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3rd Millennium

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JS may vote on reserved seats next session

Several new bills also on agenda

By Nazmul Ashraf

The upcoming session of the Jatiya Sangsad, planned to be a brief one though, is likely to have on its agenda some issues with significant bearings on the national politics.

Called basically to meet constitutional obligation, the session has primarily been designed for only seven working days. Beginning on September 6, the session will function until September 14, saving the weekends.

According to sources in the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat, the ensuing session will decide the fate of the crucial bill on women's reserved seats, which is now lying with the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law Ministry. The committee is still undecided on whether the scrutinised bill should be placed before the House or to seek time for further scrutiny.

If placed, the bill will then be on the agenda, and voting will take place on the passage of the bill and the amendments to it. If any, in such a case, the bill will fail to get the two-thirds supports required for its passage in the 330-strong parliament unless the opposition lawmakers return to the House and vote for it, explained a high official at the Law Section in Parliament.

If time is sought and granted

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General Imam released from CMH

By Special Correspondent

Major General Imamuzzaman, Bir Bikram, CMC, Bogra Division was released from the Dhaka Combined Military Hospital yesterday after being kept there for 16 days under unexplained circumstances.

He was admitted to the hospital on August 16 on orders of Army Headquarters on the alleged grounds of having high blood pressure.

CMH sources said he had to go through all sorts of tests which revealed there was nothing wrong with his physical or mental state. No treatment or medication was prescribed for the freedom fighter general during his confinement in a VIP Cabin at the Hospital.

General Imamuzzaman, famous for his heroics in the battle of Belunia, still has seven more years of service.

Gen Musharraf won't meet Vajpayee at UN: Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Aug 31: Pakistan today ruled out a meeting between military ruler General Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the sidelines of the United Nations millennium summit next week, reports AFP.

There is no indication, possibility of Musharraf meeting Vajpayee, Foreign Office spokesman Riaz Mohammad Khan said at a briefing.

No such meeting is on the cards yet, he added.

BCL leaders on special mission

PM wants report on AL's prospects in general elections

By Reaz Ahmad

Ruling Awami League sends special teams to all the 64 districts today to prepare secret reports on the party position at the grassroots level, said party sources.

Prime Minister and AL chief Sheikh Hasina assigned some 100 former and present leaders of her party's student wing for the fact-finding late Wednesday night. Hasina asked them to have their reports ready before September 11, the day she returns from New York after attending the Millennium Summit.

Student leaders, who attended the meeting with the PM at her official residence, told The Daily Star that she sought for an early assessment on AL's prospects in the 2001 general elections.

Sheikh Hasina also warned that she would not take the responsibility if the young leadership of her party indulged in



Transport strike shelved

Govt sees logic in fare hike but is against unilateral raise

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity will not go on an indefinite strike from today, as scheduled earlier, President of the Samity and ruling party MP Maqbul Hossain has said.

"We had a very successful discussion and we are not going on strike now," he said after a meeting between Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Monju and leaders of the Samity yesterday.

The minister told newsmen, "We requested transport owners not to increase fare indiscriminately and wait till September 10 when we will have another round of talks on the issue."

He also said, "there should

be some increase in fare as it remained the same over the last 10 years."

The Samity had earlier threatened to go on an indefinite strike from today demanding reduction of fuel prices, raised recently.

General Secretary of the Samity said the government side agreed in principle to increase fare but the new rate will be decided later.

The existing rate of fare is 32 paise and 36 paise per km for buses and mini-buses respectively.

Leaders of Bangladesh Bus Truck Malik Samity were not invited to the meeting. They are not in favour of strike.

Meanwhile, transport owners have increased fare by 20 to 30 per cent in different routes following increase in fuel prices recently.

Passengers protested the increase in fare and some untoward incidents were also reported from different areas of the country.

There were also allegations that transport owners engaged armed groups to enforce the increase of fare.

In reply to a question, leaders of Sarak Paribahan Samity said they have asked different units of their organisation not to increase fare before the government takes a decision on the issue.

Khulna Mayor in the dock

3 others also charged with misappropriation of Tk 3.56cr

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Aug 31: The Anti-corruption Bureau, Khulna has filed a case with Khulna Thana today against Mayor Sheikh Tayabur Rahman and three others on charge of misappropriating Tk 3.56,32,000 from the Khulna City Corporation.

Three other accused are APS Sheikh Shafiqul Hasan, PA Khan Esharat Ali and PRO Sardar Abu Taher.

According to FIR, Mayor Tayabur received Tk 4,56,32,526 from T&T Board, Khulna in 1995 and 1996 for renovation of roads that were damaged due to

installation of telephone lines in the city.

This money was given in four cheques as compensation to repair several roads. But he spent Tk 3,55,69,845 without any lawful authority and approval of the government, the FIR added.

Besides, the City Mayor paid Tk 38,140 to his APS Shafiqul Hasan as travelling allowance during his visit to India from October 25 to November 10 in 1995 also without any legal authority and prior permission of

the Prime Minister as required under the rules, the FIR said. He also paid Tk 18,566 to PRO Abu Taher against TA bill without any legal authority.

The City Mayor also paid Tk 31,834 from KCC fund to his PA Esharat Ali for travelling to India without any legal authority and prior permission of the Prime Minister.

He misappropriated Tk 1,06,296 in the name of payment of TA bills causing financial loss to the national exchequer, the FIR added.

Respite for Ershad

SC extends deadline for surrender

By Staff Correspondent

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday extended time for former President HM Ershad's surrender before the trial court.

It further ordered that the special leave petition should be filed before the full court within one week after the court reopens on October 15.

Justice AM Mahmudur Rahman, a Vacation Bench judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court heard Ershad's petition seeking time for his surrender before the trial court and issued the order.

Barrister Rafiqul Huq, counsel for Ershad, submitted before the court that his client had not yet received the certified copies of the HC order and as such leave petition could not be filed. The hearing began at 10:30 a.m. continued for 15 minutes.

Ershad intended to file leave petition against the HC order after receiving the certified copies of the order, the counsel said praying for time to enable him to file the leave petition.

The additional attorney general and the deputy attorney general opposed the prayer for stay.

When the court wanted to know whether any warrant of arrest has been issued against Ershad, the prosecution sought one-hour time to answer. The

Speaker accused of violating "natural justice"
Writ against vacancy order on Sunday

By Staff Correspondent

Former President HM Ershad will file a writ petition on Sunday challenging the order cancelling his membership in the Jatiya Sangsad, his lawyer Barrister Rafiqul Huq said yesterday.

Barrister Huq accused the Speaker of having acted illegally and in violation of the principle of natural justice.

He cited two similar cases forwarded to the Election Commission by the Speaker on a reference from the Prime

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court rejected the prayer and passed the order.

In another development, the Second Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka fixed September 4 for submitting certified copies of the orders of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court and the High Court Division regarding Ershad's surrender before the trial court in the Janata Tower case.

Earlier, Ershad's counsel Shaikh Mohammad Serajul Islam moved the petition in the Court of District and Sessions Judge, Dhaka.

On August 24, a Division Bench of High Court comprising Justice Golam Rabbani and Justice Latifur Rahman in their judgement in the 'Janata Tower Case' sentenced Ershad to five years imprisonment and fined Tk 5.5 crore, in default two more years. The court also fined 18 others including his wife Roushan Ershad.

A lower court had earlier sentenced the former President to seven years imprisonment in the same case.

PDB out to cover up 'gross violation'

Star Report

The Power Development Board (PDB) is seeking a post-facto approval from the Economic Relations Division (ERD) for its 17.7 million US dollar contract with a Russian company for rehabilitation of Ghoshal and 2 power units.

PDB signed the contract on May 31 "bypassing" the ERD, which was "gross violation of rules of business", sources said. Funds for the rehabilitation work are to be provided under a supplier's credit, for which ERD has to sign a loan agreement first.

After PDB signed the contract, ERD wrote a letter to the Energy Ministry seeking to know who would take the responsibility of the contract and whether PDB would pay for the loan. The contract was signed when Quamrul Islam Siddique was Chairman of PDB.

Following ERD's objection,

the government last month formed a nine-member inter-ministerial committee to probe allegations of nepotism and abuse of power by the former chairman of PDB.

The Power Division of the Energy Ministry last month sought an explanation from PDB regarding signing of the contract with the Russian company, Technopromimport.

The Ministry specifically wanted to know why PDB signed the contract before signing of the loan agreement by ERD.

In its recent reply, PDB Secretary admitted PDB's "mistake" and said its officials were "unaware" of the rules of business for signing of such a contract.

The letter indirectly passed the blame on the Energy Ministry for the blunder, saying that PDB signed the contract

following approval of the ministry.

"However, the PDB authorities would now be alert so that such things do not take place in the future," the letter said and urged the Energy Ministry to request the ERD for post-facto approval of the contract.

Meanwhile, the probe committee could not make much progress in its work. A lobby is now trying to stop the investigation against the former PDB chairman, the sources claimed.

The committee was assigned to investigate whether PDB authorities directly contacted any donor, PDB's alleged violation of rules of business between May 1, 1999 and May 31, 2000 and whether PDB's tender committees were formed as per rules and what were the professional profiles of their members.

Encroachers flout BIWTA ultimatum

By Staff Correspondent

BIWTA's well-publicised 30-day ultimatum to remove all encroachments from the river Buriganga expired Monday without any one of the 200 encroachers paying any heed.

Moreover, the BIWTA officials do not have any plan in hand whatsoever about what action they would take now. They failed to say what they would do now to recover the Buriganga from the clasp of the encroachers after their ultimatum is over.

One source said that the concerned officials were too busy with other things to look into the problems of Buriganga encroachments. The ultimatum was served following public pressure on BIWTA to protect the lifeline of the river of which BIWTA is the custodian.

Sources also said that the BIWTA has no plan in hand to evict the encroachers. The concerned file is now lying with the Director Port of BIWTA.

If the BIWTA wants to fulfil its pledge to clear the river Buriganga, it would have to write to the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka and also seek police assistance. Besides, they might have to procure bulldozers for demolition inside the river. A source informed that

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British Home Secy due Sept 9

By Staff Correspondent

British Secretary of State for Home Affairs Jack Straw MP will visit Bangladesh from 9-10 September, according to a British High Commission press release issued yesterday.

Straw, who is one of the top cabinet ministers in Tony Blair's government will hold talks with Bangladesh counterpart Home Minister Mohammed Nasim. Straw will also call on Chief Justice Latifur Rahman and meet the acting minister for foreign affairs.

Straw would also call on the Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia. He will exchange views with representatives of the civil society and other prominent figures.

Straw will be accompanied by officials from the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the United Kingdom.

Sandwip goes under water

12,000 people take refuge in cyclone centres

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Aug 31: About 12,000 people have taken refuge at the cyclone shelters after tidal wave inundated more than 1,000 dwelling houses in the coastal island of Sandwip, police and other sources said today.

Sandwip town went under five-foot high tidal water today. Water entered into the ground floor of Sandwip Upazila Office and into many shops there. Normal life was disrupted in Sandwip island while traffic movement came to a halt, police

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Dissuade Delhi from building N-plant in Sunderbans

FOEB urges govt

By Special Correspondent

The Friends of the Earth, Bangladesh (FOEB) has appealed to the government to take up with New Delhi the issue of India's plan to build a nuclear power station on its part of the Sunderbans.

The two Sunderbans are indivisible. A nuclear station is bound to adversely affect the bio-diversity of the Sunderbans as a whole. Professor Kazi Zaker Hossain, a well-known zoologist said yesterday.

Professor Hossain who carried out the first census in the Sunderbans in the eighties to determine the number of Royal Bengal Tigers, told a workshop in the city that there is no guarantee that another tragedy similar to Bhopal or Chernobyl

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