

Babar wants probes

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with ranks of SPs and above attended the meeting which is likely to be the last of its kind during the tenure of the present government.

In the meeting police and Rab officials placed their problems and demands. The policemen mentioned their transportation problem prominently. In reply Babar said a large number of motor vehicles have been imported and many are still in the pipeline.

Regarding a demand for water transports for the police, the state minister said it is not possible during the time left of the tenure of this government. Regarding a request for loans for buying personal motorcycles for police personnel, Babar asked the officials to put forward a proposal to the Police Headquarters as soon as possible so that he may consider it, meeting sources said.

According to the sources, the state minister said the police worked hard in the last four years and 11 months to maintain law and order and the situation is better than any other time before. He asked the police officials to work hard during the remaining time of the present government's tenure so that it may leave a congenial atmosphere for the caretaker government.

Expressing satisfaction over the militant issue, Babar said arrests and trials of militants have been most successful events in the history of Bangladesh. He said successful arrests and trials of the militants brought kudos for the nation.

The state minister said within a month three bighas of land will be

Hamas defies

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A deal on a unity government was reached on September 11 and Palestinians hope it will lead to a lifting of Western sanctions imposed on Hamas when it took office in March.

Talks on the coalition's formation have faltered since and Abbas, whose Fatah party was defeated by Hamas in January's elections, has accused Hamas of reneging on the deal.

Criminal killed

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Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared him dead, the sources said.

They further said Parvez was an accused in five cases, including three for murder. He had close links with 'Daka' Shaheed, they added.

Parvez's brother Mohammad Tofayal said Parvez was a welding mechanic and not involved in any criminal activities.

He alleged that Parvez was a Jubo League activist and implicated in false cases due to local political rivalry.

Parvez was granted bail in a case last month, said Tofayal.

Essentials

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Gram, an important item, is selling between Tk 68 to 70 but two or three days ago its retail price was Tk 65-66.

The price of lentil was Tk 60-62 three days ago and now it is sold at Tk 65, the wholesalers of Karwan Bazar said.

A 50-kg sack of gram that was sold at Tk 2,830-2,870 three days ago now is selling at Tk 3,050-3,170, a wholesaler said, adding that lentil that sold at Tk 2,950 three days ago, now is selling at Tk 3,060 in wholesale market.

The retailers and wholesalers have blamed each other for unusual rise in the prices of essentials. Retailers said hoarding of essential commodities by the wholesalers is responsible for the soaring prices while the wholesalers said the retailers are making a brisk business by bumping up prices.

Visiting several city markets during the last couple of days, The Daily Star correspondent observed sharp rise in the prices of essentials in the recent time.

For the last one month, prices of potato, onion, garlic, muri (puffed rice), chira (parched rice), wheat, flour, pulses, tea, packet liquid milk, vernicelli, Isabgol bhushi, ghee and edible oil have been rising rapidly.

Durga Puja

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our biggest festival under tight security of police, Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) or BDR (Bangladesh Rifles). But, what can we do when vested quarters damage the idols of Durga?" said Nim Chandra Bhowmik, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad and senior vice-president of Bangladesh Puja Ujyapan Parishad.

"We request the home ministry to arrange sufficient security so that devotees can celebrate the puja peacefully," he said while addressing a press conference organised by Bangladesh Puja Ujyapan Parishad at the Dhakeswari National Temple in Dhaka.

The five-day long Durga Puja begins on September 28. The Hindu devotees yesterday celebrated the Mahalaya, ceremonial invocation of goddess Durga.

"We met with State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar on August 23 and he assured us that the home ministry will provide sufficient security and take stern action against those involved with idol damaging. But we are still receiving news of vandalising the idols every day," said Birendra Chandra Saha, general secretary of Bangladesh Puja Ujyapan Parishad.

Meanwhile, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Anwarul Iqbal yesterday said around one lakh 22 thousand ansars will be deployed at the puja mandaps across the country

allotted to the police for a Police Welfare Trust.

Earlier, IGP Anwarul Iqbal addressed the meeting when he spoke about different issues ranging from security during the upcoming Durga Puja and Ramadan, to steps taken for strengthening the police force, curbing militancy, police's role in UN missions, increasing the number of officials in the special branch, and top listed criminals.

The IGP also said from now on a deputy inspector general of police will decide how much force will be required to ensure security for the prime minister's visit to a district. He said currently for a half-hour programme of the prime minister, an SP who is in charge of looking after the prime minister's security, sometimes wants 7,000 police personnel from the headquarters, which not only increases the pressure on the force, but also causes loss to the government exchequer.

He said the number of armed police battalions will soon be increased to 12 from the existing 10. He urged the state minister to increase the number to 18. He said now Rab is provided with all the facilities, but Armed Police Battalion members are not getting much.

Dhaka, Delhi for resolving river disputes

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Fresh from a joint inspection of three common rivers with Bangladesh, India yesterday voiced confidence of resolving disputes over these while noting that further discussions were needed on some technical details to reach a consensus.

Indian Water Resources Minister Saifuddin Soz said his week-long visit along with his Bangladeshi counterpart Hafizuddin Ahmed to the river sites in West Bengal, Tripura and Chittagong had led to "better appreciation and understanding of the genuine needs" of the local people and the developmental requirements of the region.

The next meeting of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) will be called here soon to push efforts to find a solution to the problems related to three rivers—Ichhamati, Feni and Muhuri, including the pressing ones like soil erosion.

With regard to soil erosion on Ichhamati river in Tripura which requires urgent redressal, the two sides reached an understanding for joint dredging, desilting and construction of embankments at the 21 km-long problematic portions, he said.

The estimated cost of Rs 25 crore expected to be incurred on it will be borne by the Indian side but Bangladeshi engineers will be involved in the construction of the embankment, Soz said.

"An agreement is possible on these three rivers and we shall work for this," the minister said, pointing out that there was a "broad understanding" between the two countries.

Robbery in old Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

Armed robbers looted valuable worth over Tk10 lakh from a house at Gobinda Dutta Lane in the city's Sutrapur area early yesterday.

Police quoted the family members as saying that a gang of 10 entered the house of businessman Nurul Islam by cutting the window grill at about 3:30am.

They confined the inmates in a room at gunpoint and took away Tk 70,000, gold ornaments, several mobile phone sets and other valuables.

On information, police visited the spot in the morning. They could not arrest any of the gang as of 8:00pm yesterday.

along with police, BDR and Rab to avoid any untoward situation.

"We have identified the high- and low-risk puja mandaps: 8,209 mandaps are marked as high-risk centres, 5,226 are low-risk while 6,180 are risk-free. Eight ansars will be deployed at every high-risk puja mandaps, six at every less vulnerable mandaps and three at the risk-free mandaps," Anwarul Iqbal said at a meeting with top police officers at the Police Headquarters yesterday.

Major General (ret'd) CR Dutta, president of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad and chief adviser of Bangladesh Puja Ujyapan Parishad, said they have directed the district committees not to use loudspeakers and musical instruments at the time of Ifar, Tarabi prayers and Sehri.

He said drums can be used for a short time during the offering of puja and Arati in the evening.

The Puja Ujyapan Parishad has already set the schedules for immersion of idols of Durga through processions on October 2 to avoid any untoward incident. Immersion and processions will take place from 2:00pm to 5:00pm, 6:30pm to 7:30pm, and after 9:00pm, the leaders said.

Around 19,000 puja mandaps have been set up across the country, 156 of them in the capital.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

With hope to find the missing ones after Tuesday's heavy storm in the Bay of Bengal, rescue workers and relatives wait at the Kuakata beach yesterday.

Dhaka, Delhi for effective steps to reduce border tension

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and India have agreed to take effective steps to reduce border tension and cooperate with each other for curbing cross-border crimes.

The consensus came during a four-day border conference between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in Kolkata that concluded on Thursday. Deputy Director General of BDR Brig Gen SM Golam Rabbani headed the Bangladesh delegation at the conference while Inspector General (IG) of BSF North Bengal Frontier SR Tewari led the Indian side at the conference.

BDR raised the issue of keeping the 'Tin Bigha' corridor open round-the-clock and setting up of electric lights in the enclave.

In reply, BSF pledged to take up the issue with the authorities concerned of their government.

The conference decided that land survey departments of the two countries would speed up the handing over of possession of newly surveyed 766 acres of land to Bangladesh.

The conference welcomed the initiative aimed at solving some land problems on the Kushtia and Nadia borders through DC and DM level discussion.

The BDR side strongly protested the killing of unarmed Bangladeshis by BSF without any reason. The BSF side did not deny the allegation, but failed to give a suitable reply in this regard, said a press release.

Unprovoked firing and killing of unarmed Bangladeshis by BSF, smuggling of goods, including arms and explosives, into Bangladesh from India, intrusion into Bangladesh by BSF and Indian citizens were among the issues raised by BDR.

Abduction and detention of Bangladeshis by BSF, push-in of Bangla-speaking Indian nationals into Bangladesh, publishing adverse information against Bangladesh and BDR by Indian media and undertaking steps for enhancing mutual friendship and understanding also came up for discussion.

14-party

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organisation were severely injured in the police actions that day.

The 14-party will demonstrate against the price hike of essentials on September 28 and against the continuing power crisis on October 6.

The opposition leaders chalked up the programmes at an emergency meeting immediately after the September 21 hartal. AL chief called the hartal and road-rail-waterway blockade programmes at the grand rally on September 18.

AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader told The Daily Star yesterday that the movement for electoral reforms will continue. "After the demonstrations against police atrocities, price hike and power crisis, we will announce a number of programmes to realise the demand for reforms."

Quader, a close aide to AL President Sheikh Hasina, said they will go for vigorous agitation during the last days of the present government.

Besides the rally on Monday, the opposition parties sought to lay siege to the Prime Minister's Office on September 12 and Election Commission Secretariat on September 6.

The government, which remains indifferent to the demand for reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems, tackled the opposition programmes with an iron fist. Lawmakers and leaders including Hasina's political secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Mohammad Nasim MP, Asaduzzaman Nur MP and Hazi Mohammad Selim were badly beaten up by the police during the street agitation between September 6 and September 12.

After the Ramadan, the opposition combine will look to press home the one-point demand for ouster of the BNP-Jamaat government in order for the reforms to be carried out.

By this time, they will go for light programmes to ensure continuity of the campaign for reforms.

The programmes during the Ramadan might be confined to street agitation and laying siege to government installations, AL sources said adding that they have to consider the people's side as well while taking up a programme.

Bimal Biswas, a senior leader of the 14-party and general secretary of the Workers Party, told The Daily Star that everything regarding the next programmes depends on the government's stance on the reform proposals.

Experts fear adviser

UNB, Dhaka

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KM Hasan who is supposed to be the head of the next caretaker government in accordance with the existing constitutional provision to take the oath of office after the tenure of the present government expires. Once the chief adviser is appointed, the president will appoint ten more advisers in consultation with the chief adviser.

"But I personally believe, none of the efficient and neutral persons will agree to become advisers to the next caretaker government unless the prevailing situation is changed," Hafizuddin said.

"Formation of the caretaker government will not be completed until the ten other advisers take oath," he added.

Echoing the same view another adviser to a caretaker government, ASM Shajahan told The Daily Star yesterday, "Formation of the next caretaker government will definitely face difficulties. If the existing environment continues, the tendency of not joining the posts of advisers among the prospective persons will prevail and they will hesitate to accept posts in the caretaker government."

In defence of his observation, Shajahan said the caretaker government will have to carry out a lot of difficult tasks including depoliticization of the administration to create a level playing field for a free and fair election.

"But in the prevailing situation, who will agree to be advisers after perceiving that they will not be able to work freely since the possible chief of the next caretaker government has already become a subject of a controversy?" he said.

Moreover, the enormous controversy at home and abroad surrounding the Election Commission (EC), especially Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz, does not make the situation any easier. The opposition coalition has in its demands very prominently the issue of reforming the current EC including ousting of Aziz from the post of its chief. The opposition so far has been quite unyielding on its position that it will not participate in the next election with Aziz at the helm of the EC flanked by three other controversial commissioners SM Zakaria, Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and Mahmud Hasan Mansur.

Wishing anonymity, another adviser to a caretaker government told The Daily Star that the country's democratic process seems to be heading for a disaster.

"If the situation remains unchanged, formation of the next caretaker government may be delayed and the present government may continue for more days," he said adding, "Then holding the next parliamentary election on time will become uncertain."

Both Hafizuddin and Shajahan apprehended that the law and order situation might deteriorate ahead of the formation of the next caretaker government.

The political arena is quickly becoming turbulent and confrontational with time running out fast ahead of the next parliamentary election as all signs predict that the tenure of the government is set to be expired without resolving the heated issue of electoral reforms.

"Serious anarchy will prevail in the country if the ongoing political crisis continues," Hafizuddin said.

Hazaribagh tanneries

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Tk 81.75 crore ETP to be set up at the new site," said Sohrab Hossain, project director of DTEP.

"We are now developing the infrastructure by building roads, drains and other structures needed for the massive relocation job," Hossain said.

President of BFLFEA Tipu Sultan said the government will have to bear the cost of relocation as agreed upon during the signing of the agreement prior to the launching of the project.

"The government knows very well that we will incur a huge loss during relocation, we have to buy new machinery replacing the old ones used in Hazaribagh," Sultan said.

"We have asked for soft bank loans for setting up modern tannery units at the new location as the sector has a huge potential since competitors like China and India are fast shutting their tanneries on

cautioned adding, "The severity of the coming situation might be such that it might not even be imaginable at this moment."

ASM Shajahan, also a former boss of the police, said the caretaker government, if formed, will face challenges in controlling deteriorated law and order situation.

Referring to the police atrocities on opposition senior leaders during the recent opposition demonstrations, a former senior bureaucrat cautioned that the situation might become more violent if the police continue their brutality on senior opposition leaders and lawmakers.

"Incidents like Kansat and Phulbaria uprisings might spring up in many areas in the country if the prevailing situation continues," he feared.

The experts stressed the need for resolving the issue of electoral reforms during the remaining time of the present government's tenure.

"The caretaker government does not have jurisdiction to resolve the crisis centring the proposals for electoral reforms as it might require amendment to the constitution, especially regarding who will control the armed forces during the interim government," Shajahan said.

EC secretariat

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EU mission member Hannah Robert inquired Justice Rouf, also president of Council for National Agenda (CNA), about how the EC and media role in election can be strengthened at the closed-door meeting at CNA office in Dhanmondi, sources said.

Robert, who refused to reveal any details of the meeting, told reporters, "We are gathering useful information about the next general election of Bangladesh... We are here as part of assessing Bangladesh's pre-election environment."

Former secretary Shah Abdul Hannan and National Press Institute President Sadek Khan, among others, were present at the meeting.

Ties with Thai

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On Lebanon, the foreign secretary said Bangladesh will make specific decision shortly about joining the UN peacekeeping in south Lebanon.

"We've to be satisfied with ourselves about terms and conditions and I think some progress has been made in discussion with the agencies concerned in New York. More discussions will take place with them and we will be able to make specific decision shortly," he told the newsmen.

On Wednesday, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan had a meeting with his Lebanese counterpart Fawzi Salloukh in New York when Lebanon welcomed Bangladesh's willingness to participate in the expanded UNIFIL.

At Havana Nam summit, he said, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan called for restoration of full sovereignty of the Lebanese people and finding immediately "a just and equitable solution" to the Middle East problem and ensuring full sovereignty of the Palestinians.

Wall collapse kills three during rain

UNB, Dhaka

Three people, including two girls, were killed in wall collapse in Chapainawabganj and Natore during heavy rain yesterday and on Thursday night.

In Chapainawabganj, police and locals said two girls died and two others were injured as mud walls of two houses collapsed on them during downpour at Jugidanga village under Sadar upazila at midnight on Thursday.

The victims are Shuktara, 7, Shirin, 11. Shuktara's mother Shanti and auntie Sumita were admitted to Sadar Hospital with critical injuries.

In Natore, a man was killed in wall collapse in Gurudaspur upazila yesterday.

Locals said Abdur Rahim, 29, of Khujipur village died on the spot when the mud wall of his house collapsed on him at 2:30 pm.

Jhalakathi trial

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September 18, 2006, and sent it to the Jhalakathi trial court on Wednesday for execution of the death sentences immediately.

As a Supreme Court staff accompanied by a six-member armed police escort team reached Jhalakathi with the copy of the judgment of the death reference and death sentence confirmation order early Thursday, the court papers were at first put under the custody of Habibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Jhalakathi Sadar Police Station.

Now all legal and official procedures to execute the death sentences of the JMB leaders and killers have been completed, sources said, adding that it may take a few days as six detained convicted are now in different jails and sub-jail out of the jurisdiction of Jhalakathi trial court.

JMB's bomb squad killed Jagannath Pandey and Shahid Sohel Ahmed, two senior assistant judges of Jhalakathi district judge court, by a bomb attack on the microbus carrying them near the Jhalakathi judges' court compound on November 14, 2005.

After considering the confessional statements of the accused, witnesses and other pieces of evidence placed by the state prosecution, the trial court sentenced seven accused including top JMB leaders Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal, Khaleed Saifullah, and assassin Iftakhar Hassan Al-Mamun — all in custody and absconding regional leader of JMB Asadul Islam Arif, on May 29, 2006.

Half-trained

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ruling BNP's student wing, and Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of BNP's coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami.

They were involved in JCD and Shibir activities in educational institutions at upazilas and districts across the country.

Newspapers recently carried stories with detailed information on these JCD and Shibir men.

Some of these activists were arrested and taken on remand in connection with the Ramna Batamul bombing incident, the case of which is pending. One of these SIs was arrested in Bogra for militant activities.

Earlier, the present government shortened the field-level training of 203 assistant superintendents of police (ASPs) recruited through the controversial 24th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations by three months to ensure their posting within its tenure.

Many of these ASPs and SIs were seen during police action against the opposition in the capital recently, said another senior police official, requesting anonymity.

"It is like giving any authority to operate upon a patient before completing the medical course successfully," he said.

However, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Anwarul Iqbal denied that the postings of the SIs at police stations were made for the upcoming election and blamed it on the accommodation problem.

The SIs will complete their training in phases, the IGP told The Daily Star yesterday.

Thai junta wins

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months of street protests demanding his ousting over alleged abuse of power and corruption.

Sonthi has promised new elections for October 2007, saying he would resign from power in two weeks and hand over to an interim premier.

"There are more than five people under consideration, and I expect he will be named soon," said Air Chief Marshal Chalit Pukbasuk, one of the coup leaders, who declined to give names.

Among those reportedly considered for the post are Supachai Panitchpakdi, former head of the World Trade Organization and chairman of the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

Other names include the president of the Supreme Court, one of the king's top advisers, and the governor of the Bank of Thailand. So far the junta has imposed martial law, banned political activities and public gatherings, annulled the constitution and slapped restrictions on the media. It has also assumed legislative powers after dismissing parliament.

A small group of Thai students and democracy activists staged a protest in Bangkok last evening despite the ban.

Investors remained uneasy, with shares down by more than 1.5 percent Friday to hit a two-month low.

Thaksin had been facing mounting public anger over corruption allegations, which boiled over in January when his family avoided paying tax after selling nearly two billion dollars worth of shares.

He called a new election in April to shore up support — his party is Thailand's largest and he remains popular among the poor — but the vote was a shambles and eventually invalidated.

Thaksin was also fiercely criticised for his failure to tackle a militant Islamic uprising in the south that has killed more than 1,400 people in nearly three years.

Auditor general Jaruvan Maintaka told newspaper that several long-standing corruption probes into Thaksin's government could wrap up within days, notably over the purchase of high-tech CTX bomb scanners for Bangkok's airport.

"We're confident we can pinpoint the wrongdoers," she said. The junta said it was still considering what to do with Thaksin's vast assets.

In London, where he has a home and where his daughter is studying, Thaksin accepted his five years as premier were over.

A statement issued by his aides urged the regime to quickly arrange a new general election, adding: "Dr Thaksin as of now will take a deserved rest."

In Bangkok, the government threatened to shut down media which violate new restrictions on radio call-in shows, websites and text messaging.

"We have asked for cooperation, but violators ... could face a shutdown of their businesses," Thaneerat Siritachana, the technology ministry official in charge of enforcing the rules, told AFP.

Pressure group Amnesty International called on the leaders to uphold human rights. "No one should be penalised for their peaceful exercise of the rights of freedom of expression, association or assembly," it said.

In Thaksin's home village, meanwhile, residents said they were stunned by the fall from power but believed he would be premier again.

US threatened

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been a classic failure to communicate, I just don't know."

"US policy was not to issue bombing threats," Snow said. "US policy was to say to President Musharraf, 'We need you to make a choice.'"

In his meeting with Musharraf, Bush is playing middle man in a thorny foreign policy problem that has bubbled up between Islamabad and Afghanistan two US allies in the war on terrorism who accuse each other of not doing enough to crack down on extremists.

Following his meeting with Musharraf, Bush will have talks Tuesday with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Then, they'll have a three-way sitdown on Wednesday.

Bush must work to placate the concerns of Pakistan, which is helping the United States track Osama bin Laden and restrain bin Laden's al-Qaeda organisation, as well as the struggling democratic government in Afghanistan, which is suffering its heaviest insurgent attacks since US-led troops toppled the Taliban in late 2001.

Afghan officials have alleged repeatedly that Taliban militants are hiding out in neighboring Pakistan and launching attacks across the border into Afghanistan. Pakistan, which has deployed 80,000 troops along the border, rejects the accusation and says it's doing all it can to battle extremists.

"This isn't about pointing fingers at one another," State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey said Thursday. "What this is about is finding ways that we can all work together to be able to achieve our common objectives, which is a free, secure and independent Afghanistan; a secure Pakistan border area as well."

Musharraf is strongly defending a truce he recently signed with Taliban-linked militants in the tribal North West Frontier Province where his government has little control. Under the terms of that deal, Pakistani troops agreed to end their military campaign against

Buddhist monk Phra Arnon Suthiyano said he supported Thaksin because of his work to help the country's poor.

"I still cannot believe the coup has happened," he said in San Kamphaeng, 700km north of Bangkok.