

BAC meeting

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chaired the meeting, said the BAC has decided that no discussion will be held on any specific issue [demanded by the opposition lawmakers].

The opposition members also demanded discussion on the crises of diesel, fertiliser and power, corruption, law and order situation, murder of a Rajshahi University professor, August 21 grenade attack and the Kibria killing case. But none of issues was included in the agenda due to stiff resistance from the ruling party members.

The opposition lawmakers had submitted a total of 131 notices to the Parliament Secretariat demanding discussions on these issues following the Rules of Procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad.

The speaker will formally disposed of all the notices in the House.

The BAC meeting however unanimously decided to extend the tenure of the current session for another five workdays. The sitting, which was adjourned yesterday, will resume on February 22 to run until February 28. The House will sit twice on each day.

On the concluding day, Leader of the House Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina will take part in discussion on the president's speech.

About the main opposition lawmakers' demand for holding discussion on various issues, the speaker said they will have the scopes to discuss the issues while participating in the discussion on thanks giving motion on the president's speech.

As their demand for discussion on specific issues were rejected by the ruling party, the AL lawmakers at the BAC meeting asked who will reply to any questions about failure of any ministry or allegation against any minister.

"The ministers will reply to such questions during discussion on the thanks giving motion," the speaker told reporters emerging from the meeting. "They [AL lawmakers] can discuss all the issues in the thanks giving discussion."

The opposition lawmakers can also discuss their reform proposals, if they want. But no discussion on any specific issue will be held," he said.

Replying to the reporters' queries, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan explained that usually no general discussion is held in parliament during discussion on the thanks giving motion on the presi-

dent's speech.

But the AL lawmakers did not agree with the BAC decision not to hold any discussion and said they had been forced to raise the issues for people's interest. They also said the ruling party members rejected the demands violating the Rules of Procedure.

"It will be a bad precedent for the House if it does not hold any discussion on issues like grenade attack on the leader of the opposition and assassination of lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria," Suranjit Sengupta, who joined the BAC meeting as the representative of the opposition leader, told reporters after the meeting.

"For the greater interest of the nation, we wanted discussion on the price spiral of essentials, unbridled corruption of the government and the rise of militancy," he said. "We also demanded discussion on the killing of nine people by police at Kansat."

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid said they demanded continuation of the current session up to March with 15 more workdays. "The ruling party finally agreed to extend the session up to February 28 with five more workdays," he told reporters.

Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid said they demanded that the opposition lawmakers should be given half the time allocated for discussion on the thanks giving motion.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, two vital members of the committee, did not attend yesterday's meeting of the BAC that also decided that there will be no private members' day on Thursday (Feb 23). Besides, no call attention notices will be tabled on the remaining workdays.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed, KM Obaidur Rahman, Agriculture Minister MK Anwar and Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain also attended the meeting. Maulana Abdus Sobhan was present on behalf of Industries Minister Matiur Rahman Nizami.

Raj Punnah festival

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Bomong circle." The source, however, did not mention the reason about not holding the fair.

Local people said that the recent countrywide serial bomb blasts and the fundamentalist threat on the cultural activities caused to postpone the fair.

In the opening day of the Raj Punnah festival, the headmen of 109 Mouzas and about 900 karbaris will pay their allegiance to the king, also the circle chief, with annual Jhum tax and traditional gifts.

Tomorrow the king would meet the headmen and karbaris and have lunch with them according to the tradition after which the celebration of Raj Punnah will end.

In the reign of 9th Bomong King Sa Neuin Nyo (1875-1901) the celebration of the festival started.

During the British rule, the whole Chittagong Hill Tracts was divided into two parts for collecting tax in 1804. The Chakma circle was founded with ancient Ramgarh, Khagrachhari, Rangamati and a part of Kaptai subdivision while the Bomong circle was established with Bandarban, Lama and the rest of

Kaptai subdivision.

Later, a separate circle, known as Mong circle was formed with an area of Ramgarh and Khagrachhari subdivision. In the course of time, their obedience, determination and social activities turned them from circle chiefs to the kings of the circles.

The people respect the kings although they do not have any kingdom or soldiers.

The government of Bangladesh pays the kings for performing their responsibilities. According to the direction of the state they do the social judgment for the ethnic minorities and deposit revenues to the state bank that is collected from the people.

At present, Raj Punnah serves not only as a programme for revenue collection, but also as a meeting place of peoples of all walks of life irrespective of castes and creeds.

Pakistan ratifies

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between zero and five percent within seven years. Agreed in 2004, it is due to come into force by July 2006.

Its latest developed countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives - have 10 years to complete the process, though all members can maintain a list of sensitive products on which tariffs will not be reduced.

The trade pact was first mooted in 1995 by the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), an economic grouping formed to reduce poverty, promote trade and fight terrorism.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, who chaired the cabinet meeting, said Pakistan wanted peace with India, which has already ratified the trade pact.

"But at the same time wants the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir be resolved in line with aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir," an official statement quoted Aziz as saying.

Water woes

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queue for hours for a pitcher of water with which they can not even meet their cooking needs, the rehabilitated people said. The unhealthy condition is threatening to take its toll on the health of the entire community.

The crisis started with the utter lack of preparedness from the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) authorities part while rehabilitating the community. The DCC however spent Tk 50 lakh to prepare the land and install tube-wells in the area.

The community built, on their own, tin-shed homes for themselves. The area along the embankment is yet to come under Wasa's water supply network. WASA officials at Zone-4 in Mirpur said it might take years to get the area under its supply network. They said the only solution is to install deep tube-wells in the area.

Molla Ansarul Haque, a DCC engineer at Zone-7 told The Daily Star his office did not receive any complaint about the crisis. "Sometimes we have had complaints about some out-of-order tube-wells but I have not heard about the contamination of water," he added.

SC rejects

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being a sitting judge, filed the petition with the Chamber Judge's Court on Tuesday. Chamber judge referred the matter to the regular bench yesterday.

An HC division bench imposed the injunction Monday after SC lawyer Khairul Alam filed a writ petition accusing Chhunu of taking part in activities of the ruling BNP.

The HC bench also issued a rule on the government, asking it to show cause in two weeks why it should not be asked to take action against the divisional judge.

TH Khan, counsel for Chhunu, submitted before the court that the HC injunction amounts to violating his fundamental rights and natural justice.

"No steps can be taken against anyone on the basis of newspaper reports," Khan told reporters yesterday, adding that the injunction came in response to a writ petition filed on the basis of some newspaper reports.

He argued before the court that many people accompany ministers for development works in their areas.

"Justices like you too have done this. Anyone can work for development of his or her areas, as did Chhunu. But it will have to be looked at from a judicial point of view," he observed.

He could have been served with a showcase notice and action taken against him after an investigation on receipt of his reply, Khan told the court.

Dr Kamal Hossain, who stood for the writ petitioner, said both the HC and SC have constitutional obligations to preserve the sanctity of the judiciary by controlling the subordinate courts.

The HC has rightly discharged its duties by granting an injunction against Chhunu while issuing a rule on him and the government, he added.

2 journalists

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journalists were assigned to collect information on drug trading in the area.

On July 13 last year criminals hurled three bombs at the Daily Mathabhangha office.

In a separate incident, a gang of 10-12 criminals exploded three bombs at Pirpuraghat field around 12:30pm following a feud over a meeting. None was injured in the incident. Police and Rapid Action Battalion started a hunt for criminals in the district following the incidents, superintendent of police (SP) of Chuadanga told The Daily Star yesterday.

In his keynote paper, Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), said poor governance in Bangladesh is a much-discussed issue. There is a lack of transparency and accountability while corruption is pervasive both within the government and in various sectors of the economy and in the society.

Bangladesh can make use of various types of virtuous partnerships towards accelerating poverty reduction but it needs to dismantle the vicious ones which promote corruption, mismanagement, and extremism in the country, he stressed.

The country achieved a respectable annual average 5.3 percent GDP growth since mid-1990s but it is certainly not high when compared to East Asian tigers and China, he mentioned.

The BEA president noted that the growth achieved has however been lopsided and income distribution has in fact steeply worsened. Even if income distribution is improved, it is necessary to accelerate economic growth to gear up poverty reduction, he observed.

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, managing director of Palli Karma-Sahayak

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Our Sirajganj correspondent reports: Power supply halved over the last few days, severely hampering irrigation of the boro fields in nine upazilas of Sirajganj. The low voltage of electricity has also damaged pumps.

Farmers also complained of high price of fertilisers in the district as dishonest dealers have created a crisis in the market by hoarding fertilisers and raising the price. A 50kg sack of urea is selling at Tk 320-330 while the government rate is fixed at Tk 290-295.

The district administration, however, denied any fertiliser crisis.

The diesel was reported to have been selling at Tk 36 in Gaibandha, Tk 40-45 in Rangpur, Tk 38 in Rajshahi, and Tk 33-37 in Bogra.

A team of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) will monitor the situation of boro farming in Gaibandha from today, said AED Deputy Director Abdul Matin.

BDNEWS adds: Half the boro land is likely to remain uncultivated in Chapainawabganj as diesel crisis and erratic power supply continue.

The district AED said only 33,885 hectare land of the targeted 57,500 hectares could be cultivated.

BB goes soft

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percent of the 'compromise amount'.

About yesterday's BB circular, Centre for Policy Dialogue Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya said the step does not go with the present monetary policy. "It also undermines the integrity of the ongoing financial sector reforms," he observed.

The pressure of handing out new loans will mainly fall on the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), as the numbers of loan defaulters are the highest with them, Debapriya pointed out. "It is not consistent with the current reform programme of the NCBs."

"Many would also suspect whether one of the windows of the pre-election financing is being open through this," he quipped.

If the loan defaulter is a present or former director of any bank, the new policy demands that he take a prior approval of the BB for obtaining any fresh loan.

In an instant reaction, Pubali Bank Managing Director Khandker Ibrahim Khaled told The Daily Star last night, "This new loan rescheduling policy will derange the orderliness achieved by the previous one."

"I suspect the central bank has changed the policy under pressure from the businessmen," he said, adding the policy change could be justified if repayment of at least 75 percent of the rescheduled loan was set as the condition for getting fresh loan.

"The elected governments typically remain strict during the early years of their tenure, but start to knuckle under various pressures during the fag end," Khandker noted.

Better ties with donors

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countries, under which products excepting arms (EBA) can enter Europe duty free, he pointed out.

The economist also urged the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to take an initiative to provide support to enterprises for investing equity.

He suggested the government to offer financial support to small tea gardens for setting up a unit for processing tea as their products now sell well below the market price.

Economist Hossain Zillur Rahman said the Asian nations also should tell the world its wonderful success stories so that other countries can benefit from it.

He however expressed concern over inequality and insecurity of growth. "We need unhindered fruits of growth."

He noted that after overcoming some extreme poverty problems, Bangladesh is now poised to address new types of challenges.

In his welcome address, David Wood, country representative of the DFID, said Bangladesh is no longer aid-dependent and it is time to develop a new kind of partnership with the development community that goes beyond traditional donor-recipient relations.

These new partnerships will be 'longer-term and broader-based,' he said. They might cover issues such as trade, climate change, reform of international organisations, migration and private sector finance as well as donor projects and programmes.

Wood further said Bangladesh is in a position to move away from being dictated by its international development partners, and towards a broader and deeper development relationship.

He pointed out Bangladesh's successes in different fields including macro-economic stability, positive economic growth for 30 years, expansion of micro-finance and vast network of NGOs.

Primary school enrolment is approaching 100 percent, which is one of the highest rates particularly for girls, in the developing world. Bangladesh also achieved success in health sector and in bringing down infant and child mortality faster than in any other developing country, Wood said.

According to him, the existing relations between Bangladesh and donors have been evolving with the completion of the poverty reduction strategy and hosting of the PRS implementation forum late last year.

The London conference would give an opportunity to share ideas on how to accelerate poverty reduction in Asia.

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McKinnon pins hope

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2007 general election.

As part of his three-nation South Asia tour, McKinnon arrived in Bangladesh from India yesterday and will go to Pakistan on the last leg of his trip.

The secretary general apprised the prime minister of the outcome of the last Commonwealth Summit held in Malta.

He appreciated Bangladesh's success in a number of fields, particularly health, education, poverty reduction and achieving a number of UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"Bangladesh can be a model for other countries in various social development and educational programmes," he was quoted as saying during the meeting.

McKinnon said Bangladesh has good relations with Commonwealth and it will help the country in capacity-building training, education and trade and commerce.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan was also present at the meeting.

MEET WITH HASINA
Our Staff Correspondent reported that McKinnon also met the Leader of the Opposition and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence and discussed different issues including law and order situation of the country, military, electoral reforms, corruption and good governance.

The AL chief explained the C'wealth secretary general about their proposals for reforming the caretaker government system and the Election Commission to ensure a free and fair general election.

Briefing the journalists, Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury said they have explained the C'wealth secretary general about their concern over a free, fair and neutral election.

Saber said they have also pointed out the differences between the elections held under a caretaker government in the past and the upcoming one.

Foundation (PKSF), said Bangladesh's economy has grown five to six percent a year but this is not enough. He stressed increased foreign investment in the country.

But inadequate infrastructure including power and transportation, and inefficient operation of Chittagong port are some of the constraints to increasing investment, he said.

Former foreign secretary Farooq Sobhan said the government needs in house financial and legal expertise for human resource development for foreign investment and job creation. He also emphasised free movement of labourers for job opportunities.

A section of government officials welcomes foreign direct investment (FDI) but many others discourage it, he pointed out.

The second generation of Bangladeshis in the UK who run around 10,000 restaurants should come forward for a meaningful partnership in taking the country forward, he felt.

Nasreen Huq, country director of Action Aid, said, "We have enjoyed a modest five percent economic growth but there is still a huge gap and children are facing extreme malnutrition due to poverty."

Wrapping up the discussion, Mahfuz Anam said administering a country is a serious business and it requires experience, honesty, commitment and expertise.

"Our ministers and high-level policy makers must acquire knowledge and expertise to run their respective ministries. Giving speeches, making commitments and talking about big plans do not make a country grow," he observed.

In a modern world, Mahfuz Anam noted, governance has become a highly technical affair for which technical qualities must be acquired.

Participating in the open discussion earlier, Angela Gomes, executive director of Bancthe Shekha, said, "Poor women do not have any idea how they can export their products and they lack technical skill. We have to find out areas where we can develop know-how and technology."

A Rouf Chowdhury, director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said Bangladesh has succeeded in securing new markets but it is facing supply constraints.

"We should pursue movement of skilled and semi-skilled manpower though most of the European Union countries are not in favour of it," he said. "But UK is different from others where we have a significant number of our population, and it is a solid ground for us."

Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, Planning Commission member, said there is a lack of appropriate data in analysing overall poverty situation in Bangladesh. The situation is similar in many other countries.

Hua Du, country director of the ADB, said aid should facilitate trade, and developing countries should be in the driving seats for formulating policies. "This is a partnership and new partnership has started to get a shape."

Talea Rehman, executive director of Democracy Watch, underscored improving the quality of education and a proper monitoring system for it.

The poor will remain poor unless governance is improved, she said.

All 5 accused

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Malitha alias Dada Tapan, Rafiqul Islam Hitter, Moniruzzaman Jamal, Golam Hossain Akash and Zafar. Of them, Hitter was present in the dock, while four others are still at large.

The court acquitted the accused, as charges brought against them were not proved, said the prosecution lawyer.

Mir Elias Hossain Dilip, editor of the Jhenidah-based daily, Bir Darpan, and his associate Afazuddin were shot dead by the underground operatives on the night of January 15, 2000 at a shop at Pagla Kanai Road in the district town.

Mir Badrul Alam, elder brother of Dilip, filed a murder case with Jhenidah Sadar Police Station the following day, naming none as accused of the double murder.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of the police station submitted the charge-sheet to a court here on April 14, 2001. The case was transferred to the Speedy Trial Tribunal on August 4 last year.

This is the second verdict in Journalist murder case delivered yesterday by the Judge of the Speedy Trial Tribunal, Khulna. The first verdict in journalist Haroon murder case was given by the tribunal on February 7, acquitting all the three charge-sheeted accused due to weak evidence.

Railway cancels

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Chandpur-Laksham (2 trains), Sylhet-Chhatak (2 trains), Dhaka-Mymensingh-Mohanganj (2 trains) and Dhaka-Bhoirab-Mymensingh (2 trains).

Sources said BR would be able to buy diesel and meet demands for next 20 to 30 days with the present cash reserves.

BR might not be able to buy diesel for the month of March and April unless the government disburses money soon. In that case BR would be forced to go for austerity measures and suspend services of few more routes, they said.

BR needs over 2,00,000 litres of diesel to run its 150 trains in the eastern zone and government gives Tk 50 crore annually to purchase the fuel.

The hike of diesel price in recent months has put BR eastern zone in difficulty as it can not buy fuel at the previous rate.

"The price of diesel increased about 33 percent and we need additional Tk 20 crore to operate," M Mahtab Uddin, chief finance advisor and chief accounts officer of BR told reporters yesterday.

He said he sent a letter to the communication and finance ministries seeking the additional fund but the ministries expressed inability to disburse the money and asked for austerity measure to cope with the situation.

"We decided to suspend the 16 insignificant routes for the time being. If we get additional money to buy diesel then we may consider reopening of the routes," Mahtab added.

Dollar price

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banks and the price hike of oil and other commodities in the international market.

The inter-bank foreign currency transactions amounted to just \$150,000 yesterday, said a banking source.

A huge supply-demand gap of foreign currency has emerged, because some new-generation banks opened too many letters of credit without considering their foreign currency earnings or the foreign currency supply in the inter-bank market, Bangladesh Bank observed on Sunday.

But, private and foreign bankers refuted the central bank's diagnosis. They said previously the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) were the main suppliers of foreign currency in the market. But, due to over-expenditures for oil import in the last one year they have run dry of foreign currency and turned into buyers themselves.

The BB too has stopped injecting foreign currency into the market, resulting in the present crisis, they argued. The bankers termed the central bank's blame on new-generation banks a politically motivated statement, as, they claimed, rather some first- and second-generation banks are suffering more from poor asset management and forex shortfall.

BPC to borrow

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\$1.54 billion for some 3.8 million metric tons of fuel. In the current fiscal year, the ministry estimates, the expenditure will be to the tune of \$2 billion.

Of the estimated import cost, the IDB would provide \$700 million, the energy ministry said in the proposal. As the BPC already owes some Tk 80 billion to the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) in outstanding loans and due to a worsening foreign currency scarcity, the NCBs have 'expressed reluctance' to offer any more money to the BPC, it explained. Bangladesh Bank too has refused to lend in order to avoid any further depletion of the already hard-pressed foreign exchange reserve, it added.

Against this backdrop, the energy ministry sought approval to borrow from the private sector to meet a part of the remaining amount needed to meet the country's import needs of petroleum.

StanChart offers the \$250 million loan on the condition of its repayment within nine months from the date of disbursement. The energy ministry expects to get the money within 30 to 40 days, Energy Adviser Mahmudur Rahman told the press after the cabinet committee meeting.

Mercury goes up

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, also in charge of the power ministry, was not in the House when the lawmakers were clamouring for power yesterday.

Acknowledging the countrywide shortfall in power supply, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud placed a district-wise list of demand and supply. It shows that supply is less than half of the demand during peak-hours.

The minister, however, said he hopes the situation will start changing for the better at the end of March when several power plants will resume production after overhauling.

In the power-hungry northern region, the situation in Bogra is better than that in the other districts. The minister said supply in the district was 45 MW against a demand of 55 MW on Tuesday.

In Narsingdi, the supply is equal to the demand, which is 48 MW a day, he added.

Replying to the main opposition Awami League (AL) lawmaker Sayedul Haq, he said the countrywide demand for power currently stands at 4,400 MW while production capacity of the power plants ranges between 3,500 to 3,700 MW, given that all plants are in operation.

The daily supply in Lalmonirhat was only nine MW against the demand of 19 MW, Iqbal said, answering a query from Mujibur Rahman, a Jatiya Party (Ershad) lawmaker from the northern district.

"The power supply in the district continues for not more than two hours a day," the JP lawmaker said, calling till for an immediate solution to the problem for the sake of agricultural production.

The state minister claimed that the power situation in the northern districts has improved after Boropukuria Thermal Power Station went into operation on Tuesday.

AL lawmaker Mirza Azam said the power crisis will cost the ruling BNP the next election. He alleged that the present government has failed to add a single MW of power to the national grid due mainly to corruption by the Hawa Bhaban men.

BNP lawmaker MA Hashem from Noakhali began the onslaught of queries. He wanted to know from the minister the situation in his district.

In reply, the minister informed the House that supply during the peak-hours in the district is 21.75 MW against a demand of 51.10 MW.

Responding to another question from BNP lawmaker SA Sultan from Chandpur, he said, "The present peak-hour supply in Chandpur is 21 MW while the demand is 45 MW."

Saleq Chowdhury, BNP lawmaker from Naogaon, told the House that his district gets only 18 MW a day when the demand is 60 MW.

JP (Ershad) lawmaker Moshir Rahman Ranga said farmers and

traders in his constituency have been agitating for power. A local market already observed a strike to press for the demand. He asked the minister to withdraw minimum charges for power if the authorities fail to ensure the supply.

In reply, Iqbal said, "Supply in Rangpur was 70 MW on Tuesday against the demand of 150 MW. We agree that power is in short supply during the peak-hours and for this, we'll have to go for equal distribution in all areas."