

A waste of Tk 60cr?

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CEC MA Aziz yesterday declined to talk to journalists about the fate of the ongoing task, while the two election commissioners, who always opposed the preparation of a fresh voter list, welcomed the HC judgement.

"It is a relief for us. People might think we are against the election as we opposed the move for a fresh voter list. After the judgement, our position has been cleared and all confusions have been removed," Election Commissioner M Muneef Ali told journalists yesterday at his office.

Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali said people's right has been established through this judgement. He, however, expressed doubt about the implementation of the court order as the government controls the EC. "The implementation of the High Court order depends on the willingness of the EC secretariat," he said.

EXPENDITURE AT RISK

The CEC on August 6 decided to prepare a fresh voter list for the next parliamentary elections, ignoring the objection of the two election commissioners.

The same month, the EC sent a budget of Tk.146 crore to the government for the purpose and started preparatory work after receiving Tk 60 crore in the first installment of the budget.

The secretariat has spent most of the money for printing a huge number of manuals, nine crore voter's registration forms and training programmes for the manpower recruited for the task.

The large number of voter's registration forms will, however, not be useful for revising the existing voter list and new forms will have to be printed for the purpose. The crew will also have to be trained afresh.

Besides, the 2,16,722 enumerators who started the work for preparing the fresh voter list on January 1 will have to be paid for their four days' work.

On the wastage of money, Mohammad Ali said the department concerned will look into the matter. "If there was any irregularity in spending the public money, it will take action," he observed.

Meanwhile, the EC remained silent about the sector-wise allocation of the budget from the very beginning.

EC Deputy Secretary Mihir Sarwar Morshed, who coordinates the budget, yesterday declined to provide any information on this and suggested contacting the public relation department of the EC. The officials of the said department also failed to provide any details.

However, the expenditure of the previous voter list prepared in 2000 will give an idea of the sector-wise allocation for the task.

In 2000, the EC secretariat spent Tk 44.89 crore as the remuneration of the enumerators and over Tk 2.22 crore for the training of the manpower recruited for preparing the voter list.

As the officials at the EC secretariat had earlier said the amount would be increased this time, a budget of Tk 146 crore was proposed for preparing the fresh voter list. About Tk 100 crore was spent in 2000 for preparing the existing voter list.

WHAT WILL BE NEXT

About the next course of action, Election Commissioner M Muneef Ali said a fresh timetable will be declared for the task. This time the

crew will go from door to door to correct the existing voter list and then it will be declared as the draft electoral roll.

"We will also have to keep provision for lodging complaints about the draft list. The final list will be published after resolving the complaints," he said.

On whether or not the present manpower will be used for revising the existing voter list, he said the EC will take the decision at its meeting.

Mohammad Ali, however, said the ongoing process should be stopped at first. "We will sit and chalk out the plans to prepare a fair voter list," he said.

On the manpower he said the EC has to take fresh decision on the matter as the allegation of politicisation was raised against the recruitment. "The manpower must be neutral and non-partisan to complete the task," he added.

Charges framed against Galib in Bogra blast case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A Bogra court yesterday framed charges against the Ahle Hadith Andolan, Bangladesh (Ahab) Ameer Asadullah Al Galib and three others in connection with the bomb blast at Laxmikola village on January 14 last year.

The other accused in the case are Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) chief Abdul Rahman, Shafiq Ullah of Narayanganj and Jovnal Abedin of Gabtoli, Bogra. Police excluded previously accused Monowara, Jovnal's wife, from the charge sheet. The court scheduled March 13 for the trial.

Meanwhile, members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested four suspected militants at the court premises during the hearing and recovered some jihad related books.

The Bogra unit of Ahab arranged a rally yesterday at the district's Edward Park area and demanded release of Galib and other Ahab members claiming the organisation has no links with militancy.

14-party rally at Paltan

Jan 23

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Awami League (AL) led 14-party combine will hold a rally at Paltan Maidan in the capital on January 23.

The next programmes of the ongoing movement will be announced from the rally.

The decision came from a meeting of the liaison committee of the 14 party combine at the Awami League president's Dhanmondi office last night with AL presidium member Abdur Razzak, MP in the chair.

Besides, the meeting also decided to hold grand rallies at Chittagong, Sylhet, Barisal and Rangpur before the February 5 long march towards Dhaka.

The meeting demanded immediate postponement of preparing the new voter list as per the verdict of the High Court and proper steps to ensure the voting rights of the people updating the existing voter list.

Hannan gets lawyer

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17 bomb blast case.
APP Emdadul Haque Lal along with two other lawyers submitted a petition with Vokalatnama for conducting the case filed against Hannan in connection with the explosion at Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue near Shahbagh.

Hannan and Abdul Awal, son-in-law of the JMB chief Abdur Rahman, were shown arrested in the case and placed on remand yesterday. Hannan was placed on remand for the 14th time and Abdul Awal for eighth time.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police accompanied by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) produced Hannan and Awal, wearing helmets and bullet proof vests, before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka yesterday afternoon on completion of their five-day remand in the August 17 Jatiya Press Club bombing case.

In the forwarding report, the investigation officer (IO), seeking a 10-day remand period, mentioned that the two were directly involved with the August 17 countryside bomb blasts, including the blast at Shahbagh in the city. They need to be interrogated further to find out the vital clues to the case, the report said.

The defence lawyers prayed for cancellation of the remand saying the IO could not gather any clues about the August 17 bomb blasts even though Hannan was in police custody since his arrest on October 1 last year.

On the other hand, Awal had no custody to defend him. He was in custody since his arrest on November 18.

Following the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shamsul Alam placed

them on a seven-day remand.

Mufti Hannan is already shown arrested in four other blast cases filed with the Tejgaon, Ramna, Motijheel and Demra police stations.

JMB's regional chief of Rajshahi, Awal (Ashique), was another Majlis-e-Sura member and was captured from a Dinajpur-bound bus at Thakurgaon on November 18.

JS body

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committee on the civil aviation and tourism ministry at a meeting asked the ministry to investigate why the crisis persisted, meeting sources said.

People responsible for the crisis should be punished since it has tarnished the government's image, committee members said at the meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan.

Senior officials of the civil aviation ministry held the religious affairs ministry responsible for the situation.

"The religious affairs ministry first informed us that there are 40,000 intending pilgrims. But later they said the number is 60,000. Due to this, the civil aviation ministry is facing difficulties to provide adequate flights to ferry the pilgrims to Jeddah," a meeting source quoted a senior official saying.

The state minister for civil aviation however assured the meeting that the government has taken adequate steps to resolve the crisis. "We will be able to send all the intending hajj pilgrims to Jeddah," he said.

A ruling BNP lawmaker criticised the authorities for negligence to take proper care of the pilgrims at the hajj camp in Dhaka.

Revise present

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regard, the EC will be considered to have failed in discharging its constitutional duties.

The EC will discharge the responsibility of making a voter list without entertaining the demands of any particular political party or parties, it observed.

The court also observed that the right of a voter does not depend on an enumerator's going to his house. A citizen can still be a voter if he fails to be present when the enumerator visits his house. So the EC will have to ensure that the absentee voters are not excluded from the list.

Petitioners' counsel Dr Kamal Hossain submitted before the court that updating the voter list for general elections is a continuous process being practised for long.

"The voter lists were updated through correction and revision from 1982 to 1995 as per unanimous decisions of the election commissioners. The court can make some guidelines for the EC regarding preparation of the voter list," he said.

About the court's observations, he told reporters that the CEC cannot take a decision unilaterally to prepare a voter list. He can take such a decision after discussing it with other members of the commission.

Barrister Amir-Ul Islam, another counsel of the petitioners, submitted that the court's interference in the preparation of the voter list by the EC is inevitable for holding the next general elections smoothly.

Explaining the court observations, he said the existing voter list will be the major basis and it can be revised through inclusions and exclusions.

"Vigilance of people and the media is necessary to ensure proper compliance of the High Court guidelines," he told newsmen.

Counsel for the CEC, advocate Khondker Mahbubuddin Ahmed told reporters that the work on making a fresh voter list that started on January 1 will continue but it will have to be made in the light of the existing one prepared in 2000.

Criticising the petitioners' counsels for their celebration after disposal of the petitions, he said: "It seems from their excitement that the court has issued a rule or an injunction on EC's voter list move. But the court has disposed of the petitions merely making a few remarks."

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil filed one petition while his party lawmakers Rahmat Ali and Asaduzzaman Noor filed the other on December 12 last year. Hearing of the petitions was first held on December 15 and resumed on January 2.

Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali was present in the court for the government while Barrister Tanjib Ul Alam assisted Dr Kamal and Dr Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury and barristers Moyeen Firoji, Shamsul Hasan and Maniruzzaman Asad assisted Amir-Ul Islam.

Sedition case

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report (FIR) of the case filed by Shah Alam, Advocate BD Zaman on December 13 sent seven letters bearing the name of the banned Islamist militant group to several lawyers, threatening to kill them and blow up their houses within seven days.

The sedition case is yet to be recorded with the police station since it requires the permission of the home ministry, said Superintendent of Police Abdur Rahim.

The police arrested one Hafizur Rahman, a typist on the court premises, for typing the letters.

Hafizur told the police that Zaman forced him to type the letters and gave him Tk 25.

Zaman was expelled from the Bar and his licence was seized, Shah Alam said.

Shahjahan, officer-in-charge of the Sakthira PS, confirming the incident said proper measures will be taken after receiving the home ministry permission.

2 killed

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Superintendent Shamsul Alam Khan later said two people died in the incident.

Their identity could not be known immediately.

Police opened fire on the agitators, who under the banner of Pali Biddiyat Unnayan Sangram Parishad, laid a siege to the Pali Biddiyat Samity office demanding withdrawal of meter-charger and uninterrupted power supply.

Of the injured, Babu of Chakrity Laoghatta village, Monirul and another unidentified man of Khasherhat, were admitted to the Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH) in critical condition.

Thirty people, who were injured by bullets, were admitted to Shuibganj Upazila Health Complex.

According to a witness, thousands of people took position around the Pali Biddiyat Samity office on the Chapainawabganj-Sonamajid road after the incident.

Police men cordoned off the office after the incident.

The assistant police superintendent said the law enforcers were compelled to open fire to bring the situation under control.

A tense situation was prevailing in the area.

A temple of neglect

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closed. A ghastly blow of stormy wind will break down all the concrete and wooden pillars.

The Thakur Ghar, residence of the temple priest, is half broken and may collapse any time. The government has launched a project in the locality, some 60 to 70 yards off the temple, for the housing of the Rakhines, but the temple failed to draw its attention.

Except providing the indigenous people with houses, the government seems to be reluctant to make other living facilities available to them.

As the Rakhines are unable to preserve the temple, Wema Ching, 55, an unpaid caretaker, had appealed to the local upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) for help.

However, the appeal of Ching, who has been looking after the temple since she was 23 leaving aside her earning, yielded no positive response.

The poverty-stricken community could never account for the last puja as its members failed to manage a fund to hire a priest and collect other necessary things.

Ching in a letter sought the UNO's help on the occasion of puja three months ago, but again no reply was

made.

"All the Muslims and the Hindus get government assistance on their religious occasions. But where is mine? I cried for help to the local administration and returned empty handed," said Ching in tears. Locals said priests Mogiche and Momiakhai had set up the temple 120 years ago.

Unarenda Bekhu was the last appointed priest who died 10 years ago and since then all religious performances have remained almost stopped. The Rakhines only perform puja when they can afford hiring a Thakur.

"I am so tired as all Rakhines have folded their hands to pay for its maintenance. Please say someone about our plight and help preserve the heritage as well as our religion," asked Wema Ching woe-heartedly.

Abdul Barik, UNO of Kalapara, said, "I have no authority to sanction any amount for such purpose except from my own pocket. Only the deputy commissioner of the district can do this."

"However, during my tenure a large amount of money was spent for renovation of the temple," he claimed.

ADP projects turn

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FY06 ADP is Tk 17,000 crore, of which only Tk 2,503 crore or 15 percent was expended in the first four months. In July-October of FY05, this rate was 21 percent.

Of the ADP this year foreign project aids account for Tk 7,500 crore, of which Tk 1,280 crore or 17 percent was spent in July-October, which was 20 percent in the same period in the previous year.

Out of the total 859 projects, 333 are foreign-funded. Of them 51 projects were unapproved at the beginning of FY06, but 44 of them had been approved by December, the planning ministry told Saifur at yesterday's meeting.

As almost all the projects have been approved, the meeting observed, so the delay in implementation was not caused by approval related complications. Saifur said he will sit with all the line ministries on January 18 to identify the causes for the decelerated pace of implementation.

The finance minister directed the Economic Relation Division to sit with the line ministries every month

to monitor and assess the progress of the foreign-funded projects. He also asked the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division to make field visits and submit reports to the finance ministry on the status of ADP implementation.

"The current ADP is much bigger in size than the previous ones. At the beginning of the year, the projects had mainly been occupied with floating the procurement process. So, the pace of implementation seems a bit slow," State Minister for Planning Anwarul Kabir Talukder told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the speed of implementation will pick up gradually in the coming days.

But, a finance ministry official expressed the apprehension that much of the ADP money will be misused during the end of the fiscal year, when the projects will spend their money hurriedly and haphazardly.

The amount and rate of ADP project spending became so huge at the fag end of FY05 that around Tk 4,000 crore was borrowed from the banks in the last couple of days alone to feed the project expenditure.

Sangsad

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lawmakers, may generate much heat as the opposition is likely to raise the issues of reforms in the caretaker government system and Election Commission and the alarming rise of militancy.

President Iajuddin Ahmed will address the House in accordance with the constitution and the lawmakers will take part in a long discussion on his speech.

The much-talked-about Anti-terrorism Bill will be placed in the coming session that was drafted amid alarming rise of Islamist militancy in the country.

The main opposition lawmakers are at risk of losing membership due to absence of 90 consecutive days.

As the ongoing anti-government movement has yet to gain momentum, the AL side is pondering joining the session to save membership.

They also contemplate utilising the joining in favour of the opposition's demand of bringing reforms in the caretaker government and electoral rules before the next general elections, sources said.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid said the Awami League Parliamentary Party will meet before the session to decide whether it joins the House or continues the boycott.

He said the AL will join the session if the party thinks it reasonable for the sake of ongoing anti-government movement. "There is

Give no concession

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that police stations in Dhaka metropolises would be increased to 51 and there will also be a women police station. Process is underway to set up 36 "model police stations".

About 2,000 new apartments are being constructed in the capital for accommodation of policemen starting from constables to sub-inspectors, she told the function.

Ministers, MPs, chiefs of the three services, diplomats, elite and senior police officials were present. The prime minister said the capability and efficiency of the police have increased manifold due to various reforms and logistic supports provided by the government.

She said 10 percent quota has been kept reserved for employment of children and dependants of the police for constable posts. Despite resource constraints, she said ration, food allowance and risk allowances have been increased substantially.

She also referred to the formation of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), highway police unit and supply of 2,844 new vehicles to make the force more skilled and dynamic.

Earlier, Khaleda distributed Police Medals among 52 recipients for their best performances. Of them, seven were given Bangladesh Police Medal and 11 the President Police Medal.

Besides, 6 recipients were given Bangladesh Police Medal (Service) and 28 the President Police Medal (Service) for their outstanding performance in different fields.

State Minister for Home Affairs

Graft, poor FDI

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asked the energy adviser not to provide inappropriate figures on energy sector with any motive."

The adviser recently said the country's total energy reserve is 100 tcf --30 tcf gas and 70 tcf coal-- which can meet its energy requirements for decades, the BEA president mentioned.

But, he pointed out that a consultant firm of Petrobangla estimated the gas reserve at around 10 tcf, which would exhaust by 2015. Moreover, experts think the country's probable coal reserve is to the tune of 6 to 7 tcf that can meet the demands for another two to three years only.

Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal, former chairman of Power Development Board, also blamed the energy adviser for making impulsive remarks on energy reserves.

Coal should be considered as the second source of energy next to gas, he said, urging the government to frame a coal policy.

BEA General Secretary Prof Abul Barakat regretted that the country is now facing a serious energy crisis despite having adequate energy sources.

No question

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them to take part in the dialogue.

Tough action will be taken to punish the bombers according to the law, the sponsors behind the bombings will be unmasked, she told the freedom fighters at the International Conference Centre (ICC).

Referring to success so far achieved in containing the outrageous act, Khaleda said bomb terrorism would be stopped at any cost and none would be spared if involved in the carnage.

She said the activists of a banned organisation had killed innocent people and attacked some institutions using the name of Islam.

"They are acting against Islam, development and democracy in the name of Islam," she told the leading freedom fighters.

A 31-member delegation led by Chairman of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad Central Command Council Kabir Ahmed Khan and its Secretary General Shah Alam Chowdhury met the prime minister.

The prime minister said a party instead of cooperating with the government in its initiative to stop bomb terrorism wants the government's resignation. She urged all to forge unity on the national issues.

Talking to newsmen after the meeting, Muktiyoddha Sangsad Chairman Kabir said they put forward 12 suggestions for curbing the bomb terrorism. Those include finding out masterminds, source of money behind the bomb blasts, shutting down those institutions involved in the bomb terrorism and formation of a strong probe committee comprising competent persons to identify the suicide bombers.

The freedom fighters extended "all-out support to the government measures in curbing the bomb terrorism".

LGRD Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who gave the introductory speech, said the government is implementing many of the suggestions given by the freedom fighters.

State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Rezaul Karim also took part in the consultation while Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury was present.

30 killed

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The bombing in Muqaddiyah left 30 people covered in blood. Police said more than 100 mourners were at the cemetery for the burial of a nephew of the director of the local hospital.

Thirty-six people were wounded along with the 30 killed, said Firas al-Nida, a doctor at hospital. Muqaddiyah is about 60 miles north of Baghdad.

The director of the hospital had survived an assassination attempt on Tuesday, when his nephew was fatally wounded.

The director is also the head of the local al-Dawa party, a junior partner in the country's largest Shia political coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, police said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari is the head of the Dawa party.

Police Lt Salim Hussine said the bombing was aimed at igniting a Shia-Sunni civil war.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the extremist Sunni leader of the terrorist organization al-Qaeda in Iraq, has made Shias his chief target.

The three major political parties -- the Shiite United Iraqi Alliance, the Sunni Arab Iraqi Accordance Front and the Kurdish coalition -- were working on a coalition government, an Alliance official said Wednesday, and were discussing a nominee for prime minister.

"We can say that the (three parties) are close to forming a new government," said Ridha Jawad Taqi, a member of SCIRI, the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which is coalition partner in the United Iraqi Alliance. "Meetings between the tickets will be resumed after announcing the final results of the elections."

An international monitoring team this week began to review results from Iraq's Dec 15 parliamentary elections, including some of the hundreds of complaints filed.

The police rushed to her house and arrested her with the baby boy and rescued the girl from her rented house in the locality.

The infants are in police custody as no-one showed up to claim them until the report was filed at 9:00 last night.

Illegal Ctg salt factory

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different brands without BSTI approval.

Burning stolen gas taken through two illegal connections from the BGS's main supply line for two and a half years, the factory owned by one Siddique Ahmed Sawdagar has consumed gas worth over Tk 2 crore, BGS sources said.

As the manager, staff and workers of the factory fled the scene at 11:00am, the mobile court team led by CPA Magistrate Mohammad Munir Chowdhury broke open the main gate and seized some salt, 24 large iron trays and other equipment.

They disconnected the illegal gas supply lines and destroyed all the infrastructures of the factory.

BGS officials, disconnecting team members, and Chittagong Metropolitan Police assisted in the disconnection and demolition drive that continued till 3:00pm.

There was an attempt to thwart the drive as some CPA men threatened the BGS officials and delayed the arrival of the crane, sources said.

Many other salt factories in the district are producing salts burning BGS gas taken through illegal connections, said BGS sources preferring anonymity.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: Mobile courts yesterday filed cases against three diagnostic centres at Jurain and fined another at Malibag in the capital on charge of cheating patients in the name of diagnosis and treatment.

Cases were filed against City Lab Diagnostic Centre, Doctors General Hospital and Diagnostic Centre, and Roagmukti General Hospital and Diagnostic Centre at Jurain.

A court fined Harunur Rashid, the owner of Padma Diagnostic Centre at Malibag, Tk 20,000.