

Barisal, Sylhet div hqs elevated to city corps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday passed legislation creating two more city corporations in the Barisal and Sylhet divisional headquarters raising the number of such corporations in the country to six.

The House passed two identical bills providing for elevation of the Barisal and Sylhet municipalities to city corporations. These two have joined the league of four existing city corporations in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna. Barisal was upgraded to an administrative division in 1993 while Sylhet in 1995.

According to the bills that were introduced in the House on March 29, elections to the newly created city corporations will be held at the earliest possible time after the laws come into effect following consent by the president.

Lawmakers from the two cities were exhilarated during passage of the bills. Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah who hails from Barisal seemed happiest, encouraging members in the treasury bench to cast their votes at different stages of passing the Barisal City Corporation Bill.

Urged on by Abdullah, some of the ruling party lawmakers started shouting at the top of their voice in support of the bill.

Unlike in the existing ones, the two new city corporations will have the offices of deputy mayor besides those of the mayor. The idea of deputy mayor was incorporated in the bills yesterday through amendment.

The corporations will also have one commissioner from each ward and a third of the posts of commissioner reserved for women. Areas in

the two city corporations will be divided into a number of wards.

According to the bills, the term of an elected corporation will expire after five years unless the government dissolves it for some reason. On expiry of term, the next election will be held in 180 days.

Piloting the city corporation bills, Local Government Minister Zillur Rahman said establishment of the new city governments would ensure better civic amenities in Barisal and Sylhet cities.

Yesterday, the parliament also passed two more bills including one empowering the government to decide on the timing of election to the Upazila Parishad as the Election Commission had failed to hold the local election within the stipulated 330 days since the Act came into effect in 1998.

Seeking passage of the bill, the local government minister criticised the Election Commission for failing to hold the Upazila polls despite repeated requests by his ministry. The minister told the House that the government would decide on holding of the local polls as soon as possible.

Upazilas were created out of the former thanas during the Ershad regime but were abolished by the Khaleda government. The local government bodies were restored by the government of Sheikh Hasina.

The House also passed another bill seeking protection of rights and dignity of the handicapped and to ensure their participation in the state and social activities.

State Minister for Social Welfare Dr Mozammel Hossain piloted the bills.

Tokai Sagar

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Tokai Sagar is the ring leader of the "Seven Star" group, an underground gang comprising some city criminals. Sagar was arrested with a pistol on his arrival at ZIA from Dubai via Sylhet.

During the hearing, the defence lawyer submitted necessary documents to prove that the pistol was not recovered from his possession. It was a licensed pistol being carried by one uzan aboard the same flight, the lawyers said.

Involved in various criminal activities including arms trading and drug smuggling through ZIA, Sagar has been absconding since the murder of Milon.

He is the assistant general secretary of BNP city committee.

Sources said that Sagar led the criminal groups of the opposition BNP. Posters with his photograph were stuck on walls asking for information about his whereabouts.

Saidul dies

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Victim's wife, Ambiya Begum Amina, told The Daily Star that she is totally helpless as she has lost the only earning member of her family.

Saidul was living at the 95 Mugdapura, Jheelpur along with his family members.

The body was taken to his village home after the autopsy at the DMCH morgue yesterday, hospital sources said.

Babul Murder Case

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With the implication of Manzur the number of the accused in the case rose to 10, the DC said. Five more persons have been enlisted as prosecution witnesses, he added.

Babul, a renowned industrialist and an Awami League leader, was killed by armed miscreants in the city's Pallabi area in October 1996.

Police earlier submitted charge sheet against nine persons, but the names of Manzur and his brother Mostafa were dropped for unknown reasons.

Holy Ashura today

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and bringing out Tazia processions in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television will arrange special programmes and the national dailies will publish special articles highlighting the significance of the day.

Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh will hold a discussion on "The importance of Ashura and its significance" at the National Mosque Baitul Mukarram today after Zohr prayers.

CEC

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porating a few changes suggested by an establishment ministry sub-committee.

A March 10 secretarial meeting, presided over by the cabinet secretary, decided that the establishment ministry and the finance ministry would finalise the recruitment rules within a month.

The CEC raised issues related to the upcoming elections, including recruitment to the vacant posts, during a brief discussion with the PM at a dinner she hosted in honour of visiting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on March 14.

The entire process has been stalled due to bureaucratic tangle in the Ministry of Establishment," said a senior EC official.

As a result, a total of 1,461 posts in 83 district and 487 upazila election offices have been lying vacant, since the EC undertook restructuring plans.

"Preparatory works for the ensuing election is on in full swing, but we cannot properly proceed as there is a huge shortage of staff," one of top EC officials, who preferred not to be named, told The Daily Star yesterday.

DSE officials also observed from the log sheet in the mainframe computer that the system had been logged on to from 4:05 p.m. till 4:37 p.m. on Friday.

The officials then informed the authorities who changed the password to restrict further access. They also tried to cover up the matter, but it was made known to the press, forcing the DSE to form the investigation committee.

But, some of the councillors did not like the idea of having DSE men in the inquiry team and demanded an independent inquiry.

DSE sources say that it is just not a case of simple hacking since someone accessing the mainframe computer would need the special software and password only available

Bangabandhu Murder Case

Mohiuddin's trial in civil court illegal: Defence

BSS, Dhaka

The defence in Bangabandhu Murder Trial yesterday challenged the trial of former Lieutenant Colonel Mohiuddin Ahmed (artillery) in civil court claiming the entire trial process against the accused was "illegal" since he was being controlled by Army Act when the case started.

"The arrest of Mohiuddin by the CID, confinement in civil custody and trial in the civil court all were illegal since he was still being controlled by the Army Act when he was arrested," Advocate Khan Saifur Rahman told the single-bench court of Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim.

The defence counsel also claimed that according to the evidence the August 15, 1975 murder of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was an "army mutiny" which deserved to be tried in a military court.

The defence claim came as the hearing on the split verdict of the previous two-member High Court bench continued for the 17th day before the third judge to decide the fate of six of the 15 accused.

The senior judge of the previous bench Justice Mohammad Rihul Amin acquitted five of the accused

including Mohiuddin while other member of the bench Justice ABM Khairul Haque sentenced all the 15 to death upholding the trial court verdict.

Advocate Khan said Mohiuddin, the lone accused of the six to face the trial in person, was arrested on the first day he went on LPR (retirement leave) and underwent the civil legal procedure leading up to his trial.

But, he said, according to the Army Act the military personnel must be guided and controlled by the army regulations for one year and six months from the day they go on LPR.

The defence counsel said although the case involved crimes of both civil and military natures "in a same thread," there was no witness to define who, among the accused, was to be charged under civil or military laws.

Advocate Khan alleged that there were also inconsistency between the prosecution witnesses belonging to army as two of them testified that on the night of August 14, there was a joint exercise of lancer and artillery units while two others said there was no joint parade.

"But none of the judges of the previous bench took the matter into consideration. Otherwise the issue

of joint night parade would have been proved 'not believable'," he said.

The defence lawyer said, moreover, two of the witnesses who joined the August 14 night parade did not identify Mohiuddin Ahmed in the dock, which indicated that the accused did not join the night parade.

Lust for power

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Replying to a question, Dr Kamal said the GF leaders would discuss and decide whether they would participate in the next election if the eight-point demand is not met.

Earlier on the day, a four-member delegation of the Forum led by Dr Kamal met CEC MA Syed.

The question of GF's registration with the Election Commission is irrelevant as election is not the only way to assess political parties, the delegation said.

Regarding the Election Commission's other proposals, they suggested that no candidate should be allowed to contest from more than one seat, election tribunals should dispose of disputes within six months and the ceiling of election expenses should be raised to five lakh from three lakh now.

Call to solve housing problem of poor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at discussion have categorically said the government has failed to play its part in addressing the housing issue for the poor.

Speakers said government's projects and programs have so far failed to reach the low-income group particularly working women because there was never such a focus until recently.

They were speaking at a national workshop on Model Hostels for Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh organised by Nari Udday Kendro (NUK) at the conference room of the LGED building yesterday.

The constitution and the National Housing Policy 1993 hinds the government to play an effective role, both as a provider and facilitator. In reality government initiatives for housing have evaded the real poor working population, they said.

Experts said that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening day by day and there is virtually no habitat programme for the poor either in the government or private sectors.

"The poor are kept out even from highly subsidised projects implemented in the name of working women through careful administration and rent mechanisms," said architect Khadem Ali, in his keynote paper.

He said that with their low salaries and affordability, the shelter

choices of working girls are narrowed down to insecure slums, in remote areas or both.

Quamrul Islam Siddique, Secretary in-charge of the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, who attended the function as the chief guest in his speech said there has not been any effort to fulfil the demand of land for the poor.

Dr. Zafarullah Chowdhury, Chairman of Gano Sasthya Kendro expressed grave concern over the growing habitat problem and said the capital would become more overcrowded if the government fails to provide infrastructures like gas, electricity and water to people outside the city.

Prof. Nazrul Islam, of Geography department of Dhaka University, underscored the need for relocation of industries out side the capital.

Eng. Kutubuddin Ahmed, President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), in his speech said BGMEA will support NGO's to solving accommodation problem of garment workers.

He said "That's why we have proposed that the government relocates garment industries from the cities to garment villages."

John Moore, Counsellor and Head of Aid of Canadian High Commission urged garment owners to increase the wage of garment workers so that they can have a better living.

No polls before Oct

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister and Awami League Organising Secretary Mohammad Nasim said yesterday that there will be no early election and the government has decided in favour of polls in October.

Nasim said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had expressed her willingness to go for early elections, but the opposition does not want polls. "The only thing they want is the hand-over of power."

But, the government will transfer power to the caretaker government on completion of its

term and the polls will be held in the dry season.

The home minister was briefing the journalists about the country's latest political situation at his office.

"Before the people raised any demand, the prime minister had declared an early election. She had said that the government would hand over power to the caretaker government after April 17."

Pro- Ershad JP

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JP joined the Sangsad sessions on March 29 and claimed to have majority over another JP Parliamentary Party led by Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju.

After March 29, JP did not attend the Sangsad sessions. According to JP sources, the party joined the parliament to ensure Ershad's release from jail. As he has not been released till now, the party is refraining from attending the sessions.

JP sources said the party would decide whether it would continue going to the parliament, depending on the development in Ershad's bail petition at the Metropolitan Session Judge Court.

BTTB's failure

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Earlier, the private firm went to the court and got a stay order in its favour, which compelled the BTTB to further delay the tender process.

In a similar case, the board had extended the timeframe of the contract for bill-preparation with another private firm thrice.

The BTTB is now trying to prepare the bills in collaboration with the Computer Centre of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

"It is largely uncertain that when BTTB would be able to prepare the bills for the months of January, February and March as it needs approval of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication for further proceeding," said another source.

There are only two firms in the country, which have expertise in this field. In contrast, the country's four private mobile operators prepare their monthly subscribers' bills on their own.

The BTTB has 5.5 lakh telephone and about 20,000 telex subscribers.

Hasina: CHT

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and pragmatic steps for the development and welfare of the people. But after his brutal killing, the post-75 government took some controversial measures, including planned settlement of non-tribals.

The Prime Minister said the Awami League government considered the problems as political and therefore took steps to resolve those politically.

"She did so out of generosity despite the opposition's agitation for the last four years and nine months."

He said the opposition movement lacked public support and "no civil society can accept killing of working people in the name of people's politics and hartal."

The hartals did not affect the administration, industries, business, the rich or the government employees and officials. "But it did affect the labour class. The government is standing by this class and that is why some actions were taken," said the home minister.

He said during the 60-hour hartal, police arrested some 500 terrorists across the country. The government was framing charges against them for possessing illegal arms and committing crimes including murder under the Public Safety Act.

Criticising the upcoming 72-hour hartal, he urged the businessmen, traders and transport owners to go about their work and added that the government would compensate for damage to property during hartal.

'Hath Kata' Shamim arrested in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna thana police yesterday arrested 'Hath Kata' Shamim, 35, from customs ghat area. Police said Shamim, a Jobo League activist, was wanted in a murder of criminal cases including murders and muggings. He is also a notorious terrorist, police said.

Khaleda

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The ruling party was illegally importing arms to use it during the next elections.

She stressed the need for recovery of these illegal as well as legal arms from the ruling party "mastans" for ensuring a free and fair election.

She said Awami League cannot carry out this responsibility and it is the job of the caretaker government, which will take time.

"The caretaker government needs time, but the Awami League does not want to give that because it intends to rig the polls," she said.

As an election campaign, she said if BNP comes to power at the next polls, it would make education for girls free up to intermediate level. She also assured solving local problems.

Party leaders Tafiqul Islam, Prof Jahanaara Begum, Shaidduzzaman Beltu MP, M Abdul Wahab MP, Shahidul Islam Master MP, Mozammel Haq Khan MP, Shamsuzzaman Dudu MP, Abdul Khaleduzzaman MP, Ashraf Hossain, Wing Commander Hamidullah Khan and Rezaul Karim also addressed the meeting.

Opposition Whip Moshir Rahman MP presided over the meeting.

Bangladesh win

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skittle the Academy out for 183 in 48.5 overs. In reply, Bangladesh raced on to overhaul the target in only 32.2 overs, with one-down Habibul Bashar notching a sparkling 79.

The first of three-match one-day series between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe begins in Harare on April 7.

(Match report and other stories on Page 13)

Criminal silence for 3 years!

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attention in this regard, also said, "The situation is quite alarming. Since knowing about it we are doing our best to find out alternatives."

A Japanese team (JICA) is now in Chaipainawabganj to find possible solutions to the problem and they are working with the local public health engineers, Mondal informed.

The affected areas include Namangshukaraboti, Nakhraipara, Durgapur, Kathalbagicha, Haluabandha, Nayanakula and Chandlai.

When contacted, Ishshantul Haq, executive engineer, Research and Development Division of the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE), admitted that people were drinking arsenic-contaminated water from pipeline water system since 1998. "Yes, its true that water in the pipeline system has arsenic more than the acceptable level. In fact, the level as we measured is 0.2 mg/L in the deep tube-wells."

Haq also said that a Japanese expert visited the spot last week to find solutions.

In the meantime, DPHE has been experimenting with a home-based arsenic removal plant using two-bucket ferric-chloride combination in one of the municipal areas for a year now, he revealed.

Mondal also mentioned that there are 347 hand-pumped tube-wells within the municipal areas operated both at the public and private levels. Out of these, 299 (86 per cent) are contaminated with arsenic above the acceptable level. Laboratory tests show the majority of the wells are quite badly affected.

DPHE experts also said that there are two options for the municipal, one is to treat Mahananda river water or remove arsenic directly from the source of the tube-wells.

At least one hundred municipalities out of a total of 224 get drinking water through pipeline system in the country.

The US\$44 million Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply Project (BAMWSP), financed by the World Bank and Swiss Development Co-operation and implemented by the local government division, is yet to test water supplied by the municipalities.

In the meantime, the DPHE detected low level of arsenic in Faridpur pipeline water system, which is treated automatically by iron removal plant, installed there a year back.

The local government and rural development and co-operative minister could not be contacted for comment after several attempts.

Rajuk to revoke plans

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and the process will continue."

Rajuk's Member Development A Awal Chowdhury said that Rajuk has no legal backup to refuse approval of a high-rise plan if a developer produces the Environmental Certificate issued by the Department of Environment (DoE).

Since 1999 Rajuk has not approved any building plan above six-storey, he said, adding that a high-powered committee headed by the state minister for environment is now working to chalk out a guideline for height zoning of the city.

"All building plans that we approve have parking and other facilities, but deviations take place later on," Chowdhury said. "With so limited manpower it is very difficult

for Rajuk to monitor progress of every construction site."

Meanwhile, a sub-committee was formed under the Dhaka Integrated Environmental Development Guidelines Committee to make a report on the guidelines for high-rise buildings in Dhaka metropolitan area.

Professor Nazrul Islam, who headed the committee, said his team has recently submitted a draft guideline to the state minister for environment.

"Once finalised, the guidelines would be followed by all concerned including the DoE where applications for Environmental Clearance Certificate for tall buildings have piled up," Professor Islam said.

PDB likely to review deal

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look into three areas: Whether or not the PDB authorities directly contacted any donor country or any donor organisation. Between May 1, 1999 and May 31, 2000, in which areas PDB violated the 'Rules of Business' and what were the violations. Whether the tender committees of PDB were formed as per the existing rules and regulations and what are the professional profiles of the members of those committees.

Meanwhile, the contract remained suspended. As a result, the Russian company refrained from giving any performance guarantee and PDB refrained from giving any down payment.

While the probe committee's work progressed very slowly, suddenly Technopromexport, also known as TPE, announced on January 14 that a lot of equipment and materials will arrive at Mongla Port and PDB should immediately get those cleared by the customs.

Despite suggestions from PDB not to import any of those equip-

ment as the contract was not yet effective, TPE brought those on February 13. These equipment, later found old and refurbished, are now lying with Mongla customs.

In a letter to TPE on March 29, the PDB secretary reiterating their position regarding the contract said, "TPE cannot make any shipment of materials for the work before the contract becomes effective. Besides, the contract has provision for issuance of notices for the pre-shipment inspection of materials and TPE shall issue such notices to PDB. But TPE has already made a shipment of about 90 tons of consumables and tools."

The letter also mentioned that TPE's partner in the agreement TKZ, which is responsible for supply of the equipment, had separately proposed change of the boiler, turbines and other equipment.

Expressing serious concern, PDB said that under such circumstances, the contract would be reviewed before further steps were taken.

on the election date and other disputed issues.

The business community is also willing to mediate between the opposing political camps, if need be, the sources said.

When contacted, presidents of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) confirmed that they are planning to sit together to take a united stand on the recent political developments and make an appeal to the political leaders.

However, a section of the business community is skeptical about the outcome of the move, since similar initiatives in the past did not pay any dividend.

Each day of hartal, according to business community and a World Bank estimate, costs the country US\$60 million.

Earlier, on Wednesday three leading business bodies, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and

Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), issued separate statements calling upon the political parties to settle their disputes through dialogue discarding programmes harmful to the economy.

Add agencies: As frequent shutdown disrupts trade and business, leaders of different trade bodies yesterday urged political parties to refrain from calling hartal and pursuing destructive politics to save the economy.

"The economy of the country is bound to ruin if hartal continues in its present form," they said in a joint statement. With a note of grave concern, they said hartal is wreaking havoc in all spheres of life, including trade and business.

"We feel that hartal is not the only way to resolve political problem. Political activities that hamper the country's economic development do not bode well for the country as well as the nation," said leaders of 22 district chambers and 19 trade associations.

They said the business community felt that the political crisis should be resolved amicably

through peaceful discussion instead of hartal and politics of confrontation.

The district chambers of commerce and industries who made the appeal included those of Rajbari, Madaripur, Tangail, Gopalganj, Bogura, Khulna, Kushtia, Narasingdi, Faridpur, Shariatpur, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jamalpur, Manikganj, Chandpur, Comilla, Jessore, Mymensingh, Luxmipur, Jhalakathi, Naogaon and Sirajganj.

The trade associations included Bangladesh National Small and Cottage Industries Association, Bangladesh Shop Owners Association, Bangladesh Engineering Industries Owners Association, Bangladesh Printing and Machinery Association, Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association, Bangladesh Motion Picture Association, Bangladesh Cargo Vessel Owners Association, Bangladesh Electrical Association, Bangladesh Film Importers Association, Bangladesh Grocery Traders Association, Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters Association, Bangladesh Textile Mills Owners

Association, Bangladesh Watch Traders Association, Bangladesh Jewellers Association, Bangladesh Motor Parts and Tire Tube Association, Bangladesh Footwear Manufacturers Association and Bangladesh Electrical Merchants Association.

Meanwhile, in a separate statement, Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association (BFFEA) expressed deep concern over the confrontational situation in the political arena and urged the ruling party and the opposition to settle all political disputes through dialogue.

BFFEA president Salahuddin Ahmed said frequent hartal may result in the country losing frozen foods market abroad.

He said huge consignments of frozen foods ready for export could not be sent for shipment due to transport crisis.

"Shrimp farmers cannot supply their products to the factory following collapse of communications," the BFFEA President said apprehending setbacks in export target in the current season.