

‘Amend article 70’

JP chief urges in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party Chairman and Deputy Leader of the Opposition GM Quader yesterday stressed the need for amending article 70 of the constitution to empower lawmakers in parliament.

According to the article, lawmakers lose their seats in parliament if they vote in the House against the party that nominated them.

Participating in the thanksgiving motion on the president’s speech, the JP chief said for this article, the MPs have to stay loyal to the party in parliament as breaching article 70 leads to cancellation of their membership.

“But as per the Westminster system, all are private members except cabinet members. This is also present in our parliament’s rules of procedure,” he said.

The deputy leader of the opposition opined that if all lawmakers, including ruling and opposition, except the ministers perform this duty individually and collectively, then the

accountability of the government can be ensured in parliament.

“But article 70 is an obstacle here. Due to the article, all proposals from the ruling party are accepted in parliament. MPs cannot take decisions as per their conscience, and opinions of people of their respective constituencies,” he said.

Quader said duties of ruling party lawmakers are to give affirmative response to the government’s decision.

“Considering the country’s socioeconomic condition, it would not be practical to abolish the article 70,” he said, suggesting that the article be limited to formation of the government, budget approval, and no confidence motions.

Speaking on the thanksgiving motion on the president’s speech, Jatiya Party MP Anisul Islam Mahmud said time has come to think about why people have lost their interest in voting.

He said removing mistrust and lack of confidence are needed for bringing back the culture of participatory elections.

Govt finds 5 doctors

FROM PAGE 1
professor between August 16, 2009 and May 19, 2013; Prof Md Moarraf Hossain, a director and project director between December 31, 2014 and June 6, 2019; and Prof Manosh Kumar Bashu, who has been the chief of the anaesthesia department since February 7, 2015.

Besides, Prof Md Hafizur Rahman Ansary, who was the director at the NICRH from February 8, 2009 to August 16, 2009, did not take any initiative to install ICU ventilators and Prof Sheikh Golam Mostafa, who was the director and project director from May 19, 2014 to August 3, 2014, “did not have the time” to set up the ICU ventilators, the probe committee said.

The probe committee, led by the health ministry’s Additional Secretary Md Sirajul Islam, submitted the report before the HC yesterday through Deputy Attorney General Amit Talukder, as per its January 2 suo moto order.

After going through the report, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman expressed dissatisfaction because the report did not mention whether any action had been taken against the NICRH officials for their negligence.

The court asked the government authorities concerned to inform it of the steps taken against the officials within a week.

The HC bench set February 23 as the date to pass further orders on the issue.

Following a report titled “ICU on sickbed” published in The Daily Star on January 2, the HC bench issued the suo moto rule on the same day and directed the government to suspend the retirement benefits of Prof Md Moarraf Hossain for his negligence in preserving and protecting hospital equipment.

It also ordered the health secretary and the director general of the Directorate General of Health Services to form a committee and conduct an enquiry into the allegations of negligence by the NICRH authorities, and submit a report before the court upon its completion.

In the rule, the court asked the government authorities concerned to explain as to why the reported negligence of the NICRH authorities should not be declared illegal.

SC lawyer Manoj Kumar Bhownick placed The Daily Star’s report before the HC bench, seeking necessary orders on January 2.

The NICRH, situated in Mohakhali, is the hospital of choice for patients in the low-income group.

According to an International Agency for Research on Cancer report released last year, about 1.08 lakh people die of cancer while 1.5 lakh are infected with the disease every year in Bangladesh.

‘Go alone’ policy

FROM PAGE 1
faction. Party insiders said it was his clean image that won over the AL chief.

Over the years, Mayor Nasir, general secretary of Chattogram City AL, kept his rivalry with the Mohiuddin family alive. He also alienated most of the senior AL leaders in Chattogram, including presidium member Engineer Mosharraf Hossain, insiders said.

AL members have also not forgotten that in October last year, Nasir forced Mohiuddin’s wife Hasina Mohiuddin, president of Chattogram City Mahila AL, to leave the stage during a programme in the presence of AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader.

AL insiders said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was fond of Mohiuddin’s family and she did not approve of the way Nasir treated Mohiuddin and his family members.

However, residents of the city and politicians were a little surprised by Rezaul’s nomination as he was never under the spotlight when the general public, activists, and media analysts were talking about probable AL nominees.

According to Chattogram City AL leaders, Nasir also had a rivalry with Mosharraf Hossain over the ownership of Jatinsangha Park when Mosharraf was the minister for housing and public works.

Besides, Nasir could not make any significant changes in the city as a mayor, said an AL leader, adding that he could not even set up a new park and instead allowed shops and business establishments to spring up in parks and on footpaths.

“Surveys were conducted on Nasir’s popularity by different agencies and all the reports went against him,” the AL leader said yesterday.

Days after taking over as mayor, Nasir alleged that bureaucrats demanded 5 percent of the development funds. It angered the bureaucrats, and as a result, the city corporation “did not get enough funds” for development during the first two years of his five-year tenure, said another AL leader.

Farid Mahmud, joint convener of Chattogram City Juba League, told The Daily Star that the PM had given recognition to a dedicated and tested leader from the grassroots by nominating Rezaul, adding that the grassroots leaders and activists were glad.

Mohammed Nasim, member of AL Local Government Nomination Board, said Rezaul was nominated because the board wanted to give the “new leader” a chance.

“I think, in some cases, new faces should be given chances so that they can prove their potential,” he said, “We also nominated new faces in other city corporations in the past.”

Contacted, AL presidium member Engineer Mosharraf Hossain said Rezaul had a clean image.

Mayor Nasir told The Daily Star that he had accepted the PM’s decision. “I am always loyal to her and will remain so forever.”

He added that he and his followers would do everything to help the party nominee win.

When contacted, Rezaul said, “I am grateful to her [PM]. I do not have any rivalry or rift with anyone.”

EC ANNOUNCES SCHEDULE

The Election Commission yesterday announced the schedule of the Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) election slated for March 29.

The last date for submission of nomination papers is February 27. The papers will be evaluated by EC officials on March 1, said EC Senior Secretary Alamgir.

The last date for withdrawal from candidacy is March 8. The contenders’ election symbols will be announced the next day.

Appeals against the EC’s evaluation have to be submitted from March 2-4. Decisions about the appeals will be taken from March 5-7.

Bandits kill 30 in northwest Nigeria attack

AFP, Kano

Armed gangs killed 30 people in raids on two villages in an area of northwest Nigeria plagued by cattle rustlers and kidnappers, police said yesterday.

Dozens of gunmen on motorcycles attacked the villages of Tsauwa and Dankar in Katsina state on Friday, shooting residents and burning homes.

“The bandits killed 21 people in Tsauwa and another nine in nearby Dankar,” Katsina police spokesman Gambo Isah said.

“Most of those killed were old people and children who couldn’t escape.”

Police and soldiers deployed in the area after the attack and arrested one suspect, Isah said.

The attackers burnt homes, livestock and food supplies before fleeing, said Tukur Mu’azu, traditional chief of Batsari, a district the straddles the two attacked villages.



Department of Environment officials, led by Director Begum Rubina Ferdousi, conducting a drive yesterday to disconnect the utility connections of 23 dyeing and steel re-rolling factories in the capital’s Kadamtali and Shyampur for polluting the Buriganga river and the air.

PHOTO: STAR

DoE punishes 23 errant factories

FROM PAGE 1

231 industries in Dhaka, she added.

“We severed electricity and water connections of six of them were also severed,” the DoE director said.

“If these factories and mills seek environmental clearances from the DoE after fulfilling all necessary requirements, we will restore their lines,” she added.

On January 20, the HC directed the

DoE to immediately shut down all 231 industries in Dhaka metropolitan area near the Buriganga.

The court asked Wasa, Titas, and Dhaka Power Distribution Company Ltd to disconnect water, gas, and electricity supply to the illegal industries.

It also directed the DoE to submit a report to the court by February 20 after complying with the directive.

The court further ordered the DoE to submit a detailed report within the next three months on the industries and organisations in the Dhaka metropolitan area which have no environmental clearances.

The HC ordered the local administration to stop dumping waste into the Buriganga and submit a report before the court by February 20.

The bench of Justice Gobinda

Chandra Tagore and Justice Mohammad Ullah came up with the directives during the hearing on a writ petition filed by the Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh.

On December 8 last year, the HC also ordered the DoE to close all industries, factories, and other structures on the river, which were running without the DoE approval and were polluting the river.

PM approves masterplan to save them

FROM PAGE 1

The committee was formed on December 5, 2016, to finalise the masterplan in line with the PM’s directives.

According to the masterplan, the government has set a short-term goal for one year, a midterm goal for five years and a long-term goal for 10 years. Those will be implemented simultaneously by different ministries and departments.

All the ministries and departments concerned are now preparing their action plans to free the rivers from pollution and encroachment.

Those include the ministries of LGRD; environment, forest and climate change; land; home; public administration; shipping; water resources; housing and public works; and fisheries and livestock.

As per the masterplan, all liquid waste from industries, households and other establishments must be treated at effluent treatment plants (ETPs) before it ends up in rivers.

Also, grabbers of the rivers as well as canals will be evicted, and the rivers will be dredged to restore their normal flow.

Earlier in 2007, the government and the World Bank jointly conducted a study which found that around 7,000 industries in and around the capital were discharging 1.5 million cubic metres of liquid waste into the rivers through 300 channels every day.

It also found 61 percent of liquid waste was being discharged from industrial units and the rest from households.

Under the masterplan, walkways will be built along riverbanks and trees will be planted on the shores of the rivers.

‘WORK WITHOUT FEAR’

The LGRD minister at yesterday’s meeting asked all concerned to work “without any fear” to implement the masterplan.

Representatives from the ministries and departments concerned were

present there.

A representative from the Department of Environment (DoE) told the meeting that if the authorities fail to act quickly, it would not be possible to save the Buriganga as the river has already turned into a stream of liquid waste.

The official further said many industrial units near the river set up ETPs as eyewash in the face of drives by the authorities. Actually, none of these ETPs works.

At the meeting, a committee was formed to free the Padma and the Meghna from pollution, and implement a project to channel water to the Turag through the Pungli river.

The Meghna is being polluted heavily at four points in Ashuganj, Narsingdi and Barodi in Narayanganj.

The minister later briefed journalists about the progress of their work and the meeting’s outcome.

On reducing pollution in the

rivers around the capital, the minister said a number of industrial units are still dumping waste into the rivers. The government is working to make the rivers and canals linked to those free from pollution and encroachment.

“It takes time to revive the polluted rivers,” the minister said, mentioning that it took nearly 50 years for the UK to revive the River Thames.

To save the rivers around the capital and the Chattogram city, the government in 2009 had formed a taskforce comprising government officials and civil society members.

The committee, headed by former shipping minister Shajahan Khan, failed to improve the condition of the rivers despite spending around Tk 1,000 crore on several projects. It sat at least 34 times, identified a number of problems and took several decisions to free the rivers around the capital from pollution and encroachment.

Admit guilt, we’ll consider

FROM PAGE 1

Law Minister Anisul Huq also made similar comments while talking to reporters during an event at Hotel Sonargaon in the capital yesterday.

Meanwhile the BNP has said Khaleda should be released on humanitarian grounds as her physical condition is deteriorating fast. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on Friday spoke to Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader over phone about her release.

On February 10, Khaleda’s younger brother Shameem Iskander wrote to the Bangabandhu Sheikh

Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) authorities, requesting them to recommend that she needed to be sent abroad for better treatment.

According to BNP sources, Khaleda declined to seek any parole as she believed that she had not committed any crime and deserved bail.

On the other hand, several ministers said the government would not compromise on Khaleda’s release until she seeks parole.

Many BNP leaders believe that it is not possible to get her released through legal means as the government is “influencing” the judicial process.

On December 12 last year, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court rejected the BNP chief’s bail petition in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case.

Khaleda’s lawyer Zainul Abedin yesterday told journalists that they would file a bail petition again this week.

Pointing to section 401(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the lawyer said the government could suspend jail term of such convicts under special consideration.

The section says, “When any person has been sentenced to punishment for

an offence, the government may at any time without conditions or upon any condition which the person sentenced accepts, suspend the execution of his sentence or remit the whole or any part of the punishment to which he has been sentenced.”

Khaleda has been receiving treatment at the BSMMU since April 1 last year.

She landed in jail on February 8, 2018 after being convicted in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case. She was convicted in another case later that year.

The BNP claims that both the cases are politically motivated.

Measures starting to pay dividend

FROM PAGE 1

The province and its capital, Wuhan, have been virtually sealed off and locked down since Jan 23, with schools, offices and factories shut and most travel suspended.

The virus is believed to have an incubation period of 14 days which would appear to indicate it has been spreading since the lockdown was imposed. But health commission spokesman Mi Feng said the campaign was beginning to show results.

“The effect of the coronavirus controls is appearing,” Mi told reporters.

Increased medical support and preventive measures in Hubei had headed off more critical cases and the proportion of critical cases among confirmed cases had fallen to 21.6% on Saturday, from 32.4% on Jan. 27, Mi said.

Mild cases were also being treated more quickly, preventing them from becoming critical, Mi said.

Nevertheless, restrictions were tightened in Hubei yesterday with a ban on vehicles, apart from essential services, and companies told to stay shut until further notice.

Outside mainland China, there

have been about 500 cases in some two dozen countries and territories, with 5 deaths - in Japan, Chinese-ruled Hong Kong, the Philippines, France and Taiwan.

The biggest cluster outside China has been on the Diamond Princess cruise ship quarantined off Japan’s Yokohama, with 70 more cases reported yesterday, taking the total to 355 of the roughly 3,700 passengers and crew on board.

Those testing positive are sent to hospital. No one from the ship has died of the virus.

The US Embassy in Tokyo said passengers and crew were at high risk of exposure to the virus and it recommended that the estimated 400 US citizens onboard get off and take one of the evacuation flights it is arranging yesterday.

“This is a rapidly evolving situation,” the embassy said in a notice.

The embassy said everyone would be screened before being allowed to board the chartered flights and quarantined for 14 days upon arrival back in the United States.

“No symptomatic or infected passengers will be allowed to board,” it said.

Hong Kong, Canada, Italy and South Korea also said they planned to evacuate their citizens from the ship.

Another cruise ship, Holland America’s MS Westerdam, docked in Cambodia on Thursday after being rejected by ports in several other countries and territories.

The ship was believed to be free of the virus but an 83-year-old American woman from it tested positive upon arriving in Malaysia, authorities there said, adding that a second test, at the request of the cruise operator, confirmed the finding.

The first fatality in Europe was an 80-year-old Chinese man who died at a Paris hospital, authorities said on Saturday.

Robin Thompson, an expert in mathematical epidemiology at Britain’s University of Oxford, said that with nearly 50 cases in Europe, a death was not surprising.

“There still hasn’t been sustained person-to-person transmission in Europe,” he said.

After an extended Lunar New Year holiday, China urgently needs to get back to work. But some cities remain in lockdown, streets are deserted,

employees are nervous, and travel bans and quarantine orders are in place around the country.

Many factories are yet to re-open, disrupting supply chains in China and beyond for everyone from smartphone makers to car manufacturers.

While there was some hope that the disease may be peaking in China, a trend has been hard to discern, especially after a reclassification that widened the definition of cases.

World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Saturday it was impossible to tell where the epidemic will spread.

“We are concerned by the continued increase in the number of cases in China,” Tedros told the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

The sickness, now officially labelled COVID-19, has killed about 2% of those infected. Cases have spread faster than other respiratory viruses this century.

The economic ripple effects go far beyond China.

White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow said the coronavirus might knock two- to three-tenths of a percent off US gross domestic product in the first quarter.