

EC sits today

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sought Tk 12 crore again from the finance ministry Tuesday.

The EC secretary also hinted yesterday they will seek more fund for printing of the updated voter list.

The finance ministry earlier allocated Tk 25 crore against the demand of Tk 40.86 crore.

In Netrokona, school students are allowed to apply for voting rights, and underage people have been engaged in updating the list in many places of the district, reports Our Correspondent.

Many assistant officers complained that some politicians compelled them to enrol underage students as voters.

Two Class IX students-- Amena Khatun, 14, Ruhul Amin, 15-- at the Boali High School in Khaliajuri upazila were drafted in as voters.

Referring not to be named, two assistant officers told The Daily Star they enrolled those underage students under the pressure of a leading BNP leader of the Netrokona district. "We also enrolled many underage students as voters due to this influential BNP leader," said an assistant staff.

Similar illegal enrolments were also reported in the Kalmakanda and Durgapur upazilas.

Thirteen-year-old maidservant Sony Begum from Biswanathpur village, 15-year-old day labourer Rasiduddin from Kamai village, 14-year-old Ahammed Hossain, 15-year-old Kamal Ahammed from Rankong village, and a class VIII student from Durgapur upazila got their way into the list under the pressure of local BNP leaders.

When contacted, assistant registration officers Humayan Kabir from Kalmakanda, Sajal Chandra Sarkar from Durgapur and Anwar Mahmud from Khaliajuri told this correspondent that they could not update the voter list properly because of the political factor.

In many areas of Khagrachhari, many eligible indigenous people were not made voters although some high school students got lucky, reports Our Correspondent.

Students Mrashang Marma, Ulapru Marma, Akroi Marma, and Nizam Uddin from Banghal Kathi of sadar upazilla were on those new underage voters.

Locals in Magura complained to Our Correspondent that enumerators were yet to visit some areas in the municipality.

Some locals also alleged a good number of people who moved to India in 2001 were enlisted as voters again. Some of them are Rabindranath Biswas, Joyshree Biswas, Sattendranath Biswas, Ganga Rani Biswas, Parimal Biswas, Anita Rani Biswas, Sushanta Biswas and Sunita Rani Biswas.

Though EC officials claimed yesterday they finished 90 percent job in Chittagong prospective voters in most of the city areas are still waiting for their visit, reports our Chittagong office.

Living in a building only 50 yards away from the district EC office,

residents alleged that nobody came to their building as yet. Suman Das, owner of the four-story building (house no-34/A) at the JM Sen Lane of the Jamal Khan Ward-21 said they are still waiting for assistant officials to come to their doors.

Reports on the same slow-paced update was also received from Mymensingh and Jessore.

EC officials did not visit nearly hundred of villages as well as many areas of the Jessore sadar district till Tuesday.

The bulk of the update works in Rajshahi is also yet to done.

District election officer Sayed Musa Ahmed said about 2.23 lakh were enrolled as new voters till yesterday.

France says US has reservations over Lebanon resolution

AFP, Paris

French President Jacques Chirac insisted Wednesday on an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon but admitted the United States had "reservations" over the wording of a UN resolution to end the conflict.

Chirac, speaking after crisis talks with senior cabinet ministers, warned the Israel-Lebanon conflict was a threat to the stability of the entire Middle East.

"Faced with this crisis, which threatens the stability of an entire region, France is fully mobilised... to secure a ceasefire and reach a durable settlement of this crisis," Chirac told reporters.

He voiced his confidence an agreement would be reached on a United Nations ceasefire resolution, though he admitted Paris and Washington -- co-sponsors of the draft text -- were divided over how far to take on Lebanon's demands.

"It seems indeed that there are American reservations towards adopting the proposal" integrating certain Lebanese demands, he said.

French and US diplomats were working Wednesday on a new draft resolution after Lebanon and Arab nations opposed an earlier text on the grounds that it did not call for Israel to withdraw its troops after a truce.

"I cannot imagine that we fail to reach a solution, because that would mean we accept the situation as it is and renounce calls for an immediate ceasefire, which would be the most immoral of solutions," Chirac said.

Chirac, who has close personal ties to Lebanon, describing the conflict as "a tragic succession of deaths, suffering and destruction... which each day brings new horrors."

"Nothing will be solved by force," he added, stressing that a "political agreement remains the key to reaching a solution."

Bangladesh lose warm-up tie

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's preparation for the coming South Asian Games suffered a shock when they went down to Thailand Under-20 side in a warm-up match in Thailand yesterday.

The Bangladesh U-23 footballers conceded a 75-minute goal in the match at Pattaya, according to a message received in Dhaka.

Bangladesh, who leave Bangkok for Colombo later tomorrow to take part in the 10th SA Games, will try to squeeze in another warm-up game in the morning.

Arrest warrants

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fabricated and baseless statements against him.

The statements were published prominently in two national dailies -- the News Today and the daily Inqilab, held the court.

The Bol chief also alleged that the accused tarnished his image and the image of the country as well, by providing false and defamatory statements to different national dailies.

The accused prominent citizens told journalists yesterday that they heard about the filing of the case against them but had yet to get any order or document in connection with it. They however decided to file a petition with the High Court this morning seeking anticipatory bail. Dr M Zahir, Mainul Husein, Mahmudul Islam, Roshuddin Mahmud, Amirul Islam, Shaheed Malik and Tanzib-ul-Alam will represent them as their counsels in the court.

"I know nothing," was the reaction of CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan as he was asked about the case and arrest warrants. Rehman Sobhan and other prominent citizens were attending a consultation meeting of Nagorik Committee 2006, formed for preparing a vision paper for Bangladesh in 2021.

"I heard about it but have yet to get any order or paper," said Debapriya Bhattacharya. Asked about the next step of CPD, its executive director said, "Let us get the information formally, then we will think about it."

"When I was coming to this meeting, I heard that a case was filed against me and a warrant of arrest was also issued," Laila Rahman Kabir told journalists while attending the consultation meeting in the Cirdap auditorium.

The Bol chief also alleged that the CPD board members while addressing the press conference on Tuesday termed him as a 'rajaker' (a collaborator with the invading Pakistani army during the War of Independence in 1971).

But, the CPD trustee board members categorically denied the allegation saying no such word was uttered by anyone in the press conference. "I did not call him a collaborator," Manzur Elahi said.

"What can I do if somebody files cases against me unnecessarily," Elahi said when asked about why Mahmudur had filed the case against him. "I don't know what crime I committed," he said.

Mahmudur Rahman while talking to some journalist in his office yesterday afternoon claimed that he had filed the case as a "common citizen" and not as the Bol chief.

"I filed the case as a common citizen and the government has no relation with it," he was quoted as saying.

He also said he will bear all the expenditure of the case himself and not with government money.

He said CPD Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya tarnished the image of the country and underestimated it, which is, according to him 'tantamount to sedition'.

The case was filed following a fiery debate between the Bol chief and CPD on the question of foreign investment flow into Bangladesh.

At the meeting with ERF Mahmudur blasted CPD for trying to portray a negative image of the country with a purposeful political motive. CPD denied the allegation and brushed aside the remarks saying that it had collected the information from survey questionnaires and official statistics.

"The remarks of the Bol executive chairman that CPD is a shameless liar and a conspirator, grossly violated the basic norms of public decorum and personal decency. We shall ignore all his crude and brash remarks on subjects beyond his competence as we feel embarrassed to discuss them" was the response of CPD executive director Debapriya Bhattacharya at Tuesday's news conference.

The meeting had detailed discussion on the road march programme at district levels which begins today at Bogra. The leaders also decided to go for more road march programmes at other districts and to mobilise a huge number of people in the movement for electoral reforms.

They decided to hold demonstrations across the country including in the capital on August 12 to protest the ongoing Israeli attacks on Lebanon.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, Jalli alleged that a vested quarter is hatching conspiracies to mislead people about the opposition's movement. He asked them to refrain from the politics of conspiracy.

He also reiterated that there would be no elections in Bangladesh until reforms in the caretaker government and in the Election Commission (EC) are implemented. Renewing their demand for the reconstruction of the EC to ensure free and fair polls in the country, Jalli said the updating of the voter list under this EC would not be acceptable.

Chaired by AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Ahmad, the meeting was also attended by Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjeet Sengupta, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Kazi Zafarullah, Obaidul Quader, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Huq Inu, Bimal Biswas, Mofidul Islam Khan Kamal, Abdus Samad, MA Gani, Asit Baron Roy and Zakir Hossain.

By using some unexpected and unwarranted words in the news, the newspaper has shown disregard and disrespect to the dignity of the Supreme Court, he alleged.

This type of derogatory report against the Supreme Court is a contemptuous offence, the petitioner said.

Advocate AY Moshuazzaman moved for the petitioner.

Shock at case

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have been filed are very respectable persons and are not likely to hatch conspiracy. "I have heard the statements made at the CPD conference over television and read about it in newspapers, but I did not find anything defamatory, he said.

"It is very unfortunate that it went to such an extreme level," said Mir Nasir Hossain, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

He said differences of opinions may occur but everybody should handle such things carefully. He said the flow of investment to the country increased but it might be low compared to other countries.

"It definitely comes as a surprise and it is regrettable that the warrant of arrest had been issued against eminent citizens of high standing on the alleged defamation issue," said Latifur Rahman, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI).

"We condemn the case as it would disrupt free thinking," said Quazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, president of the Bangladesh Economic Association.

The filing of the case was not a right action as any difference of opinion should be tackled with counter arguments. So the case should be withdrawn, he stated.

"The arrogant behaviour of Mahmudur Rahman at the fag end of power reflects a fascist mentality," said Abul Barakat, general secretary of the Bangladesh Economic Association.

Barakat said Mahmudur should seek apology and withdraw the case.

Khondoker Ibrahim Khaleed managing director of Pubali Bank said the case is a bad signal because it was filed against some

eminent persons.

The issuance of arrest warrant against such persons is a threat to democracy, free thinking, civilization and as well as to the country itself, he said.

Research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies Zaid Bakht said: "I thought Rahman was an intelligent person but he showed callousness by filing a case against persons like Rehman Sobhan and Monzur Elahi who are highly respected in the society and also performed as members of the caretaker government. What I understand by reading the statements made by both parties, the case should have been filed against Mahmudur."

4th Expert

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separate goals.

A steady state' population level, reduced neo-natal mortality and maternal mortality, increased awareness of women's reproductive issues, universal access to world-class primary healthcare, improved consumer awareness about food adulteration, universal access to safe water and sanitation and many other relevant issues will be deliberated and consulted upon at today's session.

The outline of the Vision 2021 has been drafted on the basis of recommendations and aspirations propagated by a large number of people attending the regional civil society dialogues at various places of Bangladesh, which are being organised by CPD, the Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channell.

The Nagorik Committee 2006 is now going through a process of consultation with expert groups about the draft outline.

WB, IMF to increase

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Wolfowitz and IMF Acting Managing Director Takatoshi Kato made the assurances in separate meetings with Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman in Washington on Tuesday.

The fifth review on the PRGF will take place early next month for the release of the sixth tranche of PRGF, according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

They stressed the importance of continued support of the World Bank in the form of DSCs and also effective implementation of the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) on which both the government and the Bangladesh country team of the World Bank are now jointly working.

"The bank will actively support the government in implementing the PRSP not only through release of DSC-IV within the stipulated time, but also through implementation of projects with scaled up assistance in the light of CAS," Wolfowitz was quoted to have assured Saifur Rahman.

"Budget support to the government for implementation of the PRSP will continue beyond DSC-IV," he further said, encouraging the minister to continue the pace of reforms as charted out in government's own PRSP.

He gave special emphasis in areas vulnerable to external shocks to sustain the hard-earned macro-economic stability.

Wolfowitz acclaimed Bangladesh's performance in social sector, economic growth and poverty reduction in last five years at a rate highest in South Asia region.

Saifur apprised the World Bank

president of the country's sustained macroeconomic stability despite unfavourable external environment resulting from higher commodity price, particularly soaring oil prices.

He also informed about the country's achievements in MDGs, particularly in the social sectors, and accelerated economic growth of about 7 percent last year.

IMF Acting Managing Director Takatoshi Kato assured the finance minister of another round of PRGF agreement with Bangladesh after successful completion of the ongoing one by the end of this year.

He commented the improvement in macroeconomic performance, including sustained growth with moderate inflation, progress in meeting MDGs and robust growth in exports and remittances.

Saifur apprised Kato of the measures taken to sustain the achievements already made and to accelerate domestic revenue mobilisation that has recorded substantial improvement over the last five years.

He, however, expressed concern about the rising oil prices, posing risk to macroeconomic stability in all countries, and called for an effective IMF facility to help poor countries to absorb the shock.

Bangladesh Ambassador to United States Shamsher M Chowdhury and World Bank Alternative Executive Director Zakir Ahmed Khan were present at the meetings.

Dhaka asks Bimstec

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could come into force on July 1, 2006.

"Clearly, we have missed the timeline. Given the current state of negotiations, my apprehension is that unless all member-countries demonstrate further flexibility and willingness to accommodate the concerns of all the member-states to ensure equitable trade, we may fail to see the larger canvass," he said.

Morshed said Bimstec, which brings together India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan, completes its first decade next year and the time has come to think of the road ahead for the regional grouping.

"We need to ponder over the charter of our group. This would be a very useful instrument at disposal of the member-states to carry on collaborative effort in a systematic manner for the benefit of the peoples of our countries," he said adding, "Our main objective in this regard should be to ensure effective delivery."

According to the Morshed, the Bimstec countries should think of goals and targets in identified areas of cooperation and what is needed is a result-oriented approach in different sectors.

In this context, Morshed proposed the Bimstec should review the agenda of regional cooperation on a project-based mode and think of an alternative to realise concrete sectoral projects.

"We need to review how far we have benefited from project-based approach to cooperation and whether we could think of any other way to realise concrete sectoral projects," he said.

He said Bimstec's activities have so far been inter-governmental in nature but "we really need to consider how best we could utilise the strength of a dynamic and innovative civil society that exist in our countries" to promote regional cooperation.

"By civil societies, I mean a range of stake-holders like think tanks, private sector entrepreneurs, businesses, NGOs," he said adding,

IU students

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appoint a new VC in his place.

Meanwhile, teachers of the university under the banner of Islamic University Teachers Association (IUTA) brought out a procession yesterday on campus and reiterated that the Chancellor Prime Minister Khaleda Zia take immediate measures to appoint a new VC from among the teachers of the university.

The university authorities cancelled the Syndicate meeting scheduled to be held yesterday amid the unrest on campus, sources in the administration said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the students locked up all departments and offices of the university and closed off the university main entrance blocking all traffic movement for four hours.

The students vowed to continue their programme until the crisis is resolved, while different political students' organisations of the university extended their support to the movement initiated by the general students.

The general student's agitation came after 20 days of deadlock in the university.

The deadlock was triggered by IUTA On July 19 in an urgent meeting - which declared suspension of classes and examinations and non-cooperation programmes after the government appointed Prof Karim as the acting VC on July 18.

The previous VC Prof Rafiqul Islam resigned on June 22 in wake of severe agitation by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of ruling BNP as he failed to appoint at least 200 BNP loyalists.

However, Prof Rafiq had appointed 162 BNP and Jamaat loyalists before his resignation.

Meanwhile, the recruitment by Prof Rafiq has been challenged by the High Court. Upon a write, a high court division bench on July 20 issued a rule on the IU authorities to explain within two weeks why the recruitment will not be declared illegal.

CPD protests

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press conference held at the CPD auditorium in the capital. These newspapers wrote that CPD Board of Trustee Manzur Elahi termed Mahmudur Rahman as a "Razakar" or 'collaborator', a CPD press release said.

"No such remarks were made in the press conference. CPD is strongly protesting those news items," clarified the press release.

20,000 acres

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parliamentary body.

"The grabbers are so powerful. They continue to grab land with the help of a section of government officials," Committee Chairman advocate Mahbub Rahman told reporters after the meeting.

Land worth Tk 60,000 crore to 70,000 crore have been illegally occupied across the country, he said expressing frustration over non-implementation of the committee's recommendations to recover the land.

About the identity of the grabbers, the committee chairman said mainly businessmen, industrialists and local elite are on the list.

Mahbub said the secretary of the land ministry has promised to submit the list of the grabbers at the next meeting of the committee. "We will make the list public to let people know about them."

According to the district administration, 3,273 grabbers including housing companies have occupied 7,993 acres of land in Dhaka.

In Narayanganj, 13,745 grabbers have gobbled up 4,207 acres of land while in Gazipur 13,934 encroachers have occupied 8,533 acres.

The committee chairman however said the actual amount of encroached land will be higher.

The committee also discussed the present status of forestland. "A huge chunk of forest lands has been grabbed in Gazipur and Savar areas," the committee chairman said.

Waterlogging

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meni, kattle, khailisha and taki have become extinct, Dipok Kamal, a professor of fisheries and marine resource technology of the KU, said.

He said the people in the area will now be dependent on fishing in the wetlands as there will be no agriculture due to salinity in the water, he said, adding that fish production in the beels will also be less due to shortage of natural foods.

He expressed fear that rise in riverbeds caused by growing siltation and sea level rise will result in waterlogging in almost all areas of Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira districts in 20 years.

Worse still, once the area is waterlogged there will be no way to drain out the stagnant water from the areas, he said.

Following construction of 37 polders and 282 sluice gates in the three districts in mid 60s, sedimentation in river channels started raising the riverbeds. Adjacent beels (wetlands) also subsided due to non-deposition of sediment, and a vast expanse of land gradually became permanently waterlogged.

Some two lakh hectares of land are now waterlogged while the number of affected people is around 12 lakh, according to Water Committee, a local civil society forum campaigning for measures to solve the problem of persistent waterlogging.

Around 80,000 hectares of land of the said area are badly waterlogged.

Implement verdict

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detect black money holders. The main task of the voters is not to elect such persons," he said.

Dr Kamal, also president of the Gono Forum, said the EC has to start collecting information about candidates in the next polls by appointing manpower and training them. Lawyers, accountants, media personnel and the civil society members can help it, he said.

Expressing his desire to be the first to be a volunteer in the process and to provide information about himself, he said the process requires mobilisation of the people. Information about the candidates should be made public to save the nation from the evil influence of black money holders, he noted.

In his keynote presentation, Dr Badiul Alam Majumder said that on May 24 last year, the HC gave a 'revolutionary' verdict that directed the EC to collect information about the candidates with their nomination papers and publicise those through the mass media.

According to Section 111 of the constitution, any verdict of the HC is like a law and Section 112 provides that implementation of HC verdicts is mandatory, he said. "But unfortunately, our Election Commission has failed to implement the verdict fully."

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice MA Aziz had remarked that implementation of the HC verdict is not mandatory since there is no provision of punishment in case of non-implementation of it.

Referring to this, Badiul, who is country director of the Hunger Project, said, "HC verdict can be 'directory' only in case of interpretation of law while all the other verdicts are mandatory."

He called for foiling the 'conspiracy' against voters' right to information about candidates.

Moderating the roundtable, Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said the EC does not understand the HC verdict that results in its non-implementation before the elections. "It can be considered if any change in the legal

structure is needed in case of implementing the HC verdict."

Reforms of the EC is a must, and the two major political parties have to sit together to discuss the reform issues, he said.

Supreme Court Bar Association President Barrister Amir Ul-Islam said democratic institutions are being destroyed through politicisation.

The HC verdict on the voters' right to know about candidates is certainly mandatory but is not being enforced, he noted.

Stressing empowerment of voters, Justice Abdur Rouf said politicians do not want laws that go against their interests.

Dr Tofaif Ahmed of Chittagong University suggested that electoral rules should provide for programme where candidates will face questions from voters.

Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury of Gonoshasthya Kendra said a provision should be included in electoral rules that persons aged less than 18 cannot take part in election campaigns. "This (campaigning) leads them to crimes and drug addiction as they get money from political parties."

Bangladesh Economic Association President Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad stressed an integrated process to raise public awareness both in urban and rural areas.

Speakers included former secretary Muizul Haque, Major Generals (Rtd) Moinul Hussain Chowdhury and Syed Muhammad Ibrahim, Awami League (AL) leader Abdul Matin Khasru and Dr Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfaz Anam gave the welcome speech while Prothom Alo Joint Editor Abdul Quaim conducted the programme.

World oil prices

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September delivery jumped 50 cents to 78.05 dollars per barrel in electronic trading, not far from its all-time peak of 78.64 dollars reached on Monday.

New York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in September, climbed 29 cents to 76.60 dollars per barrel in electronic deals before the official opening of the US market.

However the contract was a long way off its historic record of 78.40 dollars per barrel reached in mid-July as violence erupted in Israel and Lebanon.

"Crude futures gained ground this morning awaiting data that is expected to show declining crude and gasoline (petrol) inventories in the US," Succden analyst Michael Davies said.

"In addition, continued violence in the Middle East is still supporting oil prices, with Israeli forces pushing deeper into southern Lebanon and facing fierce resistance" from the Lebanese Hezbollah militia.

The US Department of Energy was to publish its latest weekly snapshot of US energy inventories at 1430 GMT. According to analysts' consensus forecast, the data should reveal that stockpiles of US crude and motor

fuel each dropped by one million barrels last week.

"Figures above these predictions may see the market revisit Monday's highs," Bank of Ireland analyst Paul Harris said.