from now on ministries, instead of the Privatisation Commission, would liquidate the laid-off mills and factories.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, at yesterday's meeting with Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in the chair, also approved the draft of the Privatisation Rules in a bid to accelerate the privatisation of state-owned factories and strengthen the commission's power.

As per the draft, the Privatisation Commission would have the authority to liquidate a factory. But, yesterday's meeting entitled ministries concerned to do the job.

After the meeting, Saifur explained why the government suddenly stripped the Privatisation Commission off one of its basic responsibilities: "The laid-off mills usually have huge liabilities. So, the ministries that own these laid-off units will be better able to waive the debts of the factories through negotiations with respective banks or other parties."

Bypassing the question on whether the Privatisation Commission was doing its job properly or not, Saifur said, "The

ministries can do it even better."

The liquidation cells of the ministries will be entrusted with the tasks since the Privatisation Commission is not equipped with adequate facilities and mechanism to negotiate with the banks for debt write-offs or other options, the finance minister added.

But, some Privatisation Commission officials said there was no good reason for stripping the commission off this entitlement which it had been carrying out well so far. They said the move was likely to slow up the government's privatisation drive and create scopes for corruption.

"The commission acts as an independent body but the ministries don't and so they cannot do the job like the commission does. The ministries also operate under various external and motivated pressures," noted a Privatisation Commission official, expressing his doubts about the neutrality of the ministries in privatising the laid-off factories.

Replying to a query on whether the decision would reduce Privatisation Commission's responsibilities, Saifur said, "No. The commission will privatise other factories (which are not laid-off)."

According to the draft

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Untreated industrial waste from Tongi Industrial Area falls into the Turag river yesterday afternoon, left, as people continue fishing in the river waters turned so toxic that fish are dying out. A man shows off his catch, right, made using a spear after the near-dead fish floated to the water's surface.

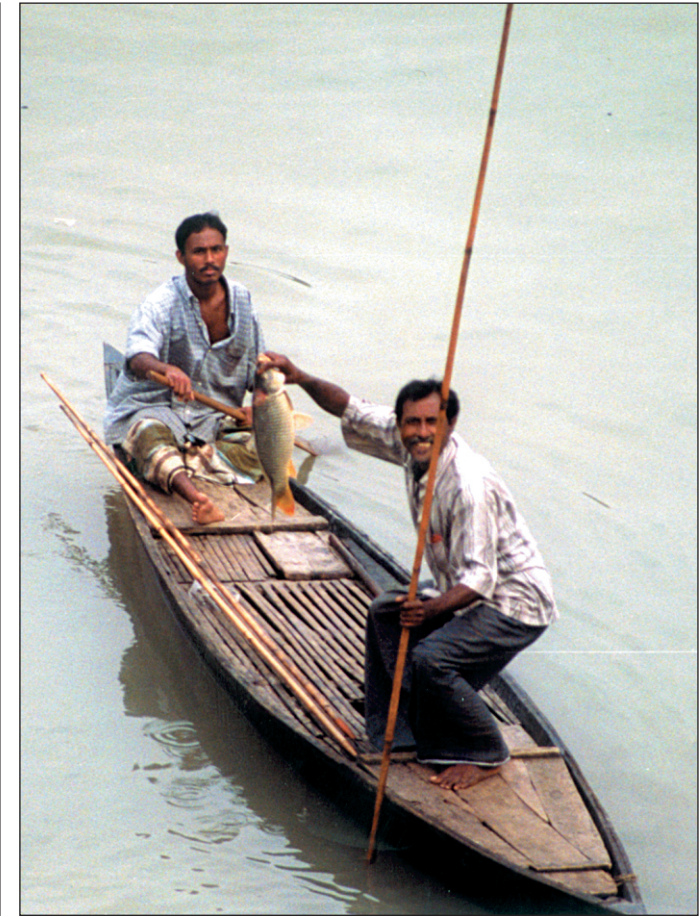


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Thrown out in the cold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Trembling in cold, malnourished and barely clothed five-year-old Russell pestered his mother for food in a feeble voice. The destitute mother in a torn sari found no words to make her child understand she had nothing to feed him.

The widowed woman and the child were passing their sixth day yesterday under the open sky at Kalyanpur Pora Bustee (slum).

"How could I manage him a little food, whom could I approach?" Jahanara said wiping tears with the 'anchal' (edge) of her sari. She was sitting on the ruins of her flattened shanty at Section-3 of the slum.

Jahanara is among some 2,000 evicted from their shanties at the slum as part of a drive to recover government land from encroach-

ment.

The House Building Research Institute (HBRI), which was likely to arrange dwellings for these homeless people, began the eviction from December 21 although a vacation bench of the High Court asked it not to disturb the shanty people till December 27.

"Without making any rehabilitation arrangement, they (HBRI) ordered us on December 20 to leave our homes with our belongings by 10:00am the next day," said Mali Hossain, a freedom fighter.

"I have been living here for the last 12 years with my two sons and four daughters since my house at Tajumuddin in Bhola was washed away in river erosion," he said.

"When our houses were being bulldozed, men of local Ward Commissioner Shamim Parvez looted most of our belongings

including corrugated tin, fence and bamboo poles. I don't have anything to rebuild my shanty even if I am allowed to stay here," said Rahima, a woman from Charfassion of Bhola, now working as a domestic help.

She has no place to go as her husband ditched her and their 4-year-old daughter about eight years ago to marry again, she added.

The HBRI people have demolished the shanties in seven of the nine sections of the slum, where people mostly from Bhola, Mymensingh, Noakhali, Faridpur and some northern districts were living for 16 to 18 years. Schools and clinics run by various organisations were also demolished.

Many of the evicted have taken shelter on the embankment at

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Non-govt school, college teachers strike today

UNB, Dhaka

Teachers of non-governmental schools and colleges go on a strike today to press home their eight-point demand.

The demands include a 10 percent pay hike, festival bonus,

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Prayer Timings		
December 28		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-40	4-00
Maghrib	5-27	5-32
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Vajpayee's Pak visit on despite attack on Musharraf

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will head to rival Pakistan for the January 4-6 South Asian summit despite an assassination bid on President Pervez Musharraf, the government said yesterday.

"The prime minister will go there," said Foreign Secretary Shashank, who uses only one name.

"President Musharraf has said he is the target. He is making fool-proof arrangements. We are going by that," Shashank told reporters.

Fifteen people including two

suicide bombers were killed Thursday when two cars packed with explosives rammied Musharraf's motorcade at a petrol station in Rawalpindi near the capital Islamabad.

The two leaders have not met since January 2002 amid bitter wrangling over militancy in the disputed territory of Kashmir.

"All seven heads of state and government, including our prime minister as well, will have a joint call on the president before the banquet," Pakistan Foreign Secretary

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Chemical engineers' meet tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chemical engineers are going to celebrate their 50th year as a professional group at a two-day international conference beginning tomorrow at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

Dr Iqbal Mahmud, professor emeritus, Department of Chemical Engineering of BUET, yesterday said in these 50 years the department has produced 1,200 chemical engineers. "The conference will act as a platform



Dr Iqbal Mahmud

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