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Speaker may revive probe body today

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali last night gave a broad hint of reviving his proposal to set up a special parliamentary committee to probe into alleged corruption by the Flood Control and Irrigation Minister Majid-ul Haq and his ministry, reports UNB.

"Let me think over the whole matter," said the Speaker in response to a strong demand for revival of his proposal, which he declared had died a natural death when the Opposition differed on the terms of reference of the proposed committee.

The Speaker said it is an important issue closely linked with the sentiments of the people.

He said he would let the House know about his decision today.

The Speaker's hint of reviving the proposed committee came on the heels of a strong demand from leaders of the Opposition.

Earlier, Deputy Leader of the House said the government would not oppose if the Speaker's July 6 proposal on the committee is revived in its totality.

"We will have no reservations

if the terms of reference, as proposed by the Speaker on July 6, are accepted as the principle and basis of the functioning of the committee," Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury said.

If necessary, he said, the members of the 15-man body might take further decision through discussion for people functioning of the committee.

The Deputy Leader of the House also demanded that the remarks made by the Opposition questioning the neutrality of the Speaker and his alleged tampering with the proceedings of the House must be withdrawn in accordance with parliamentary practice, by expressing "regret" for such remarks.

Dr Chowdhury said the July 6 proposal about the committee headed by the Speaker was accepted in its totality by the Treasury Bench but there was "no" response from the Opposition on that proposal.

The special probe proposed under Rule 266 was declared "dead" by the Speaker, he said, and added that if the committee is to be revived, the Speaker will now have to "give the revival

certificate" through Parliament.

"You have given the death certificate for the committee ... and now you will have to give the revival certificate through the Sangsad," Dr Chowdhury told the Speaker.

Referring to allegations against ministers and the government, the Deputy Leader said the present government was elected through a free and fair election and it is ready to face any challenge by the Opposition.

"We are ready to prove this government is transparent and accountable ... we categorically demand that our cabinet is free from corruption."

In support of his contention, Dr Chowdhury said it is unprecedented that a minister had offered to resign if the allegations against him were proved.

He said Majid-ul Haq himself proposed for a committee to verify the specific allegations brought against him by Tofael Ahmed. He had also agreed to take action if any specific allegations against his ministry are proved, the Deputy Leader of the House added.

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World Population Day observed

World Population Day was observed yesterday across the country as elsewhere in the world, reports UNB.

The day is observed every year under the auspices of the United Nations Population Fund to highlight the adverse effects of population growth and create awareness among people about the need for adopting family planning.

This year's theme of the day was: "The Individual and The World Population, Migration and Development in 1990s."

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Department of Family Planning organised elaborate programmes to mark the day.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas inaugurated the day's programmes at the Osmany Memorial auditorium in the morning.

A colourful procession was brought out from the Engineers' Institution at 8 am carrying banners, festoons and placards with various family planning messages. It ended at the National Press Club.

Different national dailies brought out supplements and Radio and Television put up special programmes highlighting the significance of the day.

The United Nations Association of Bangladesh (UNAB) organised a symposium at its office.



A colourful procession was brought out yesterday in the city to mark the World Population day. — Star photo

Sharif puts off broadcast as opposition delays march

ISLAMABAD, July 11: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif put off his scheduled nationwide broadcast today as the opposition parties delayed their decision on a date for a proposed long march on Islamabad to force mid-term elections, reports AFP.

The Prime Minister will now address the nation over radio and television on Tuesday evening, an official statement from his office here said.

No reason was given for the postponement.

The Prime Minister had decided to address the nation on his months-old tussle with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. The decision to go on air came as he failed to hold a patch-up meeting with the president arranged by religious leaders for Saturday.

Sharif is facing a three-pronged battle with the president, the opposition and the hostile provincial governments who are all challenging his two and a half year rule.

Earlier an All Party Conference (APC) of some two dozens opposition groups began a crucial meeting in the Punjab

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Leaders of 14 opposition parties held a meeting at the Awami League office with Abdus Samad Azad, Acting President of the Awami League in the chair. The meeting decided to call a half-day hartal on July 19. — Star photo

Half-day hartal called for July 19

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League-led alliance of 14 opposition parties has called for an eight-hour (6:00 am to 2:00 pm) nationwide hartal on July 19 on a three-point charter of demands.

The demands are: implementation of the Government-SKOP accord signed on July 6 last year, investigation into alleged corruption in different ministries and containing growing terrorism.

The half-day hartal, decided at a joint meeting of the parties yesterday, coincides with the first day of a countrywide 48-hour strike and road-rail barricade, announced by the SKOP and other labour bodies from July 19.

Chaired by the acting AL

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\$200m package for 5 projects Japan to fund 2 new power plants

Star Report

Japan, in principle, has agreed to fund five projects, including two new power plants, in Bangladesh at a total cost of more than 23 billion yen (over 200 million US dollars), official sources said here yesterday.

The initial approval of the Japanese government for funding the projects was communicated to Bangladesh earlier last month. The Japanese side sought an early date for signing the loan agreement in Tokyo.

An intra-ministerial meeting was held last Monday to finalise the exchange of notes for funding the projects.

In addition, Japan has responded favourably to a request by Bangladesh to conduct a feasibility study for setting up a modern industrial zone in Chittagong parallel to the Export Processing Zone.

The five projects included in the 23.1 billion yen loan assistance proposal are: converting Chittagong airport into an international airport (0.33 billion yen); containerisation of Dhaka port (0.179 billion yen); rehabilitation of two barge-mounted power-stations in Dhaka and Chittagong (1.56 billion yen); the Sylhet combined power plant (5.94 billion yen); and the Haripur combined power plant

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PM inaugurates tree plantation programmes

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday (Sunday) inaugurated the tree plantation programmes of the Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Police and Bangladesh Ansars and VDP, reports UNB.

Begum Zia first went to the armed Police Battalion Headquarters at Uttara in the morning and planted a Mahogany sapling there.

Inspector General of Police ASM Shahjahan briefed the Prime Minister on the massive plantation programme undertaken by the police forces.

Bangladesh Police will plant more than 2 lakh saplings of different fruits and timber at all its office premises including thanas of five divisional and four metropolitan headquarters.

Police planted 1,37,155 saplings during 1992 at the

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Implementation of VAT system Tax officials must change their attitude: British expert

By S Y Bakht

A change in the attitude of tax officials is needed to improve collection under the Value Added Tax (VAT) system, according to a British tax expert.

Tax officials need to place more emphasis on accounting checks, on which VAT is primarily based, instead of relying on more physical checks used under the excise tax system, explained Edward R C Mouat, a VAT advisor to the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

Emphasizing the need for continued training of tax-officials, he added: "The overall management system is weak and not yet geared to the need to properly control a sophisticated (VAT) system which involves the use of computerised information."

In an interview with The Daily Star, earlier last week, Mouat stressed the need for continuing the training programmes for tax officials, undertaking a concerted effort to inform the public about the VAT system.

A former senior British customs official, Mouat expressed guarded optimism about increased VAT yield in the current fiscal year, as envisioned by the Finance Minister in his budget speech, without expanding the VAT net into wholesale and retail sectors.

Terming the decision not to expand the VAT base now as "sensible", he noted that recent VAT registration drives in the service and manufacturing sectors were quite successful.

Increased tax yield in the domestic — service and manufacturing — sectors last year indicates that tax officials are getting a better grip on the system, he said.

Mouat recently completed his tenure here as an advisor to the NBR. He was sent in February last year under the British Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) programme. Recruited by the Crown Agents, during his stay here he helped write a control manual on how VAT should be imposed, devised

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Jail guard refused bail

A jail guard who tried to smuggle a hacksaw blade into the Dhaka Central Jail was given another two days' police remand by the CMM's court yesterday, reports UNB.

It was stated in the forwarding report that Hossain Ali Khan, 50, who has been a jail guard for the last 27 years, was found carrying a hacksaw blade into the jail. He was produced before the court Sunday after a day's remand.

The hacksaw blade, it is believed, was being smuggled in to help rescue or attempt to rescue either Mokim Gazi, a notorious dacoit convicted for 59 years, or Munir Hossain alias Suruj awaiting execution in death cell, one both.

The court rejected the guard's bail prayer and allowed police two more days' further interrogate the accused.

A few weeks ago, Mokim Gazi had challenged in open court that none could keep him confined in the jail.

Private airlines may be permitted soon

By Asiuzzaman

The government is considering opening the skies to private airlines in the country and a "positive decision" is expected later this month, official sources said Sunday.

"Initially it will be opened for different domestic destinations where the national carrier Biman is not operating," one senior Civil Aviation ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

The private airlines would be allowed to operate small short takeoff and landing (STOL) aircraft to destinations where such aircraft can operate. The Shamsheernagar in Sylhet, Lalmonirhat, Ishwardi, Barisal, Patuakhali and Mongla airports currently have such facilities, the official said, adding that Cox's Bazar could also be a route for a private airlines.

The official said that Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia showed "special interest" about this matter in the wake of the growing traffic in different domestic routes.

Biman now operates flights to seven domestic destinations — Chittagong, Rajshahi, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, Jessore, Saidpur and Dhaka.

Biman officials have always maintained that their domestic service is a losing enterprise because of their high overhead and also because the government refuses to let it raise the fares.

The ministry source said that it was not yet decided how many private airlines would be allowed initially. However, another Civil Aviation source said that the government would not

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Zahir murder case Another accused confesses guilt

One of the accused in the businessman Humayun Zahir murder case made a confessional statement yesterday before the Metropolitan Magistrate Md Abdul Hannan, reports UNB.

The accused, Md Alam, 25, was produced before the court on the expiry of a 7-day police remand. He was sent to Dhaka central jail.

Alam reportedly mentioned the name of the person who planned the murder of Zahir and disclosed the details of how, when and in what manner the plan was executed for a sizeable amount of money.

Detective Branch of the DMP arrested Md Alam in connection with the murder of industrialist Humayun Zahir on July 3, from Shahpur village of Sadar thana in Comilla. He had fled to India just after the killing of Zahir on April 8.

Police arrested another co-accused in the case, Matin, following the statement of Tanmoy, chased and caught red-handed by the public soon after the murder.

Bosnians find new home in Malaysia

From Chapal Bashar

KUALA LUMPUR, July 11: Over 300 Bosnian Muslims, the victims of Serbian aggression in strife-torn former Yugoslavia, have taken shelter in Malaysia.

The ill-fated asylum-seekers were flown here in different groups since last October. They have been provided shelter at camps in Kajang, about 20 km from here and Sarawak, an

the four organisations.

A dozen Bosnians have already been provided jobs in Kuala Lumpur, while a good number of students were admitted at educational institutions.

Malaysia and Pakistan are the two Muslim majority countries which have so far given shelter to Bosnians.

Following discussions with a Bosnian delegation last year, the Malaysian government agreed to provide asylum to the war-victims and the voluntary bodies were authorised to bring in the Bosnians.

Tuan Syed Abu Bakar, an official of ABIM, told this correspondent that a long-term programme has been taken up for the Bosnians and they would even be allowed to work in Malaysia.

Twelve Bosnian women have been employed at factories and

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Some Bosnian children and a woman at the ABIM Centre in Kajang, Malaysia. — Star photo

UN inspector leaves Baghdad Iraq won't allow UN to seal missile sites

BAGHDAD, July 11: An Iraqi General said today Baghdad will defy a United Nations order to seal its missile testing equipment and take all necessary measures to defend itself if attacked.

"We cannot accept (UN) seals of activities which are not prohibited," General Amer Rasheed, Chairman of Iraq's Industrialisation Commission told Reuters.

Rasheed, the man in charge of Iraq's weapons potential and relations with UN inspection teams, said there was no way Baghdad could allow the UN to disable its industry.

"It (sealing) will be a dangerous precedent," he said. "It means if we allow them this time, they may extend it to the whole of Iraqi industry."

Tomorrow they will come and seal any factory," he said.

Rasheed said Iraq did not fear threats of the use of force and was ready to defend itself and its installations.

"We as a nation, we take all necessary measures to protect our people, our land and facilities," he said.

Meanwhile, a United Nations inspector said Sunday Iraq had prevented him from carrying out the task assigned to him by the world body. "I was not allowed to do what I went in for and that is why I came out (of Iraq) immediately," Mark Silver said shortly after arriving in Bahrain from Baghdad.

Silver's three-man team had been assigned the task of sealing off two missile testing sites

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IDB for plans based on needs of its members

The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) is thinking of adopting a strategic plan, based on the needs of the member countries, with provision for co-operation among the members, poverty alleviation, human resource development, conservation of environment and promotion of science and technology, reports UNB.

This was stated by IDB Vice-President Enam Ahmed Chowdhury in a meeting with Planning Minister A M Zahiruddin Khan at his office here yesterday.

The Planning Minister appreciated the role of the IDB in the socio-economic uplift of Bangladesh.

Khan stressed the need for IDB support in the compulsory primary education programme.