

Slain judge's wife wants quick execution

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Pallabi Pandey Rita, widow of the killed judge Jagannath Pandey, expressed her satisfaction over yesterday's High Court verdict that confirmed the capital punishment of seven Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militant leaders and demanded immediate execution of the sentence.

After hearing the verdict of death references of the top leaders and killers of JMB, Pallabi's father rushed to Barisal branch of United Commercial Bank and took Pallabi, who works as a junior officer there, and took her to their home on the Fishery Road in the city at noon.

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JUDGES KILLING
Death sentence to 7 JMB kingpins upheld

Quick execution of verdict expected if appeal not made

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The High Court (HC) yesterday confirmed death sentences to seven militant leaders of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) including its five kingpins for killing two judges in Jhalakathi as it found the trial court's judgment appropriate.

The government and state lawyers believe that the punishment to the seven Islamist militants can be executed before the ruling coalition government's tenure ends on October 28 provided the convicts do not appeal against the verdict with the Appellate Division within 30 days.

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Abdur Rahman Bangla Bhal

PHULBARI
Celebrations all around, but doubt about govt pledge

BISHAWJIT DAS and KANGKON KARMAKER, from Phulbari

Phulbari people yesterday celebrated victory of their movement even though there was an air of doubt among them if the government would actually fulfil their demands which it agreed to on

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PM asks army to be alert against division

Says attack on independence can come from within too

UNB, Bogra

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has urged members of the armed forces to remain alert against any division, confusion and anarchy that can weaken the national unity and defence.

"In the present age, the concept of national defence has undergone a lot of change. Attack on national independence and sovereignty not only comes from outside the coun-

try, but also from within," she said while addressing a darbar of army at Bogra Cantonment yesterday.

Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed and Area Commander Major General Manirul Islam received the prime minister on her arrival at the cantonment.

The prime minister has expressed her firm belief that members of the armed forces will play an effective role in holding the forthcoming general elections in a free, fair and neutral manner, as they did in the past.

"As per provision of the constitution, a caretaker government will take over on expiry of tenure of the coalition government in October and will arrange a free, and fair election in the country," she said.

The prime minister assured members of the armed forces that the government would keep up the

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550 shanties gutted in slum fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 20 people were hurt and over 550 shanties were gutted in a devastating fire at a slum at Basila in Mohammadpur in the capital early yesterday.

The fire, believed to be originated from a candle, left around 2,500 dwellers homeless. Their sufferings increased in the pelting rain in the morning.

The injuries were caused when panic-stricken people were rushing out of their shanties for safety.

Eight shops, three auto-tempos and a minibus parked inside a makeshift garage adjacent to the slum were also burnt down in the blaze.

Witnesses said a group of fire-victims turned unruly and pelted stones on a fire fighting vehicle

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Despair overwhelms Hashi Begum after a fire gutted around 550 slum houses at Mohammadpur in the capital in the early hours Thursday.

Asia Energy seeking clarification from govt

AEX, London

Asia Energy PLC said it is seeking clarification from the Bangladesh government on its proposed 1.4 billion usd open pit coal mine project in the northern town of Phulbari.

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Babar sees good reasons for unrest, wants workers demands met

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday said there were good reasons behind the recent unrest in the garment sector and urged the owners to

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ASIA ENERGY
Govt's handling puts country in sticky stew

SHARIER KHAN

The BNP-led alliance government is caught between a rock and a hard place over the Asia Energy deal as its cancellation implies serious international reaction and arbitration but its continuation by going against public sentiment appears impossible.

Highly placed sources said the government is unconfident about

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WARD 40
Revised voter list sent to BNP leader's house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Instead of keeping the updated voter list on public display at his office, as directed by the Election Commission (EC), a city ward commissioner has sent most of the revised roll of his area to the ward unit BNP president's house.

Anwaruzzaman Anwar, commissioner of ward No 40 of Dhaka City Corporation and a ruling BNP leader, however, told reporters that he has sent only a portion of the voter list to the BNP office at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar "for the convenience of the locals".

Later the same day some

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MINIMUM WAGE FOR RMG WORKERS
New agitation from today as deadline expires

MONJUR MAHMUD

As the three-month deadline for fixing minimum wage for the garment workers ended yesterday without any settlement on the issue, different workers' organisations have announced fresh programmes including street agitation from today.

Following the severe labour unrest in the country's premier export-earning garment sector, the government formed a minimum wage board on 31 May and asked it to recommend a pay structure for the workers within three months but the last meeting of the board held on August 29 ended without any decision.

Questioning the sincerity of the garment owners, leaders of different workers' organisations blamed them for ignoring the workers' interest.

"The owners are simply playing a game with us and dilly-dallying in settling the minimum wage for the workers. Labour unrest will recur if they don't resolve the issue within a couple of days," Nazma Akhter, who represents workers in the six-member board, told The Daily Star.

While the garment owners have stuck to their position of offering Tk 1,300 a month, the workers are demanding Tk 3,000 as the minimum wage.

The garment owners also

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Ex-bureaucrat made new EC
Govt yet to announce formally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a sudden move, the government yesterday appointed former bureaucrat Mahmud Hasan Mansur as an election commissioner, raising the number of members in the Election Commission (EC) to four.

On the advice of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, President Iajuddin Ahmed last evening gave his seal of approval to the appointment, said Bangabhaban sources.

However, the government did not yet make a formal announcement regarding the appointment. Rather the matter was kept so secret that even the secretary of the EC Secretariat and registrar of the EC Secretariat, who are usually closely related to the conduct of oath for an election commissioner,

could not say when the ceremony will take place.

"I haven't received any notification to this effect. We will arrange an oath-taking to be administered by the chief justice only on receipt of the notification," Fazlul Karim, registrar of the Supreme Court, told The Daily Star last night.

He said the EC Secretariat usually sends a notification of such appointment with a request for organising an oath-taking.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Secretary of the EC Secretariat Abdur Rashid Sarkar said he does not know anything about it.

The Supreme Court registrar said if any such appointment had been given, the oath-taking of the new entrant to the commission

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New alliance Jatiya Oikya Front launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new alliance, Jatiya Oikya Front (JOF), made up of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB), Jatiya Oikya Manch and Tarikat Federation, was launched yesterday.

BDB President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, Jatiya Oikya Manch President Dr Kamal Hossain and Tarikat Federation Chairman Syed Najibul Bashar Majibhandari jointly declared the new alliance aimed at bringing a meaningful and qualitative change in political and state affairs, electing honest and competent public representatives and establishing an effective parliament.

They said the alliance would not participate in the next parliamentary elections without reforms in the caretaker government and the Election Commission.

The joint declaration came at a press conference at the National Press Club, where BDB Secretary General Major (Rtd) Abdul Mannan read out the joint declaration while

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Telecom Secy hid deal irregularities
Huawei's optical fibre, VoIP schemes under question

ABU SAEED KHAN

The telecommunication secretary had misled the government by not revealing gross irregularities in the two deals that were slipped through the cabinet purchase committee on August 21. These controversially structured multi-million dollars deals with Huawei Technology of China now await the prime minister's approval.

One of them is a \$3.5 million contract to deploy an optical fibre transmission link between Dhaka and Rajshahi. The planning ministry's Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) had repeatedly alerted the telecoms secretary that Huawei has "created the opportunity to influence the decision" in its favour by hosting overseas trips for the officials who

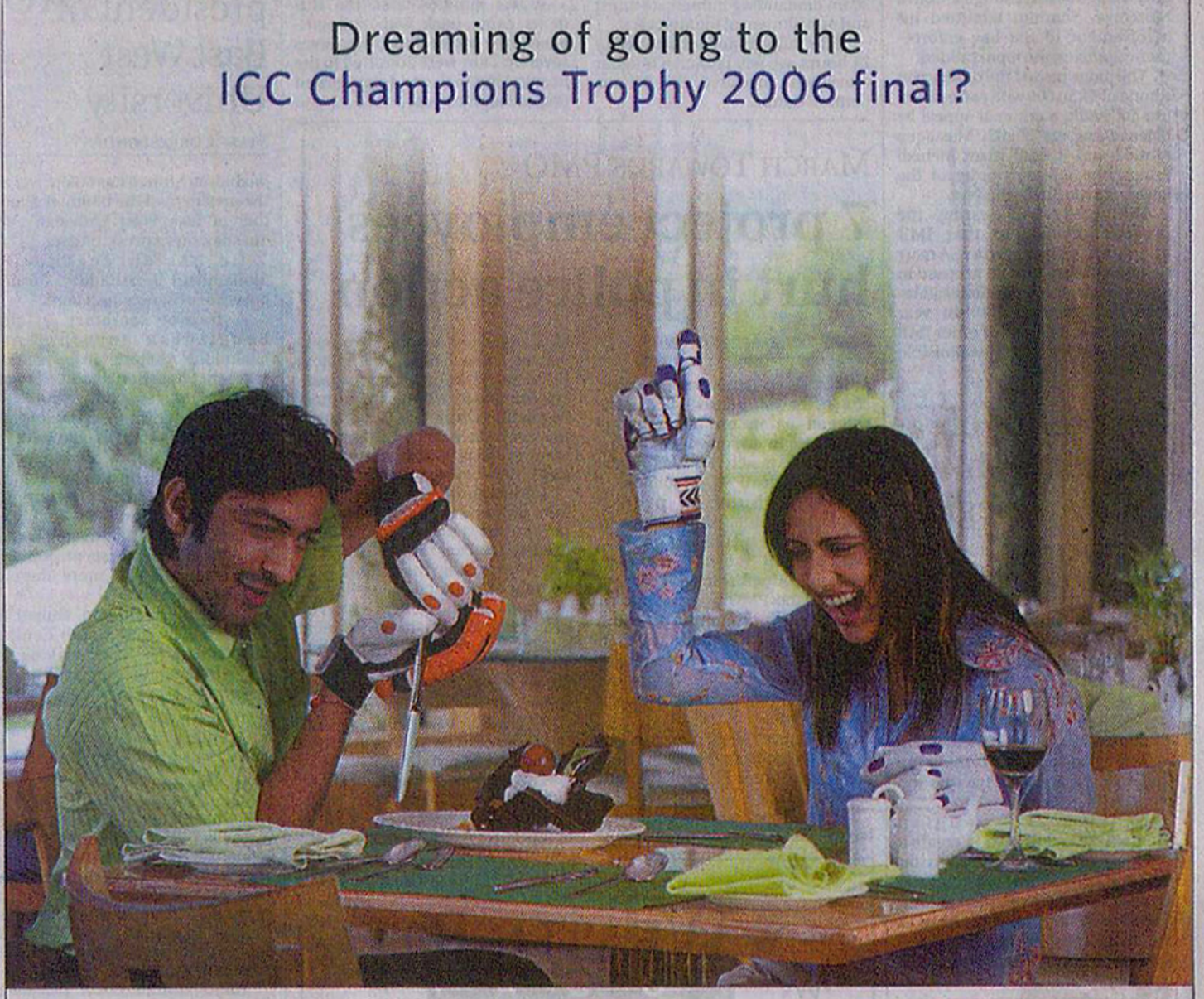
evaluated this bid.

CPTU in letters to the secretary in March, April and June this year has labelled the Huawei-funded foreign trips as "conflict of interest". It has asked him to cancel Huawei's bid for 'corrupt practices' and blacklist the company according to regulation 15 of the Public Procurement Regulation 2003.

The purchase proposal that the telecoms secretary has signed, however, mentions nothing about the consecutive warnings. Therefore, the uninformed cabinet purchase committee stamped this deal in favour of Huawei and passed it over to the PM's nod.

The telecoms ministry has similarly misled the cabinet purchase committee and had \$3.6 million VoIP platform procurement deal,

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