

Secretarial body

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Instructing the home ministry to scale up the ongoing illegal arms recovery drive, she said the November 10 deadline for surrendering of illegal arms would not be extended.

The prime minister reiterated stern measures against terrorists, possessors of illegal arms and extortionists, irrespective of party affiliations.

She also asked the authorities to take action against those police officials, especially officers-in-charge on patrol, found negligent to their duties. The prime minister suggested that those providing information helping recover illegal arms be rewarded.

The new government had decided earlier to hold meetings of the cabinet committee on law and order on Sundays and Wednesdays. However, the meeting was held yesterday due to the National Revolution and Solidarity Day on Wednesday.

IGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Labour and Employment Minister Abdulla-Al-Noman, Works Minister Mirza Abbas, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadek Hossain Khoka, Education Minister Dr Osman Faruq and PM's Political Secretary Haris Chowdhury attended the meeting.

Besides, Cabinet Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan, PM's Principal Secretary Dr Kamaluddin Siddiqui, Home Secretary Dr Sadat Hossain, Law Secretary Afzal Hossain

Ahmad, IGP Mudabbir Hussain Chowdhury, DMP Commissioner Anwarul Iqbal and other officials concerned were also present at the meeting.

UNFPA

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'defeat poverty and protect the environment.' If women have the number of children they want, families will be smaller and population growth will be slower, it added.

The commitment made at the ICDD in 1994 was not acted upon. What is needed now is the same kind of vision that created the Programme of Action in the first place, the political will and tenacity to stay in course, UNFPA stressed.

"Food production capacities in poor countries are deteriorating due to soil degradation water shortages, inappropriate agriculture policies and rapid population growth ... Much agriculture land is devoted for crops for export, depriving local people of land to farm and food to eat."

UNFPA Representative in Bangladesh Suneta Mukherjee said, "While progress has been made in family planning in Bangladesh since 1970s, maternal mortality is still high. We need to give more focus on this issue."

Political will is needed to bring about major changes to address gender equity, groundwater arsenic contamination, rapid urbanisation and air pollution and use of water in Bangladesh, she felt.

Joint secretary in health ministry Mir Shahabuddin Ahmed and UNFPA official Nurul Amin also spoke.

Citizens' rally

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He expressed grave concern over the dwindling air quality in the capital and said, "We the city dwellers are inhaling the most polluted air in the world. Emission of block smoke from two stroke auto-rickshaws, tempos, old and obsolete transports, mills and factories and terrific traffic jam have together caused the worst ever air pollution in the city."

In a statement yesterday, he said the level of air pollution in the capital is far above the danger level. Smoke emitted from transports contains deadly chemicals like sulphur, benzene, carbon dioxide and nitrogen, which cause various killer diseases including cancer. "We are virtually living in a gas chamber which causes death."

Children in the city are suffering from different types of complications including breathing problem and brain diseases and adults are also exposed to serious health hazards due to air pollution, Prof Sayeed noted.

Air pollution directly or indirectly causes death of about 25 thousand people in the city every year, according to a World Bank study.

The litterateur went on, "Despite being aware of the seriousness of the problem, we are remaining silent spectators and ignoring the reality. If this situation continues, we all have to pay for it very dearly. Both the government and the civil society have to share the responsibility in this regard. I think we have already paid much for this and if we do not act even now, we have to pay more."

Batsmen lose way

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Omar at forward short leg. He then trapped Ebrahim leg before with the second ball of his second over.

In the 12-odd overs the Zimbabweans batted, local fans also had the opportunity to see the much anticipated debut of 19-year-old pace prospect Mashrafe bin-Murtoza Kowshik. With his raw pace and obvious hostility, Kowshik did create a sense of de ja vu although he failed to take a wicket.

The tourists however ended the day without further hiccup with experienced campaigners Stuart Carlisle and Grant Flower playing cautiously under floodlights.

The match started at 11.15am due to stagnant water on the ground caused by slight drizzle in the morning. Match referee Hanumant Singh extended the day's play by an hour under lights, but the proceedings ended 20 minutes before the scheduled close after Flower and Carlisle complained of poor visibility.

Apart from Mujrul's burst, it was a totally disappointing day for Naimur's men after his Zimbabwe counterpart Brian Murphy won the toss and put the home side in to bat under overcast skies on a wicket that had moisture and made life difficult for the batsmen.

The Zimbabwean pacemen led by the experienced Heath Streak exploited the condition superbly. Newcomer Travis Friend and the sharp Henry Olonga bowled to an

impeccable line with Streak, and never offered the home batsmen any room to score freely.

Bangladesh lost eight wickets in the post-lunch session after negotiating seven overs of the morning's play.

The rot started when makeshift opener Al-Shahriar was undone by a delivery from right-arm paceman Friend that kept low.

Bangladesh umpire Akhtaruddin Shaheen, standing in his first Test, had no hesitation to give his very first verdict - a plumb low decision.

One-down Habibul Bashar, who has four Test half centuries under his belt, was next to go after playing a rash shot.

The right-hander slashed the first delivery he faced, one that was going wide from Friend only to be caught by wicketkeeper Andy Flower.

The rest perished playing on the back foot when the situation demanded a more front foot approach on a double paced wicket with the ball keeping low occasionally.

Bangladesh were faced with the prospect of being bowled out below their lowest Test score to date - 91 against Sri Lanka in the Asian Test Championship - when they were reduced to 56 for eight.

But a gritty 24 not out by veteran Enamul Hoque, which was the highest score in Bangladesh innings, enabled the home side to

avoid that ignominy.

The left-hander featured in a 28-run partnership--the highest stand in Bangladesh innings - for the ninth wicket with Kowshik and added 23 runs with Mujrul for the last wicket.

Enamul struck four fours in his 52-ball vigil on a day where boundaries were hard to come by.

Friend, who missed the Tests due to injury when Bangladesh toured Zimbabwe, returned with career-best figures of 5/31.

Olonga, who wrapped up the Bangladesh innings, captured three wickets for 18 runs. The colourful paceman deceived Bangladesh's young sensation Mohammed Ashraf with a well-directed bouncer that the batsman could only fend off to second slip.

A persevering Heath Streak also took two wickets to ensure that the day belonged to the pacemen.

"It was a good toss to win and my bowlers exploited the moisture on the wicket well," said Zimbabwe captain Murphy at the end of day's play.

"I would have been happier had we finished the day without losing any wicket. But it is cricket and you will have to accept it. Besides, Mujrul bowled very well."

"I think the wicket will be lot easier tomorrow and I'm hopeful of taking a lead," added the leg spinner.

The match resumes at 9.30am today.

Ministers sans assignment

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show in the ministries they have been given charge of. They dictate and approve decisions of their ministries leaving absolutely no room for their junior colleagues in the council of ministers to have a say," explained a secretary, who preferred anonymity.

According to the Bangladesh Secretariat sources, an unusual rise in the number of junior ministers this time around is not helping the ministries either in terms of an improvement in their performance. Instead, these ministers who spend time inside their chambers keep the officials and employees unnecessarily busy.

The 60-strong council of ministers, the largest ever in the country's parliamentary democracy, boasts of 28 state ministers and four deputy ministers all but five of whom are now in charge of their ministries. They have been appointed in addition to the cabinet ministers who do everything on their own.

There are five ministers who are aided by two junior ministers each. Besides, 14 other ministries have two ministers each.

Except in five ministries, the state and the deputy ministers are yet to be given specific responsibilities. Only three junior ministers in

the ministries of power, energy and mineral resources, and the communications have been given separate assignments. But, such ministers in other ministries are yet to get such privileges.

Cabinet Minister Harunur Rashid Khan Monno and State Minister Major (ret'd.) Quamrul Islam are yet to have portfolio one month after the council of ministers was formed.

Most cabinet ministers are unwilling to share responsibilities with their junior colleagues, sources close to them said.

"The ministers will be left with no work if responsibilities of a ministry are distributed among the junior ministers," said a cabinet minister who has two state ministers in his ministry. He, however, asked not to be named.

Several secretaries, talking to The Daily Star on this issue, shared the minister's view. "No ministry needs three ministers for its functioning," said one of the secretaries who suggested that important ministries such as finance and planning, education, and health and family welfare be run by two ministers each.

Another secretary explained that the ministers were supposed to guide the government's programmes and policies to be

implemented by bureaucrats. "Therefore, additional ministers are of no help as far as boosting of human resources in a particular ministry is concerned."

Like in the ministries, the junior ministers are also not being able to perform in the Jatiya Sangsad where the cabinet ministers are the key players.

With the jobless junior ministers getting increasingly frustrated, some senior cabinet members feel that all the state and deputy ministers should share ministerial duties. "The problem will soon be addressed," an influential minister told The Star.

However, he felt senior ministers must dictate terms in the ministries as most of the junior ministers lack experience.

Road accidents

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Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where Kamal succumbed to his injuries.

In another accident, 20 people were injured when a Mymensingh-bound passenger bus overturned at Gabtola on Mymensingh-Netrakona road at the same time.

Six of the injured - Abdul Hai, Chan Miah, Robela, Shafia Begum and Abdol Hossain - were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Washington lukewarm

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efforts will have to be launched to bail out the RMG sector where export demands are on a fast decline.

There is also expectation in different circles that Dhaka will be able to obtain special concessions from Washington, having extended unfettered support to the US-led international coalition including clearance to use its strategic facilities.

It was learnt that Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury is likely to follow up on the foreign minister's visit to impress upon the need for US support in the textile sector during a visit to Washington on November 14. He left for Qatar yesterday to attend the WTO ministerial meeting.

It is not known how much, if at all, discussions were held between Dhaka and Washington related to export of oil and gas and use of port facilities in which the latter has shown an express interest.

Diplomatic sources said Foreign Minister Professor Chowdhury presented the economic situation of Bangladesh at the official talks at the US State Department, especially highlighting the impact of the September 11 terror attacks in New York and Washington.

He laid special emphasis on the

plight of the country's readymade garment (RMG) industry and argued for support on quota- and duty-free access of its RMG to the US markets.

Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca, Director (PAB) Steven Young, and Todd Holmstrom, Bangladesh desk officer, were present on the US side during the talks.

Those present from the Bangladesh side included among others State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman, Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury and Ambassador to Washington Ahmed Tariq Karim.

It was learnt from sources that the Washington said in response to Dhaka's request for duty- and quota-free access that the US economy itself was in a shaky situation and particularly the textile lobby in the US was strongly against any further concessions.

It may be recalled that 72 sub-Saharan and Caribbean countries received duty- and quota-free access in textile and clothing sector from the US government in October last year following the enactment of the USTDA.

In a press release yesterday, describing the outcome of the visit, the foreign ministry said Professor Badruddoza and Powel talked about the existing friendly rela-

tions between the two countries and agreed to further strengthen the ties "in the future for mutual benefit".

The US secretary of state recognised that Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim democracy and a role model for others in practice of democracy.

The secretary of state, according to the foreign ministry press release, praised Bangladesh for its support in the fight against terrorism and its commitment to peace-keeping around the world.

Powell stated that the US would look forward to Bangladesh's continued support in peacekeeping including in Afghanistan, particularly in the rebuilding and reconstruction efforts. He also appreciated Bangladesh's humanitarian assistance for the Afghan refugees.

Professor Badruddoza reiterated Bangladesh's total commitment to the fight against terrorism in all its manifestations.

Earlier in the day (November 6), the foreign minister accompanied by the state minister and the foreign secretary met the Deputy National Security Advisor Steven Hadley at the White House.

Professor Badruddoza also exchanged pleasantries with National Security Advisor Dr Condoleezza Rice.

Mazar-i-Sharif

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After claiming to have moved as near as seven kilometres to Mazar-i-Sharif on Wednesday, Alliance Forces dug in at the village of Thursday-e-Shifa, about 22 kilometres to the south, a spokesman said.

A bloody battle loomed for the city that has been in Taliban hands for the past three years.

Mazar-i-Sharif's airport and its location on a key supply route near the border with Uzbekistan, where more than 1,000 US are troops are based, make it a major prize in the campaign. There were no fresh air raids on the Mazar-i-Sharif front on Thursday but US bombers pounded front lines near Kabul and areas close to the Tajik border.

The Taliban denied the opposition had advanced on the city, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency reported yesterday.

"Opposition forces are far away from Mazar-i-Sharif and they are making false claims," AIP quoted a Taliban spokesman in Kabul as saying.

Opposition spokesman Qari Qudratullah acknowledged that Mazar-i-Sharif, a city of more than 200,000 people, would be difficult to take over, given its importance for both sides. But he told AFP the Taliban "have no air force any more, they cannot bring reinforcements in large numbers and their morale is not as high as it used to be".

US Marine Corps General Peter Pace, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, confirmed in Washington that the opposition was

"making gains" and said US Special Forces were reporting cavalry charges by the Northern Alliance.

"This is opposition forces riding horseback into combat against tanks and armoured personnel carriers," he said. He added that the situation remained "very fluid".

Taliban intelligence sources in Jalalabad told AFP they had arrested 20 people, including two opposition commanders, accused of spying for the United States and trying to provoke a rebellion.

An exiled Pashtun tribal leader, who US reports said was evacuated from Afghanistan after narrowly escaping capture by the Taliban, told the BBC he was still inside the country.

In Pakistan, police prepared to clamp down on radical groups ahead of planned mass protests by Muslim parties opposed to the US military action in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Police said lists of hundreds of Islamic radicals had been drawn up for possible arrest ahead of demonstrations planned after Juma prayers, which both sides say could be the biggest test so far for President Pervez Musharraf's military government.

Fakhruddin

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fact that Muslim law strongly recommends burial of the dead as soon as possible.

They said the body would be sent to Toronto from New York and buried as soon as possible although the exact date of burial could not be confirmed.

Fakhruddin's son Reazuddin Ahmed, who is based in London, had arrived in Dhaka for the burial but left last night for Toronto.

A freedom fighter and career diplomat, Fakhruddin Ahmed served as Bangladesh envoy to London and Belgrade. He was advisor for foreign affairs in the first caretaker government of acting President Shahabuddin Ahmed.

He is survived by his wife, one son and one daughter and a host of friends and relatives to mourn his death.

Income tax

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"Self assessment system is a major cause of revenue leakage," the official said.

He however appreciated the 'positive aspects' of self-assessment system but said all 'loopholes' in the system should be sealed immediately to increase income tax collection.

Around 85 per cent income tax returns were submitted under self-assessment system and the rest under normal system.

According to rules, income tax returns are submitted on behalf of individuals and business firms, describing income and expenditure of the previous fiscal year.

Business firms have to submit tax return by July 15 or within six months of closure of the annual accounts.

Collection of income tax last year stood at Tk 3,500.82 crore against the target of Tk 3,400 crore.

No action yet against perpetrators of Bhola outrage

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shops, was almost deserted. But soon a group of curious onlookers gathered at the site where we stood. Some men sat on wooden benches near by and whispered to one another, occasionally pointing their forefingers at us. Tension was visible in their faces.

A former chairman of the Union and a businessman, Abdul Kader said that the village had about 2,200 Hindu voters and many of them had left for unknown places over the last one month since the election.

Kader himself fell victim to atrocities with his house and business ransacked and destroyed about a month ago. Refusing to flee, Kader clung to his business and partially rebuilt his house keeping silent about everything that happened around him. Kader was a rare non-Hindu victim of the area. He was an Awami League activist.

At a Hindu house near the Bazaar, the first stories of rape, assault and looting started to emerge. The female members of the house begged for anonymity and burst into tears.

The terrified inmates said they had just paid Tk 10,000 in protection money to remain in their own house, where they had lived for generations. They told the Daily Star team how the perpetrators looted literally everything they found, including lungis, gamchhas,

quilts, saris, cooking utensils, plates, pitchers, rice in stock, pigeons, chickens, cows, goats, ornaments and cash. When the attacks happened, they - men, women and children - hid in nearby paddy fields infested with large water leeches.

The story began at around 3:30 in the morning of October 2. Within hours the results were still being aired, several Hindu houses in the southern side of the village came under attack.

Gangs of miscreants moved onto the northern side and looted valuables from Hindu houses. As the day moved on and the results of the election became clear, the intensity of the attacks increased. By noon the Hindu community of Annada Prashad became extremely fearful. Women and children left their homes and started to look for refuge.

They all narrated how up to 150 armed perpetrators swooped on the isolated *Bentor Bari* at around 10:30pm, where more than 100 women and children took refuge during the day. They had mistakenly assumed that the isolation of *Bentor Bari* and its difficult accessibility would save them from the attackers. "In fact the situation started to change at around 12 noon of the election day, when armed men entered the Ranoda Prashad voting centre and took over charge," said a woman. She added that within the four-

kilometre radius of the village, every Hindu house was raided and looted on October 2 and many incidents of rape, torture took place.

They said known faces of the area such as Shahabuddin, Mizan, Farid, Faizullah, Yasin Master and his sons Selim (arrested on charges of raping eight-year old Rita Rani) and Belal, Saiful, Zakir the rich - saw-puller, Abu, Dulal, Mosharraf, Shaheen and Tofael were leading the attacks. More than a hundred strangers from Lalmon and nearby villages also joined the attackers on the day. The women cited names of others, their relatives and friends who were raped.

The Daily Star correspondents talked to over 100 women at different places of the village who, in their narration of what had happened, were strikingly and frighteningly similar. Most said the attackers had forcibly taken away their *nakful* (nose rings). They symbolised losing their *nakful* with rape and assault on them. For instance, whenever this correspondent asked an individual how many men attacked her, she would burst into tears and cite a number and say, two or three or four men took her *nakful* away.

Not all women however were narrating rape with euphemisms. Landless M R Das (not her real name), about 38 and a widow with three children, said with tears flowing down her cheeks that eleven men gang raped her first in her house within a week after the caretaker government took office. Fearing attack, MR had already sent her two daughters to her parent's house in Dhaka.

On the night of October 2, a gang of men broke into her house and raped her, while her son cried. "I begged for a respite, I told them I needed to drink water but they went on and on. My son cried for help but who would help, everybody was running away," said MR, almost hysterical and crying.

While the women talked to the Daily Star correspondents, children were sent out to keep vigil. A loudspeaker mounted on a rickshaw moved slowly on the earthen road nearby and announced the arrival of Hafizuddin, the MP, at Lord Hardinge. The announcer urged the Hindu community in particular to join Hafizuddin in the meeting for discussion.

About half a kilometre in the

north, 75-year-old Luxmi Kanta Das and his wife Radha Rani about 40, said when the attackers came, all their neighbours started to run.

Some women ran in the paddy fields, some hid inside the betel leaf shed and some were caught by the attackers and robbed of their *nakful*. Radha Rani said defying her husband Luxmi Kanta's plea not to talk, Radha Rani said, after the attackers caught her they tried to strip her near the village pond. But she grabbed a large stick and defended her. She said she was nonetheless overpowered and robbed of her *nakful*.

Radha Rani's 13-year-old daughter-in-law, Tripti Rani came forward to tell what had happened to her. Shy and still childish and completely unaware of her status of a housewife, living with in-laws, Tripti Rani tearfully said she was caught by five men in the betel leaf shed and robbed of her *nakful*. Josna Rani, Priti Rani, Lipi Bala, Thaku Rani, Dhaleswari and many others narrated in deep sorrow and unrelenting tears how they had lost their *nakful* and everything they possessed. Many said during the attacks the perpetrators accused them of voting for the Awami League. Those who survived the onslaught said for hours they lay in the paddy fields bitten by dozens of leeches, too weak to move.

As more men and women arrived at Luxmi Kanta's house to tell their stories, suddenly everyone went mum and looked terrified. Hardly ten feet away stood a young man in lungi who stared at the crowd. The crowd of men and women whispered that the man in lungi was none other than Belal, wanted on charges of raping Rita Rani, looting, physical assault, masterminding the attacks on innocent villagers and so on. Soon, the notorious criminal slowly walked off the scene without saying a word.

Bentor Bari, about 1.5 kilometres southward from Luxmi Kanta's house was extremely difficult to reach. From the main earthen road of the village, there is no road leading to this cluster of houses, situated in the middle of paddy fields about a kilometre to the south. One has to wade through waist-deep water rich in fish and large water leeches.

For the inmates of *Bentor Bari* and more than 100 who took refuge there, the night of October 2 represents a nightmare that they could never probably forget. Amalendu

Das a grocer from *Bentor Bari* explained why so many people took refuge in their house on the day. During disturbances in 1991 over Babri Mosque, all houses belonging to rich Hindus were looted and torched, they did not touch *Bentor Bari* because the people living here are very, very poor and the house is so isolated, Amalendu said.

Following overnight attacks on all the Hindu houses in Annada Prashad, many families started to wade through the water towards *Bentor Bari* at around 2:00pm. The perpetrators simply watched from far throughout the day as the desperate Hindus took refuge inside the cluster of about 15 dwellings.

Promod Chandra Das of *Bentor Bari* said that he and his neighbours had already sent most of their family members elsewhere on October 2. As soon as the refugees started to arrive, about eight of their friends formed a vigil group.

"At around 10:30pm we suddenly saw that about 150 people were wading toward *Bentor Bari* from the northern side. We shouted at them asking about their identity but they kept silent. When they came near the house, we realised we were helplessly outnumbered, we asked the women to run for cover and then we started to run away through the paddy fields," Promod said.

The following few hours of the night represented savagery for children and women, trying to flee. A group of perpetrators concentrated on looting, another chased the children and women in the paddy fields caught and dragged them on to the land and gang raped them.

Women showed wounds of beating and assault on their bodies, including spots of leech bites. In the *Bentor Bari*, rape was indiscriminate during the night that included eight-year-old Rita Rani and 70-year-old Paru Bala.

"You know the policemen who are now camping at the Vaskor Bari are friends of the attackers, they were invited by the rapists and we often find them together having friendly talks," said a woman.

At Vaskor Bari about 500 metres away from *Bentor Bari*, scores of women waited to tell similar stories of torture, rape and looting. Some of the women came closer to whisper the message of police's friendship with the criminals.

Havildar Yusuf and his nine

constables were sleeping inside the temporary house, now turned police camp at around 3:30pm. The house had an earthen idol of goddess Luxmi as it was the day of the Luxmi puja. But there was nobody else to observe the puja. Yusuf denied that he had anything to do with the criminals but said he had heard about the atrocities on Hindus in the area.

He said the police post was set up on October 5 and none of the victims lodged any complaint with the police. When asked how Belal and four others, wanted in Rita Rani rape case, were roaming freely in the area, the Havildar replied he did not receive any directive from the higher authorities to arrest anyone.

Mohammad Faruk Hossain, a constable, said he had heard that over 200 women were raped in the village after the election.

At around 4:00pm, about 200 men gathered at GM Bazaar. Muslims and Hindu men were on their way to Lord Hardinge to hear the new MP. Some Muslim men expressed their frustration and said the administration did nothing to arrest the criminals, who now think that they got away with the barbaric crimes.

"Let me tell you," said a Muslim villager, "The same thing will happen here as soon as the police go away. The criminals are just waiting."

He added that every Hindu family living in the village is subjected to paying protection money.

At Lord Hardinge, about an hour later, the new MP was seen arriving, escorted by at least 50 motor bikes ridden by tough youths.

In Bhola,