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PHILIPS

Cabinet meets President's JS opening speech discussed

By Staff Correspondent

The Cabinet yesterday discussed the contents of the presidential speech to be delivered on the opening session of Jatiya Sangsad, cabinet sources said.

The JS is scheduled to meet on January 14 and President Shahabuddin Ahmed will address the House on the opening day.

The Cabinet had a four and a half hours discussion, beginning from 11:30 am, on a draft of the presidential speech. The ministers found the draft incomplete, especially in projecting the 'development activities' the government had done over the last year, a Cabinet member attending the meeting said.

The meeting resolved that all the development activities done by the government would be incorporated into the presidential speech.

Then the ministers, one by one, mentioned the development activities already done by their respective ministries and also those under implementation.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who presided over the meeting, instructed the officials concerned to rewrite the speech, mentioning the achievements of the government especially its development works.

Cold wave

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Of the victims, three were reported from Sirajganj district. They are Abdul Halim, 5, of Chowdhali thana, Helaluddin, 6, of Taras thana and Pervin, 4, of Kazur thana.

Hospital sources said over 100 people, some of them children, were admitted to different health complexes of the district with various cold-related diseases.

In Jamalpur district, four people died of cold wave yesterday.

The victims were identified as Anisur Rahman, 55, of Bakshiganj (thana) and Anequddin, 75, Shahar Ali, 65, and Taison Ali, 75, of Sadar thana.

Beximco

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repay their defaulted loans in January, without mentioning any specific date, and till the winding of this report they have not repaid the money.

Meanwhile, AB Bank yesterday informed the Bangladesh Bank (BB) that these companies defaulted in their instalments.

This is not the first time that these companies had defaulted in their repayment in instalment. In June, 1997, they had also defaulted by submitting a post-dated cheque. However, the defaulted amount had later been adjusted.

According to rules, a defaulted loan cannot be rescheduled more than twice. In case of these four companies, rescheduling had been made on many occasions.

The accounts of these four companies containing defaulted loans were detected by the Bangladesh Bank. Later, Beximco Group came forward and gave guarantee for the loan's amounting to Tk 90 crore.

3 missions

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Presently, the country's full-fledged embassies in Europe are located in London, Paris, Rome, Brussels, Geneva, The Hague, Moscow, Madrid, Bonn, Stockholm and Warsaw.

After the opening of the Male mission, Bangladesh will have resident missions in all the SAARC countries.

Meanwhile, Dhaka needs to examine seriously the opening of missions in some other European capitals including those of Norway and Hungary. Both these countries have resident missions in Dhaka. Bangladesh is the largest recipient of Norwegian assistance in Asia while Hungary is considered one of the fastest emerging economies in East Europe, diplomatic sources pointed out.

Radio-TV

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He expressed 'resentment over the rejection of one of his programmes by the committee and said, "I am planning to approach the Appeal Board for reconsideration of the committee's decision."

Mentionably, there is a three-member Appeal Board headed by the Information Secretary to take up cases of aggrieved package programme producers.

A member of the expert committee, however, claimed that despite limitation in the very formation of the committee, "it always tries to maintain neutrality in judging the quality of package programmes."

He denied allegations of favouring any single private production house and named three major houses—Impress, Tele Real and the Infrance—to claim that all of those were being treated equally as far as selection of package programmes is concerned.



A delegation of Prokrichi-BCS Coordination Council called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office yesterday.

—PID photo

Bus service on Sylhet-Sunamganj road suspended

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Jan 5: Plying of buses on Sylhet-Sunamganj road remained suspended for the second day today due to a strike jointly called by Sylhet Motor Owners Group and Sunamganj Transport Workers Association.

The strike was called protesting attacks on vehicles on the road during the last three days by some rival groups of transport workers.

The strike has caused untold sufferings to the passengers.

Shantibahini men assembling in temporary HQs at Dudukchhari

RANGAMATI, Jan 5: Mem-

bers of Shantibahini, the armed wing of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity, have reportedly started assembling in their temporary headquarters at Dudukchhari in Khagrachhari district for surrendering arms and ammunition as per the CHT peace accord, reports BSS.

Sources said the armed cadres of the PCJSS reportedly abandoned their hideouts in the hill district of Bandarban about a week ago, the sources said.

Administrative and security officials stationed at Bandarban told BSS over telephone that necessary preparations have also been taken to deal with other terrorist groups, apparently active in the district in jeopardising normal life.

Sharif to attend Dhaka summit

ISLAMABAD, Jan 5: Pak-

istani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will join his Bangladesh and Indian counterparts in a three-nation economic summit in Dhaka this month, the Foreign Office here said today, reports AFP.

ULFA leader

From page 1

Golap Barua, Laxmi Pradip and Babul Sharma were arrested by Special Branch from a flat at Adabar under Mohammapur thana on December 21.

Police said Golap Barua was charged in all the three cases while the other two face a separate case in connection with the illegal entry.

BIRDEM

From page 1

He further said, "Once the new service rule is approved, the 1996 service rule will automatically be cancelled."

Sports and Cultural Secretary of EWA Noor Mohammad said, "All the employees work-

ing under the service rule of 1996 have to be brought under the new service rules. There are about 200 such employees who are working under the 'hire and fire' rules. The authorities wanted to create fear among the employees by implementing the contract service rules."

The Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB), which runs BIRDEM, and the EWA had reached an agreement on Sunday night following a meeting.

Tribal affairs

From page 1

awaiting a fresh reply from the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) on its proposal to hold a meeting with the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts (NCCHT) on January 12 or 13. The PCJSS had earlier proposed that the meeting be held in Khagrachhari on January 15.

The government side had told the PCJSS it would be difficult for it to hold the meeting on January 15 as it would coincide with the three-nation Business Summit.

The meeting is to sort out, among other things, the date and venue of surrender of the armed cadres of PCJSS, following submission of lists of the cadres and their arms and ammunition within 45 days of signing of the accord.

The agreement was signed on December 2 between the NCCHT and PCJSS.

Yellow Panel sweeps RUTA polls

From RU Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Jan 5: The pro-Awami League Yellow Panel supported by a faction of pro-BNP teachers swept the election of the Rajshahi University Teachers Association (RUTA) held today.

The Yellow Panel candidates captured all the posts of the executive committee defeating their rival candidates from White Panel by a big margin.

The White Panel was formed by moderate teachers who claim themselves as genuine BNP.

Prof Abdur Razzak of Statistics Department and Prof Muzaffar Ahmed of Applied Physics have been elected President and General Secretary respectively of RUTA for the year 1998.

As many as 493 votes were cast in the election held at Jubilee Guest House from 8-30 am to 1-30 pm without any break. Prof M Zahidul Hassan con-

ducted the election.

Prof Abdur Razzak polled 371 votes while his rival Prof Azhar Ali from White Panel got 74 votes. Prof Muzaffar Ahmed secured 353 votes while his rival Prof Ashrafuzzaman from White Panel got only 91 votes.

The other elected office-bearers are: Vice-President—M A Halim; Treasurer—Chand Mohammad Mostafa; and Joint Secretary—M Shahidullah.

The elected members are: Shahidul Islam, KBM Mahabubur Rahman, M Akhter Faruk, Jamsad Ali Sarker, Abdul Kuddus, Nurul Afsar, Mustafizur Rahman, Aminul Haq, M Golam Kibria and Abdul Hamid.

Meanwhile, the election of another RUTA formed by pro-Jamaat and a small faction of pro-BNP teachers will be held on January 8.

Circuit breaker to go

From page 1

day as part of their efforts. The discussions which followed a similar meeting with the finance minister the previous day concentrated mainly on creating confidence as a means of market revival.

But the DSE bosses are looking for new sources of funds as the key priority. They will meet the commerce minister today to find ways for insurance funds to be channelled into the capital market. On Thursday, they will see the central bank governor to try to amend banking regulations obstructing flow of funds into the stock market.

For the capital market regulators, automation at DSE was set at the top of the immediate agenda, which the SEC officials, in keeping with their current campaign, said would ensure transparency in transactions and trading.

The SEC, which had earlier slapped a deadline on DSE to go online by March, asked for a status report. The councillors said a task force headed by FBCCI president and DSE councillor Yusuf Abdullah Harun was already working to devise an action plan which should be ready by January 20.

The DSE is lagging far behind the CSE, which has already finished its automation work.

The SEC officials said brokers should submit periodic statements of transactions on their own accounts, which might be made mandatory after a gazette notification soon.

Some councillors' bid to discuss the court cases against some of them was averted citing the issues being sub-judice.

While an early entry of merchant banks was highlighted as a necessity, the fact that many of the firms awaiting licences did not have "adequate manpower" surfaced as a problem.

A SEC official admitted that a wrong approach guided the

SEC evaluators while scrutinising the applications. "We gave most weightage to companies having two crore taka, but not on their capability to do the job," the official said. "The emphasis was wrongly placed."

Responding to DSE councillors' plea, the SEC also agreed to examine whether the regulations could be reviewed to bring in more mutual funds. "Here as well, the essential handicap is professional manpower of the companies," the official said.

It was agreed that the ICB, the top institutional player in the market, was not being able to do it alone. Alternatives will have to be examined to create a facilitating atmosphere.

They also discussed appointment of DSE CEO, another important step necessary to separate management from policymaking. The process is being delayed as the new Council is being formed after the job.

Ferry services at Aricha ghat suspended again

By Staff Correspondent

Ferry services at Aricha ghat has been suspended again since 9:30 pm yesterday because of dense fog, leaving more than 1800 vehicles stranded at the ghat.

Earlier, ferry services resumed at 10 in the morning after remaining suspended for over 13 hours.

Ferry services in Maowabhang and Bhupur-Sirajganj routes also remained suspended, sources said.

"Thick fog has disrupted movement of the vessels. So, we have decided to postpone ferry services in Aricha-Natakhol and Aricha-Daulatdia routes," a BIWTC high official told The Daily Star.

Task Force report

From page 1

The employees of eight boards went on an indefinite strike at the call of the Federation demanding cancellation of the TF report that brought corruption charges against some officials and employees of the boards, an end to "attempts" to curtail the autonomy of the boards, transfer of the centralised computer cells to the respective boards and stoppage of intervention in board matters by the Ministry of Education.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers Association in a statement yesterday urged the employees of the boards to call off their strike for smooth holding of SSC and HSC examinations on schedule.

"The fate of the examinees has become uncertain as the talks between the ministry officials and the leaders of the board employees have failed," the statement said.

UNB adds: A technical committee, formed to look into the feasibility of shifting the computer cells to the respective

boards, said that it would be difficult to shift. Even if it is done, the process of publishing results simultaneously will be hampered.

Meanwhile, Education Minister ASHK Sadique told UNB that officials of the education boards are looking into the matter.

The minister declined to make any comment saying, "Discussion is on, so I should not make any comment at this stage. The boards were given the responsibility to resolve the problem arising out of the strike."

A decision will be taken after hearing from the boards' authorities about the outcome of their discussion, he added.

However, asked about the demand for shifting the centralised computer cell to the respective boards, the Education Minister said there was no such computer cells. These are just located in a building, but controlled by the respective boards and run by their employees.

He said the computers are kept in Dhaka for better maintenance.

PM: Prokrichi

From page 1

which were created during the previous governments, would be solved through the Administrative Reforms Commission set up by her government.

In this regard, the Prime Minister said that the commission would be made effective by appointing a dynamic and neutral chairman. Besides, the commission would have representation from all cadres and professions, she added.

The Prime Minister underscored the need for total readjustment of the administration to make it people-oriented and sought cooperation of all the achieve the objective.

Referring to the initiative of her government to establish dynamic and effective local government administrative system, she said most of the grievances of the professionals and cadre service personnel would go gradually through the establishment of strong local bodies.

Ctg incident Commissioner's office gheraoed

CHITTAGONG, Jan 5: The people, who were evicted from South Pahartoli in the city, gheraoed the local ward commissioner's office today, protesting Sunday's violence that left three people dead, reports UNB.

Being informed, city Mayor A B Mohiuddin Chowdhury visited the spot and assured them, on behalf of the government, of taking all necessary measures to rehabilitate them.

He said those who were responsible for the incident would be punished on the basis of the enquiry committee report.

Nearly 1,200 people of 400 families were passing their days under the open sky in an inhuman condition following the eviction drive.

Admin cadres

From page 1

They will hold a demonstration today at 9:30 am at the Finance Ministry, they said.

Finance Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan told The Daily Star last night that they came to meet him and waited at the conference room of the ministry but he could not give them time because of the Cabinet meeting.

"I would see them tomorrow to hear their views," he said.

The meeting yesterday was addressed by, among others, Khan Mohammad Blayet Hossain, Harunur Rashid, Sajjad Hossain, Badiur Rahman, Sirajul Islam, Abu Alam Shahid Khan, Mizanur Rahman, Abul Kalam Azad, Mosharraf Hossain, Taufiqur Rahman, Ajit Kumar Pal and Anwar Ali.

They spoke about the problems facing the administrative cadre and expressed deep resentment over non-implementation of the upgradation of cadres, "approved by the Prime Minister." Such delay would hamper administrative and development activities, they asserted.

The speakers further resented that vacant posts of additional secretary, joint-secretary and deputy secretary were not filled up despite "specific directives by the Prime Minister."

The seven-point demand is: (1) Promotion of competent officials to the vacant posts of additional secretary, joint-secretary and deputy secretary, (2) Inclusion of 50 per cent posts of cadre service in selection grade along with an order to upgrade posts of deputy secretary to the pay scale of Tk 7,100 (3) Creation of opportunities for promotion in administrative cadres as in the BCS foreign service, taxation, excise, revenue and police cadres, (4) Immediate implementation of upgradation of the 321 administrative cadre posts approved by PM, (5) End to contract appointments and attempts to raise the retirement age, (6) Implementation of at least 12 per cent promotions in all cadres including the administrative cadre in the light of recommendations by the Matin committee, (7) Repeal of a 1992 order cancelling 25 per cent intake quota for administrative cadre in foreign service.

Shafaat Jamil discloses in court We've captured state power under Mushtaque, shouted Rashid

"We've captured state power under Khandaker Mushtaque. Sheikh is killed. Don't try to take any action against us," Carrying a shotgun, Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid used the threatening words as he accosted Col Shafaat Jamil at the latter's cantonment residence on August 15 morning after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Col (ret'd) Jamil, who was then commander of 46 Brigade at Dhaka Cantonment, made the disclosure while making his deposition to the trial court as the 44th prosecution witness yesterday, according to UNB.

The witness said Rashid, the CO of 2 Field Artillery, was accompanied by Major Hafiz and Lt Col Amin Ahmed Chowdhury and a contingent of armed troops who were waiting outside his house.

Later, on his way to 1st East Bengal Regiment, the brigade commander said he found Major Farooq Rahman, the acting CO of 1st Bengal Lancer, sitting on a tank with an aggressive mood at the entry point of EBR.

"Firing was opened on us from the tank with heavy machine gun," the witness said adding that several of his S&T company vehicles were damaged and some soldiers injured in the firing.

But no instant action was possible, said Col Jamil who also found three other tanks of Lancer in aggressive mood inside 1st EBR, one of his infantry battalions.

"Major Farooq was previously known to me. He could not participate in the Liberation War for which he was not given two years' seniority (as reward)," said the retired army

officer who was a freedom fighter.

For this, the witness said, Major Farooq, a brother-in-law of Major Rashid, was unhappy with the Bangabandhu government.

Giving a description of the fateful morning, Jamil said, after a telephonic conversation with army chief General Shafiullah, he went to the residence of deputy chief General Ziaur Rahman.

... So what? President is killed. Vice President is there ... uphold the Constitution," he quoted General Zia as saying.

The witness informed that Zia was shaving his whiskers at that time, Jamil said Major Hafiz who came to his house with Col Rashid at about 6 in the morning accompanied him to Zia's house.

See Page 2

Dhaka to incur \$400m loss

From page 1

because it does not have that amount of money," a Petrobangla official said.

The operating cost of Cairn is also much higher than that of the Bangladesh Gas Field Company Limited (BGFCL), a local producer.

BGFCL's operating cost is 2.25 million dollars annually for producing 500 million cubic feet of gas per day while Cairn's cost in the first 8 months is 12 million dollars for producing 160 mmcf gas per day, according to official sources.

It was earlier thought that the PSC between the government and Cairn, the first of its kind in Bangladesh signed in May 1994, would be at least a groundbreaking step by the government.

"The government did not expect any profit from this particular PSC, because profit from offshore gas field is usually lower for the government than onshore fields," said a source.

The average equity ratio between Cairn and the government for Sangu is 50:50 while this ratio is 35:65 for the onshore gas fields.

Cairn's development cost in Sangu had increased amazingly from 188 million US dollars to 264 million dollars. The budget started rising after the British company was allowed to carry

out a development programme without prior approval of the appraisal plan for the gas field due to "diplomatic pressure" and acute shortage in the supply of gas, the sources said.

Petrobangla experts had raised serious objections when the government allowed Cairn to go for a 'first-track development' without any appraisal, the sources added.

"This cost rise could have been avoided if the government listened to the Petrobangla about getting the appraisal done first. In that way, Sangu development cost could have been pre-fixed as per Bangladesh's economic interest," said a source.

Due to lack of government supervision, Cairn, which earlier earned the reputation of a conservative oil company, also spent "unnecessarily" the sources claimed. It has employed a large number of foreigners "unnecessarily" who are paid in dollars.

However, Cairn is now resolving these matters with Petrobangla and some cost escalation may be avoided by making those "non-recoverable."

To strengthen supervision, a suggestion for new recruitment in Petrobangla and re-structuring the division concerned made several times but those

were shelved, the sources claimed.

Energy experts said that as per an incentive package in the PSC, the Petrobangla will pay corporate tax worth 200 million US dollars for Cairn. This amount will be a total loss for Petrobangla, if not for the government as a whole, observed a source.

It has been projected that in 15 years, Cairn will invest 700 million dollars for exploration, development and operation in Sangu which will be recoverable from the gas sales. This cost is equivalent to the price of 285 billion cubic feet (BCF) of gas.

In other words, out of one trillion cubic feet, Cairn takes 640 BCF (285 BCF gas as cost recovery and 355 BCF as profit share) gas and Bangladesh gets 360 BCF," explained an expert.

The government's current gas sales price is about 1.2 dollars per 1000 cubic feet (or one unit) while it will buy Sangu's gas at around 2.46 dollars per unit.

"Therefore Bangladesh will pay Cairn nearly 1.6 billion dollars to buy this 640 BCF gas in 15 years."

"Bangladesh will get slightly over 1.2 billion dollars by selling the total one trillion cubic feet of gas in the domestic market," the expert said.

"This leaves us with a loss of 400 million dollars," he added. "Adding the 200 million dollars corporate tax to be paid by Petrobangla for Cairn, the total loss for Petrobangla stands at 600 million dollars."

The experts strongly argue that the government should re-evaluate the PSCs still not signed in the light of the experience gathered from the operations of Cairn and Occidental in blocks 16 and 13-14 respectively.

"These were the first such PSCs for Bangladesh and it is quite natural that there will be some flaws. But Bangladesh should learn from its experience to derive the highest possible benefit from future PSCs," an expert said.

"PSC activities should be monitored by experts independently. If there is any political or diplomatic influence there, the whole nation will have to pay for it," said another expert.



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