

Tk 6.09 cr project under progress for development of Dhaka Zoo

Fisheries and Livestock Minister A S M Abdur Rob told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday that a Tk 6.09 crore project was taken in 1996-97 fiscal for the overall development of Dhaka Zoo, reports BSS.

Replying to Kamal Ahmed Majumder (AL-Dhaka) the minister said work on this project is under progress. Besides, he said, there is a high powered committee for the overall development, reforms and management of the Dhaka Zoo. The committee renders necessary advice for sound management, expansion and modernisation of the zoo, he added.

Moreover, a task force headed by a Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock has been constituted for sound management, reforms and beautification of the zoo. The task force will visit the zoo from time to time and render necessary advice for the overall development and beautification of the zoo, he added.

APB newsmen to observe token hunger strike Saturday

Leaders of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalist and Dhaka Union of Journalist at a meeting yesterday expressed concern over the failure of APB management to remove the deadlock in the news agency within the deadline given earlier, reports UNB.

They urged Beximco Media Chairman Salman F Rahman to resolve the existing crisis of the news agency before his visit to London on July 5 with the Prime Minister.

The APB unit of DUJ organised the meeting in its newsroom in protest against the harassment of journalists by the APB authorities.

They urged the authorities to reopen the APB office, withdraw the transfer order of four journalists and restore congenial atmosphere in the news agency.

Chaired by APB unit chief Nasar Ahmed, the meeting was addressed, among others, by BFUJ general secretary Akhter Ahmed Khan, DUJ president Altaf Mahmood, vice-president Ashraf Ali, general secretary Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan, joint secretary Rokeya Kamal, publicity secretary Jawaharal Das, sports and cultural secretary Gulshan Akhter, elderly journalist Sheikh Rakibuddin, Mosaddique Al-Mahmud and S M Akash.

Meanwhile, APB journalists decided to observe a token hunger strike at Jatiya Press Club from 9 am to 5 pm Saturday.

Global Young Leaders confce in US July 12

Sadia Ferdus of Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom has been selected to attend the Global Young Leaders Conference in Washington DC on July 12. It will conclude in New York City on July 22, according to a press release received here yesterday.

This leadership development programme will bring together outstanding young people from around the world to build critical leadership skills in a global context.

The Global Young Leaders Conference is sponsored by the Congressional Youth Leadership Council, a nonprofit, non-partisan educational organisation. Founded in 1985, the Council is committed to fostering and inspiring young people to achieve their full leadership potential. Over 370 members of the United States Congress join this commitment by serving on the Council's Honorary Congressional Board of Advisors.



BNP brought out a procession in the city yesterday protesting the ruling party MP's remarks on its Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia and her family members in the Jatiya Sangsad.

Opposition lawmakers protest defence purchase 'Govt turning armed forces into supplementary force of Indian army'

Opposition lawmakers in Parliament Wednesday accused the government of turning the country's armed forces into a supplementary force of the Indian army and taking kickbacks from buying Mig-29 and Frigates, reports UNB.

They also charged the Prime Minister with nepotism and politicisation of the armed forces by appointing her relation as the chief of army and extending the tenure of the Air Chief.

The scathing criticism came when BNP and Jatiya Party MPs moved cut motions on the allocation of Tk 311,27,76,000 for the Defence Ministry for fiscal 1999-2000.

Finance Minister SAMS Kibria, who moved the demand on behalf of the Defence Ministry in Parliament, said the present government wants to build up a modern and powerful army for the interest of the country's independence and sovereignty.

Whip Mashiur Rahman, Major (Rtd) Akhtaruzzaman, Alamgir Haider Khan, Gazi Mohammad Shahjahan and Shahidul Islam of BNP and GM Kader of JP spoke on the cut motions.

They protested the purchase of Indian-made Leyland Trucks for the Bangladesh Army, Frigates from South Korea and Mig-29 from Russia at higher rates "in exchange of kickbacks."

Mashiur Rahman alleged that the army has been made subservient and a supplementary force to the Indian army. Referring to the purchase of Mig-29 from Russia, he claimed that Mig-29, which could be bought at US\$ 8 million each, was purchased at \$15 million. He said the Air Force would be dependent on India since spare parts for this Mig-29 are produced in India.

About the purchase of

Frigates from South Korea, Mashiur Rahman said FBCCI president Abdul Awal Minto and an MP had negotiated the deal in buying Frigate from Korea at a cost of Tk 10.5 crore each.

He charged the government of buying Indian-made four-ton Leyland Trucks at a higher price of Tk 19 lakh each, which could be bought at Tk 9 lakh each. He said the Leyland Trucks are not fit for the Bangladesh Army.

Referring to the Prime Minister's intention to install an army brigade in Sylhet surrounded by India, Mashiur said the Prime Minister perhaps is suffering from India phobia. If so, how the Prime Minister went to buy Mig-29 from Russia, a friend of India.

Major (Rtd) Akhtaruzzaman (BNP-Kishoreganj) said he does not oppose increase in the Defence budget, but opposes when the army is being turned into a subservient force of India.

He suggested restructuring the country's Defence system keeping in view the Defence system of India.

The retired Major, who is also a member of the parliamentary committee on the Defence Ministry, asked: "For whose interest the Mig-29 were purchased?"

Alamgir Haider Khan (BNP-Chandpur) accused the Prime Minister of appointing her relation as the Army Chief and extending the tenure of the Air Chief.

GM Kader (JP-Lalmohirhat) questioned the wisdom of spending Tk 3,111 crore, 10 per cent of the total budget, for the unproductive sector like Defence when 50 per cent of the population is living under the poverty line without food and medicine.

He asked: "Whom are we trying to appease by establishing new cantonments when a

poor man even can't buy a packet of oral saline of Tk 2?" Shahidul Islam (BNP-Jhenidah) alleged that Bangladesh's Defence system is being guided by the Indian Defence Ministry.

He said all military hardware, used by the Bangladesh Army, are based on India. The Mig-29 purchased from Russia cannot even fly for three minutes and failed to do anything against the NATO air attack in Kosovo.

Gazi Mohammad Shahjahan (BNP-Chittagong) said that after liberation, the Awami League government had destroyed the strength and image of the Army by raising the Rakkhi Bahini, which finally failed to protect Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.

Defending the budgetary allocation for the Defence Ministry, Finance Minister SAMS Kibria wondered how the opposition could oppose a powerful Defence force for the country.

About the Indian-made Ashoke-Leyland trucks, he said former Army Chief General Mahbubur Rahman, now a BNP leader, had proposed to buy these trucks. He said another General Bhuiyan made the proposal for the Frigate.

Responding to the criticism about the Mig-29, the Finance Minister asked: "Does the opposition not want to see a powerful Air Force?" He said after independence, Bangabandhu built up the devastated Air force by procuring Mig-21 from Russia.

"We may be poor, but people of this country are ready to make any sacrifice for protecting the independence and sovereignty of the country," the Finance Minister told the Parliament.

Later, the demand for the Defence was passed by voice vote.

Law & order

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim claimed that the police administration was discharging its duties neutrally and without any influence of anyone. "The present government has taken steps to curb terrorism by rising above petty party interest and act neutrally," he added.

Refuting the opposition allegation that there are two police administrations, he said, there were two OCs during the rule of Begum Zia and not now. There is only one uniformed OC in each thana and one SP in each district.

He said double standards had long been prevailing in the country, but the present Awami League government is trying its best to do it. "We have nothing to do if courts grant bail to one person and deny it to others. But I can assure you that I never make any phone calls for granting bail," the home minister said in response to BNP's reference to their lawmakers Rahman.

Mohammad Nasim claimed all untoward incidents perpetrated by members of the law enforcing agencies were investigated and put on trial as per the law of the land. Police have arrested a good number of suspected killers of JSD leader Editor M. A. Jessore, and the Udchi bomb explosion incident, also in Jessore.

Referring to British high commission's circulation that advised its women citizens not to go to police stations, alone, the home minister said after the incident he called the British high commissioner and he said that it was issued on the basis of wrong information.

On deterioration of law and order, he said country's overall law and order deteriorated after some senior army officers, usurped power, illegally.

He sought cooperation from the opposition to improve the law and order situation in the country. "We are going to place a new law in parliament which will have the provision of summary trial of terrorists, armed hoodlums, snatchers and criminals. I seek your all-out cooperation in passing the law," Nasim said and added that it would be helpful for the government to curb crime if the law is passed unanimously.

Major Hafiz suggested forming an independent body to investigate into criminal incidents committed by the law enforcers. He said inquiry by police to investigate against another policeman can not be fair at all.

He said terrorism could never be stopped if the ruling party continued to blame the previous governments and narrate what happened in the past and asked the government not to use the police for illegal activities.

Hafiz quoting an US state department report and the British high commission's circular said the Awami League government is now internationally known as a "terrorist" government and terrorism took a new dimension since the AL assumed power.

The BNP lawmaker alleged that a large portion of police force is now engaged against the BNP and their only duty is to file false cases, arrest and harass the opposition leaders and activists.

"We have confidence on the police department and a majority of the police personnel are skilled, but they are not able to discharge their duties neutrally due to politicisation and illegal orders of the government," he said.

AL MP Akhteruzzaman alleged that BNP was ousted from power twice after failing to curb terrorism and maintain law and order. He alleged that the BNP when in power sponsored state terrorism.

He said the process to establish rule of law has started through the trial of the Bangabandhu killing and said terrorism can be eliminated if the BNP cooperates with the government sincerely.

BNP member Sadek Hossain Khondok said the home minister does not look into the matters of this (home) ministry as he remains busy most of the time with another (telecommunication) ministry. "There is no example in the world that the home minister holds two portfolios. How law and order situation will improve if he (Nasim) spends 24 hours for another ministry?" he questioned.

Referring to killing of a man in the court premises, death at DB office, rape at JU and other heinous acts, he said these incidents clearly proved that there is no law and order and there is no security of life in the country. He alleged that on an average five people were being killed everyday in the capital city, alone.

Amanullah Aman of BNP said those who always move under tight police protection cannot realise the real situation of the country. He said rule of law cannot be established through maintaining double standards.

Abdul Latif Mirza of AL claimed that the law and order situation have improved substantially since Mohammad Nasim took over charge of the home ministry. He alleged that BNP-backed JCD killed some 138 Chhatra League activists in five years of BNP rule in the Dhaka University campus.

Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah, who made the proposal on general debate on law and order, said the AL government has given top priority to improve the law and order situation.

He said the insurgency in CHT has stopped permanently through the peace accord and terrorists in the south-west of the country have started returning to normal life due to the efforts taken by the government.

Punish poachers

From Page 1  
year, another tiger escaped death at Baidyanari bazar in Shorankhola thana. It reportedly stayed into a human settlement near the forest last week.

Local people said the tiger was troubling them, prying on their cattle and chicken. They drove the tiger back to the Sundarbans, forest officials said.

But the reported venture of the tiger raises questions like why it had been trying to pick cattle or chicken.

Wildlife expert Abdul Wahab Akhonda says, "The tiger's behaviour appears to be contradictory. It would not venture off his abode for food unless it has some problem at its turf".

Khasru Chowdhury, a journalist-writer who conducted studies on tigers in the Sundarbans for long, says "The traditional foraging grounds for the animals are coming under threat from encroachers."

Shrimp fry collectors are intruding repeatedly into the forest, they are destroying and disturbing the eco-system that sustains tigers, creating problem for them in collecting food.

He also said, "Food habit of the tigers could be changing as shrimp cultivators are expanding their farm areas, encroaching upon not only forests but also grazing lands for cattle. The result is that many cattle are dying due to malnutrition and their carcasses are thrown

into rivers. The tigers tasting such easy food are developing a taste for cattle and making forays into the neighbouring villages for the food."

A FAO-sponsored study by Kirtman Tamang, a Nepalese-American expert who carried out a survey in 1994-95, says there are 360 tigers surviving in the Sundarbans. His report which relied on previous studies by Heinrich and Blumfield stressed 'better management of the tigers to help them survive'.

An integrated resource development of the Sundarbans reserved forest by the UNDP-FAO in 1998 recommended 'proper wildlife management under project tiger'.

He stressed bio-diversity management, captive animal breeding, reintroduction, protected areas and boundary demarcations for effective sustenance of the animals.

But the Forest Department which is the sole custodian of the forests including its flora and fauna lacks required manpower and equipment. Even the two tranquilliser guns it received from FAO in the eighties have never been used to tame stray tigers and shift them to their abodes. The tranquilliser darts' active life span expired long ago and those were never replaced", an official said.

Experts suggest that there should be an independent authority to effectively manage the wildlife in the country.

Dangerous game

From Page 1  
allowed Dr. Chowdhury to speak only after the budget was passed, and not before, as wished for by the latter. So what prevented the Honourable Speaker from standing firm on his ground? Will the Speaker kindly let us know?

Second reason why we comment on this topic today is that we think the politicians are playing a very dangerous game with our religion. The Prime Minister and all the ministers and ruling party MPs who spoke in the House, and all those activists who took to the street know very well the content, the meaning and the spirit of what the deputy leader of the opposition said. The House records clearly prove that the question of Dr. Chowdhury inculcating the Prophet is at best a question of imagination, and at worst a calculated misrepresentation and vicious distortion of a speech only to gain what may appear to be political mileage, but is in fact legitimising opportunistic use of religion in our politics. And that is the dangerous game that we want to warn all our politicians about. Please stop using religion in politics. We have had enough of it from the days of Pakistan till today. It harmed both our religion and our politics. Here again the Speaker let us down. He could have easily looked through the records and put a stop to the distortion saying that Dr. Chowdhury never said what he was being accused of saying. That would have ended the matter.

To be true to the issue at hand we must add that it is the Awami League and its leaders who were customarily at the receiving end of use of religion in politics. It was Awami League against whom a vicious propaganda was carried out by the old Muslim League and the Pakistani Muslims and the BNP recently that AL was an anti-Islamic party and that future of our religion will in jeopardy if it ever came to power. It was no less a person than Khaleda Zia who had said that "if AL came to power then the sound of Azan (Muslim prayer call) will be replaced in our mosques by Uludhni (sounds associated with Hindu prayers). I distinctly recall seeing BNP writing on city walls during the elections that if AL came to power then we will be forced to wear dhuti in place of lungis. The nationalist slogan of 'Joy Bangla' that inspired and mobilised us to fight against the Pakistanis and a

cry which was in the lips of every one of us, freedom fighters, was later denigrated and deliberately made to appear to be a Hindu slogan. This 'war cry' that resonated from every nook and corner of Bangladesh and from the heart and soul of every freedom loving men, women and children during our liberation war was forcibly pushed aside and equated with Joy Kall or Joy Hind, by the succeeding regime in the past 75 period, including the BNP.

The AL appears to have learnt to play the "religion" game and is paying the BNP back in its own coin with vengeance. If my memory serves me right, it was Dr. Chowdhury himself who accused the AL of indulging in "fire worship" when a particular type of lamps were lit to inaugurate some function. BNP's attempt to use religion to gain political grounds did not work. Nor will AL's. What happens in the process is that politics instead of becoming modern, scientific and in tune with the dynamics of an ever-changing world, becomes backward looking and veers towards obscurantism, full of retrogressive symptoms. The only gainers are those who exploit religion and the religious sentiments of our people to gain political power. Parties like the AL and the BNP, who are based officially on modern ideas and democratic principles and who have a lot to offer to our people only jeopardise their own future when they use religion in politics. As an example of how politics becomes retrogressive when modern parties use religion for petty gains, consider Dr. Badruddoza's own reply to the distortion of his speech. He said he does not need to learn to be a good Muslim from the likes of 'Ajoy Kor and Balaram Poddar'. He has clearly brought a communal tinge to the debate. Why suddenly bring a Hindu-Muslim AL, quite unfairly in our view, has accused him of showing disrespect to our Prophet. Now he is in his attempt to get back at the AL deliberately distorts and brings a communal angle to hit back, further distorting the issue.

We call upon both sides to desist from playing this dangerous game of using religion for political gains and to give us a modern and scientific politics fit for the 21st Century. At the very least, if you cannot solve our problems, please don't bring in new ones.

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Flowers

From page 12  
tion in family members, keep them in the poverty trap. Malnutrition and preventable diseases are the major causes of such high rates of infant mortality. Since the probability of children surviving into adulthood is low, they feel the need to have more children to survive into adulthood. These children are then used as assets who are sent off to earn for the family. And these are the 'vagrant' children who beg and sell flowers on the streets.

They operate in a society different in itself. They have never been taught anything worth learning. The monotonous repetitions of 'God stories' are what they feel is the norm. The children have been brought up in such a culture where the need for money and food determines their actions. Selling flowers, to them isn't any better than begging, in terms of respect and dignity.

Potential customers often feel that it is they who these children sell flowers that deter them from buying them.

If a child with a smile offered to sell me flowers in a cheerful way, there would be no way that I could refuse," said one such customer.

Another said, "If, instead of nagging and aggravating people, they were 'nosed' with a simple 'yes' or 'no', they may well sell more."

The problem is that these innocent children do not know this. They are doing what they have seen their parents do and they learn from theirs. There is a chain which passes on behavioural characteristics onto the next generation, and they have no choice other than to take that up as well. And it is this lack of knowledge that turns flowers into stones.

Daily allowance

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cially the peasants and workers "Once elected, an MP becomes a king. But do not forget that before election, each poor day labourer is a king. All of us approach them for votes as politely as possible."

The PM, however, did not say anything about the BNP leader's statement that she and her party MPs had received remuneration and allowances without attending a single sitting of parliament for some 18 months.

The Law minister took the floor again to suggest that the proposed bill should be allowed to be moved. "Let it go to the parliamentary body concerned for scrutiny. The Opposition MPs can speak out their minds in the committee meeting. Besides, they will have another scope. The suggestion when the bill will be brought back to the House for discussion."

At this stage, BNP legislator Salahuddin Kader Chowdhury took floor. "Yes, I do agree with

the Prime Minister's observation that the sense of integrity varies from person to person," Chowdhury said. "You have your definition of integrity and I have mine. Not only that you took salaries and remuneration for 18 months without attending the sessions. The AL legislators took those for the period between August 15, 1975 and November 1975."

Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury then asked the law minister to move the bill for sending it to the parliamentary committee for scrutiny. The bill will be brought back to the House on Sunday.

Water level of most rivers rises

Most of the rivers in the Eastern Hill basins recorded rise due to heavy rainfall in different places during last 24 hours, reports BSS.

According to Flood Information Centre, the Padma in the Ganges basin registered further rise by 27 cm at Pankha, 33 cm at Rajshahi, 42 cm at Hardinge Bridge point, 10 cm at Golaanda and 11 cm at Bhagyakul.

The Surma at Kalnaghat and Sunamganj and the Khowal at Habiganj in Meghna basin are flowing above their respective danger levels.

The Brahmaputra-Jamuna registered further fall by 12 cm at Chilmari and slight fall at Noonkhawa. The Jamuna recorded fall by 3 cm at Serajganj while it registered rise by 12 cm at Aricha. The Dharla at Kurigram registered fall by 4 cm.

The Buriganga at Dhaka registered rise by 20 cm and Sitalakha at Narayanganj observed further rise by 13 cm. All the rivers in this basin are flowing below their respective danger levels.

The Muhuri recorded slight rise at Parsuram while the Halda remained steady at Narayanhata. The Sangu registered sharp rise by 150 cm at Bandarban. The Matamuhuri at Lama also registered further rise by 52 cm. All the rivers in this basin are flowing below their respective danger levels.

Flood

From Page 1  
bandha thana have been inundated with deterioration of the overall flood situation in the district.

Daurabri, Sindurni, Patikapara, Char Dubni, Barakhat, Goddimari, Sheikh Sindur, Haldibari, Kishayna, Dauabari, Thambhara, Pitkatika, Chhayani, Doani, Paralia and West Haldibari villages were submerged following the onrush of waters from upper catchment and incessant rain during the last seven days.

Court complex

From Page 1  
area. "We have already informed the higher authorities through proper channel about the necessity of deploying well equipped and trained policemen on the court premises," he added.

The magistrate also suggested that security outside the court should be beefed up as accomplices and rivals, of many criminals roam in the court area and any untoward incident like 'Azad killing' could happen any time.

A high official of South Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police admitted to The Daily Star that more policemen should be deployed in the court area where 20 to 30 thousand people gather every day.

Khaleda opposes

From Page 1  
cided to buy Indian vehicles which were disqualified at the preliminary tests, she said.

"Such introduction could weaken the strong artillery performance of our patriotic and efficient armed forces, she apprehended. Moreover, it would cripple the dynamic armed forces if India refrains from supplying necessary spare parts for the vehicles.

There was also allegation of irregularities and corruption in buying Russian-made Mig 29 aircraft for Bangladesh Air Force, the BNP chief noted in the statement.

Russian government first approached Bangladesh to barter its 16 aircraft for 12 million US dollar each. "But for reasons not known, the government has changed the decision and decided to purchase eight aircraft through local agents, giving four million more US dollars for each one."

These planes need major maintenance and overhaul after flying 250 hours and as Bangladesh doesn't have its technical facilities, it has to depend on India for spare parts and upkeep, the BNP Chairperson said.

In the statement Begum Zia also criticised the alleged graft in the purchase of modern frigate fighter ship for Bangladesh Navy.

The Opposition leader urged the government to rescind the purchase deals for Leyland vehicles and Mig-29.

Walkout

From Page 1

As Prof Chowdhury completed his statement, Tofal Ahmed got the floor, but the opposition members started shouting in protest of allowing him to speak and at one stage, they walked out of the parliament session.

Tofal Ahmed said Awami League never tried to use religion for political ends and alleged that "rather it was the BNP chief who in her election campaign had warned that if Awami League was voted to power, there would be no mosques and madrasahs in the country and 'ulu dhuznu' would be heard from the mosques."

He said such allegations were repeatedly made against Awami League in a "systematic manner" for more than 21 years despite the fact that the party's President Sheikh Hasina starts her day with Fazr prayers, recitation from the Holy Quran and most of Awami League MPs have performed Hajj.

A large number of treasury bench members raised their hands to support Tofal Ahmed's comment.



Bangladesh Noujan Malik Samity (Bangladesh Water Transport Owners' Association) held a press conference in the VIP Lounge of the Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday ahead of their countrywide strike beginning tomorrow.

Weather

Moderate rain likely

Moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at most places over the country with moderately heavy to heavy falls at many places over Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Day temperature may fall by 1 to 2 degree Celsius over the country, Met Office said.

The country's highest temperature 31.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and the lowest 23.4 degrees at Sylhet and Satkhira.

The sun sets in the city today at 6:50 pm and rises on Saturday at 5:15 am.

Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	26.8	24.7	93	92
Chittagong	26.8	24.0	92	89
Rajshahi	31.4	24.3	93	100