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Reports on Ershad's takeover, Nasim's 'coup bid' demanded

JS Committee on Defence Ministry meets again on Jan 7

By Nazrul Islam

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Defence has asked the government to submit within 15 days separate reports on the 'process of illegal takeover of power' by former army chief H M Ershad in 1982 and the 'coup attempt' by General Mohammad Nasim in 1996.

After about two and a half hours' discussion at its meeting yesterday, the committee finally fixed the agenda to examine the process of illegal takeover of power by Ershad and asked the defence ministry to submit its reports. The meeting was adjourned till January 7.

After receipt of the reports from the ministry, the committee will hold detailed discussion and constitute separate parliamentary sub-committees, if needed, to conduct independent investigation into the military takeover and the coup attempt.

Committee Chairman and former Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. (Retd) Shafiqullah told a group of journalists at the parliament building that the committee would look into the activities of Ershad before he took over.

The committee would also examine whether the process of illegal

takeover could be tried under the Army Act or existing laws, meeting sources said.

The committee had earlier fixed the agenda for discussion on the illegal takeover of power by Ershad on March 24, 1982. But on objection from Ershad's brother Golam Mohammad Qader who is also a member of the committee, the committee decided to examine only the process of illegal takeover.

Earlier, in a written objection to the committee chairman, Qader said there is no scope to discuss the takeover (by Ershad) and the activities of the then government because those were 'legitimised by the Seventh Amendment to the Constitution'. Terming the initiative by the JS body as illegal, the JP lawmaker said the issue has been taken up to give 'undue advantage to someone and to victimise some others'.

On the other issue of the 'coup attempt' on May 20, 1996 following which the then Army Chief Lt. Gen. Mohammad Nasim was removed, the meeting asked the authorities concerned to submit a 'complete report' on it.

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PM's directive to implement ADP speedily

In a midterm review meeting yesterday, the National Economic Council (NEC) expressed satisfaction over national economic activities and implementation of ADP in last six months of the current fiscal, reports UNB.

At the same time, the NEC meeting, presided over by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, emphasized yet speedier implementation of different development projects for achieving more success in economic fields.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked officials concerned to devise effective plans for speedy implementation of development.

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Bus service with Nepal likely

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Possibility of opening Dhaka-Kathmandu bus service will be discussed during the forthcoming visit of Nepalese Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola to Bangladesh.

The Nepalese foreign minister will pay a four-day official visit to Bangladesh from January 8 to 11. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad said this while briefing newsmen in the city yesterday.

The two countries will hold talks on bilateral issues including scope for expansion of trade and investment, he said. Talks will also take place on enhancing transit facilities and the opening of a direct bus service between the two countries, Azad added.

Minister says 'no crisis' while students see no textbooks

By Mustak Hossain

Education Minister ASHK Sadique has said there is no textbook crisis in the country, ignoring the reality that students of both primary and secondary levels have started attending classes without new textbooks for the current academic year.

The minister said this when opposition legislator Moshir Rahman drew his attention to frequent press reports on textbook crisis at a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education yesterday.

Education Secretary Dr Sadaat Hussain then said there are around 1.75 crore textbooks for primary level students and those would be distributed among them by January 31.

Opposition members of the committee expressed concern over the prevailing textbook crisis.

The meeting however did not discuss the situation concerning textbooks for secondary level students.

Presided over by Chairman of the Committee Nurul Islam Nahid, the meeting was attended by, among others, Abdus Shaheed, Moshir Rahman and Begum Rawshan Ershad.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) is responsible for supply of the

books. Meanwhile, students and guardians are worried about the non-availability of books in time.

There are reports that the textbooks would not be available in market within this month and it might even take more time.

The NCTB in a surprise move had awarded the job of printing 8.12 crore textbooks only to three concerns of Beximco Group—

Pustaka, Suktara and Free Press—allegedly by ignoring rules. When contacted yesterday, NCTB Chairman Dr Tapan Kanti Chowdhury said, "We hope more than 50 percent books for secondary level would reach the students by the third week of this month. We have one crore 55 lakh books for primary level in our hand but we could not despatch those to different districts due to lack of transports during the Eid holidays."

He went on, "We hope the situation would improve as we have more primary level textbooks of old edition and we are working to print 'due part' of those books with information updated and errors corrected."

A leader of Bangladesh Mudran Shilpa Samity said prices of textbooks would go up as it is now obvious that the Beximco concerns would not be able to supply the books by the first week of this month.

He mentioned that the NCTB did not pay heed to repeated cautions from the printing industry against awarding the job of printing such a large number of textbooks only to three concerns.

The organisations representing the country's printing industry said the NCTB's move was a violation of rules.

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PSA fails to curb crime Only 40 out of 476 cases disposed of in 9 months

By Court Correspondent

The Public Safety Act (PSA) failed to make any positive impact on improvement of law and order increased despite enactment of the Act, they noted.

It was enacted despite bitter criticism by opposition political parties and human rights organisations.

Under the PSA, an accused is put behind the bar after charge is brought against him, and no court can grant him bail during the 30-day investigation period. However, investigation sometimes takes more time.

A tribunal was constituted in the city on March 28 last year for

trial of cases under the PSA.

A total of 476 cases were registered with the tribunal in nine months ending in November, 2000. Of these, 40 were disposed of and 436 are pending. The accused in 20 cases out of the 40 were acquitted as the allegations against them proved to be 'false, fabricated and vague', sources in the tribunal said.

In the rest 20 cases, 25 offenders were given rigorous imprisonment for their involvement in such crimes, the sources said.

Many other cases filed with different thanas

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Drifters... fourteen people, who had been stranded at the transit lounge of the Zia International Airport since December 16 after being forced back to Dhaka by the Indian authorities, were placed on a day's police remand yesterday by a magistrate's court. The 14, including four women, were deported from Vienna by the Austrian immigration authorities to New Delhi.

HC asks police not to arrest Morshed Khan

By Special Correspondent

The Vacation Bench of the High Court yesterday directed police not to arrest or disturb M Morshed Khan MP and his son Faisal M Khan 'till one week' after the court reopens on January 7, pending hearing of the 'substantive application' for their bail by a Regular Bench, court sources said.

The Vacation Bench comprising Justice Fazlul Karim gave the order following anticipatory bail prayer by Morshed Khan, a leading businessman and a central leader of BNP and his son in a case filed with Kulshi thana in Chittagong on December 26 under Public Safety Act (PSA). The case is now lying with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Chittagong.

Barrister Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed along with Dr Kamal Hossain, Rafique Ull Huq and Abdul Malek moved the anticipatory bail petition while Deputy Attorney General AKM Saifuddin opposed it.

The lawmaker and his son are sought by police since filing of the case in which they have been accused of rioting, ransacking a sweetmeat shop and looting Tk 45,000 from the shop.

They have denied the allegations and also filed a case, which police had first refused to accept but later recorded it on orders from a magistrate.

It was complained in the case that Faisal Khan along with his wife went to buy fruit items from the shop but they came under attack by some young men following an altercation over parking of their vehicle. They were beaten. When Morshed Khan arrived there on information about this, he was chased.

Megawati's visit will be significant, says FM

Dhaka will propose to enhance bilateral trade and economic cooperation with Jakarta when Indonesia's populist leader and Vice-President Megawati Soekarnoputri arrives here on January 5, reports UNB.

Megawati, daughter of Indonesia's founding father Soekarno, will be visiting Bangladesh on a 3-day official tour at the invitation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

She will be here on the second leg of her 3-nation tour that will also take her to Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

Her visit is seen as significant as it would be Megawati's first official tour of Bangladesh and a follow-up to the visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who toured Jakarta in September 1997.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will receive the Indonesian Vice-President at the Zia International Airport breaking usual protocol, possibly on grounds that both Hasina and Megawati are daughters of founding fathers of their respective nations.

It would be a high-profile visit and significant as well. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad told reporters at the Foreign Office. He said Bangladesh and Indonesia being members of OIC and D-8 enjoy excellent relations.

The Indonesian Vice President will call on the President and meet with the Prime Minister on January 5 and is expected to hold official talks with Foreign Minister Azad on January 6 at state guesthouse Padma.

Asked whether Bangladesh would place any specific proposal for closing the widening trade gap with Indonesia, Additional Foreign Secretary Ruhul Amin said: "There is scope for expanding Dhaka's trade with Jakarta... we will explore means of achieving more export to Indonesia."

Bilateral trade is heavily inclined towards Indonesia. In 1999-2000, Bangladesh's exports fetched USD 8.13 million while imports cost USD 159.47 million.

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Promotion of asstt secys held up

By Special Correspondent

The Superior Selection Board (SSB) has put on hold the process of finalising promotion of senior assistant secretaries as deputy secretaries following an order by the Supreme Court staying it till January 7.

The SSB took the decision at a meeting yesterday, chaired by Cabinet Secretary Kazi Shamsul Alam. It was attended by Additional Secretary of Establishment Division Rashidul Alam, Home Secretary M M Reza, Land Secretary Saiful Islam and acting Law Secretary Abdul Hye.

The Court gave the order on Monday upon a petition by officials from the Special Batch of 1982 Administrative Cadre.

Statement by 64 BNP MPs over new JCD body Khaleda dissatisfied, terms it violation of discipline

By Rezaul Karim

The joint statement of 64 BNP MPs criticising protests by JCD activists against its new central committee has created serious resentment in the BNP rank and file, party sources said yesterday.

Even BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has expressed dissatisfaction over issuance of the statement and said it was violation of party discipline. It was issued without any consultation with her or any senior leader, the sources quoted her as saying.

The statement published in some newspapers on Monday said the 'wild protests, backed by some government agents in BNP, were contrary to healthy and democratic politics and aimed at tarnishing the image of the party'.

The sources said hardliners in BNP are behind issuance of the statement to serve their interest by creating division and confusion in the party ahead of the national election.

They said more than 30 of the 64 MPs have contacted party Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Chief Whip of the Opposition in Parliament Khandaker Delwar Hossain and denied any

link with the statement. The MPs told the two leaders that they knew about the statement from newspapers, the sources said.

When contacted, a good number of the MPs expressed their surprise seeing their names in the statement. They said the language of the statement is 'objectionable'.

Several of them suspected that Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain and Salahuddin Qader Chowdhury were behind issuance of the statement. They said they have demanded explanation from the two.

The MPs said there is no government agent in BNP, as alleged the statement.

The sources said most of the members of BNP Standing Committee, the Chairperson's Advisory Council and party MPs have strongly protested the language of the statement.

They said the statement proved that there is a sharp division in the party, which is causing seri-

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39 Kalaroa BNP men sent to jail hajjat

From Our Correspondent

SATKHIRA, Jan 2: The special tribunal judge here today rejected the bail petitions of 39 BNP leaders and activists accused in a case under Public Safety Act (PSA) and sent them to jail hajjat.

Police sources said, a case was lodged with Kalaroa thana against 46 leaders and workers of BNP. Kalaroa upazila unit on charge of creating terrorism and attempting to foil the public meeting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Kalaroa on October 5 last year.

The accused include ex-UP chairperson Abdur Rashid, Koyla UP chairperson Abdur Rakib, ex-Upazila chairman of Kalaroa, Professor Bazlur Rahman.

After submitting charge sheet, seven of the accused were released on bail while the rest were at large.

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Devotees arriving for Ijtima

By Staff Correspondent

All preparations for holding the three-day Biswa Ijtima are nearing completion and devotees from home and abroad have started arriving, organisers said yesterday.

The second largest congregation of Muslims next to Hajj starts on Saturday at its traditional venue at Tongi, about 22 kms from the city.

Several thousand volunteers are working round the clock to give a final touch to the huge canopy and complete other preparations, including those for supply of water, gas and electricity in the area for the congregation.

Work for erecting the huge canopy on more than 100 acres of land on the eastern side of Turag and preparing the field started about two months back.

More than two hundred

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Stranded deportees on police remand

By Special Correspondent

Fourteen people, who had been forced back to Bangladesh by India after being deported to New Delhi by the Austrian immigration authorities, were placed on a one-day police remand yesterday.

The suspected Chinese and Taiwanese nationals, including four women, who reached the Indian capital via Bangkok, Dhaka and Calcutta, have no valid travel documents. Austrian immigration authorities seized the papers, they claimed.

Only one of the 14, aged between 22 and 26, can speak a few words in English.

Earlier yesterday, they were handed over to the police by Bangladesh Biman, which had played the unwilling host to the group stranded in the transit lounge of the Zia International Airport since December 17 last year.

The police took them into custody under section 54 of CrPC

and produced them before a Magistrate's court. The court granted a one-day remand against a police prayer for a three-day one.

The police plan to interrogate them with the help of an interpreter, sources said.

The 14, believed to be victims of organised human traffickers, were boarded a Biman flight to Dhaka by the Indian authorities.

"We had to play the host to these people who had no papers, offering them food and keeping them at the transit lounge of ZIA, since Indian authorities forcibly boarded them on a Dhaka-bound Biman flight on December 16. The decision to hand them over to police was taken after the Chinese embassy in Dhaka had declined to take their responsibility," a Biman source said.

The 14 first arrived in Dhaka from Bangkok in batches of seven

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Launch disaster death toll rises to 158

From Our Correspondent

CHANDPUR, Jan 2: The death toll from Friday's launch disaster in the river Meghna at Ekhlashpur rose to 158 with recovery of 48 more bodies till 7 pm today.

Police, BIWTA officials and local people found the 48 mutilated bodies floating in the river during rescue operation in the morning.

Officials said they recovered 28 bodies from Sadar Upazila, 17 from Matlab and 3 from Haimchar. The bodies were taken to sadar hospital morgue for autopsy.

It will be difficult for the relatives of the victims to identify the bodies after five days of their death," said an official. He said that the bodies would be buried here after autopsy.

Earlier, a total of 111 bodies were recovered. Of them, 46 bodies were found on Monday. They were lying in front of Sadar Hospital morgue till filling of this report.

The accident occurred early Friday when a double-decker launch, MV Rajrangshi, sailing from Dhaka to Madaripur sank in the river with some 400 passengers aboard after a collision with another launch, MV Jalkapot-2.

UNB adds: Gayebana janaza for all who died in launch accident in the Meghna was held at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after Ar prayers yesterday.

Most of the victims, who met with the accident on way to home from Dhaka on the night of Eid day, were from Naria and Jazira of Shariatpur district.

Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak, Colonel (Retd) Shaukat Ali MP, among others, attended the janaza.

After the janaza, Quirankhwani, milad mahfil and special prayers were held for salvation of the departed souls.



Devout Muslims from all corners of the country have started assembling on the bank of the river Turag on the outskirts of the capital city for the three-day Biswa Ijtima, scheduled to begin on January 6.

-Star photo

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 3		5.24 pm
Jan 4	6-42 am	

Prayer Timings		
January 3		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-14	5-20
Zuhr	12-45	1-20
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-23	5-30
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation