

Cabinet okays draft bill to repeal PSA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved the draft bill to repeal the controversial Public Safety Act (PSA).

The repeal bill, to be placed before the parliament in its upcoming session, gives the government the power to selectively withdraw political cases and those meant for harassment. All the cases on trial under this act would continue till these are disposed of, however.

In a last minute amendment to the bill, the accused will be allowed to seek bail as per the CrPc. The PSA had a very narrow scope to grant bails.

The regular weekly meeting of the cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, also decided that the special tribunals formed to conduct the PSA cases would con-

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DUTP gets snarled

Slow progress, fund irregularities overshadow project future

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) to improve the capital's traffic situation is itself stuck in a nasty snarl-up.

Allegations of financial irregularities involving crores of taka and almost no implementation progress in the last three years have dogged the project vital to make the city more commutable.

Some officials of the Tk 1288 crore DUTP has 'secretly' paid a consortium of six local and foreign consultants more than 72 per cent of the Tk 36 crore consultation fees. But less than 13 per cent of the physical works of the project has been completed since its start. The consultants, led by a Dutch company called VHV Netherlands, were supposed to get payment after they had designed, monitored and supervised the completion of each of the components and obtained certificates to validate their accomplishment signed by various bodies.

Moreover, the same consultants were given an additional payment of three per cent of consultation fees for 'conducting works not included in the project'. Key DUTP officials openly admitted the irregularities and said they found out the deviations after taking over office, and so, could not be held responsible.

The Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB), of which Mayor

Mohammad Hanif is chairman, was created to monitor, supervise and coordinate six different organisations involved in the project. Although the DTCB approved the payments, Mayor Hanif expressed his ignorance about it as 'he is not kept posted about the developments of the project'.

Some DUTP and DTCB officials claimed the payments were made after getting seals of approval from the World Bank, which lent the money under a credit scheme for the development of the city.

The DUTP's implementation failure has angered officials of different organisations currently involved in managing the growing traffic problem of the city. Top police officials said the department is unable to bring about vital changes for solving these problems due to financial constraints.

World Bank sources however categorically denied its approval of payment and said the bank was 'so annoyed at the unlawful payments and low progress in project implementation that it has decided to raise serious questions' during the mid-term review of the DUTP scheduled to start on January 21. The credit would already have been cancelled had there not been 'some recent initiatives' to solve the traffic problems, a WB source said.

"They (DUTP) will have to justify how and why the payments were made and no progress was attained during the last three years," said the source.

The five-year DUTP was taken in November 1998 mainly to develop

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Government borrowing doubles in 6 months

INAM AHMED

The government's net borrowing from the banks has alarmingly shot up to Tk 3057 crore during the first half of the current fiscal till the end of December last.

This showed an about 45 per cent increase as only Tk 1787 crore was borrowed during the same period last fiscal.

However, to lower its interest repayment burden, the government is borrowing fund from the central bank at bank rate instead of looking towards the commercial banks.

Of the net amount, Tk 3052 crore was borrowed from the central bank while as a classic syndrome of deep recession, the commercial banks are now saddled with about Tk 4000 crore in excess liquidity.

"This is a paradoxical situation and a typical case of recession," said Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). "The government thinks of this move as commercial

banks have no need for use of rediscount window of the central bank because of investment slump."

The current macro-economic situation is now characterised by low inflation, 2.32 per cent revenue shortfall, 11 per cent export slump and investment slowdown.

"Against this backdrop, the government can only borrow to augment demand," said Dr Bhattacharya. "But it is bound to hit back in increased interest payment obligations."

Meantime, the gross borrowing of the government at the end of December 2001 stood at Tk 20735 crore, up from Tk 17,677 crore on June 30 the same year.

The gross borrowing from the central bank stood at Tk 13,159 crore on December 31, 2001 against Tk 10,107 crore six months ago.

However, borrowing from the commercial banks at the end of December was Tk 12,382 crore which was Tk 12,661 crore on June 30, showing a retardation of Tk 278 crore from the banks.

Offices now to have 2 more portraits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to put on display portraits of all the heads of the state and governments of the country in offices alongside that of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Sources said the cabinet in its regular weekly meeting yesterday directed the law ministry to prepare a draft law in this regard and place it in the next cabinet meeting.

Under the existing law, only the portrait of Bangabandhu is displayed in offices.

The cabinet meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair discussed the proposal regarding display of portraits.

The Awami League government introduced the "Father of the Nation's Portrait Preservation Law", which made it mandatory to display only Bangabandhu's portrait in all offices.

Separation of judiciary Govt to pray for extension of SC deadline

STAR REPORT

The government will petition the Supreme Court for a three-month extension of its deadline to separate the judiciary from the executive.

The Supreme Court in 1999 had directed the government to separate the judiciary within eight weeks. The deadline was then extended several times to be finally set at January 15, 2002.

The petition hearing will be held today.

However, the government move would be legally opposed by Barrister Amir-ul-Islam who has been fighting the government against the extension issue since 1997.

"It will be strongly objected. The Court has already given a specific deadline and the government has everything at its disposal to implement the order. Therefore, there is no reason for the deadline to be extended," he told The Daily Star.

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 15		5-33 pm
Jan 16	6-44 am	

Prayer Timings

Jan 15		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-40	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-37	5-42
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaks at the inaugural session of International Workshop on Arsenic Mitigation at Osmani Memorial Auditorium yesterday.

More changes in admn

UNB, Dhaka

Changes in administration continued as the government ordered more appointments and transfers yesterday, according to officials at the Establishment Ministry.

Three additional secretaries, who were OSDs, have been given posting orders. Of them, Lutfar Rahman Chowdhury has been made DG of BSTI, Tara Charan Chakma vice chairman of CHT Development Board and A K M Delwar Hossain DG of Directorate of Non-formal Education.

Joint secretary Mominul Islam, also an OSD, has been given posting as a member of Law Reform Board while Chittagong WASA chairman M Ali Ahmed member of the Tea Board.

Two joint secretary-level officials have also been transferred. DESA member Sirajul Islam has been transferred to IMED while joint secretary Ochut Pada Goswami from Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry to Planning Division.

Mohammad Ibrahim, who was a joint secretary at Industries

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Politics hots up

NAZRUL ISLAM

In the wake of some recent developments, the country's political atmosphere is hotting up as the BNP-led ruling coalition and the main opposition party Awami League have sharply contrasting stance on many crucial issues which include making the parliament effective.

The Awami League which has been boycotting the parliament since its maiden session is unlikely to attend also the next session beginning from January 31. No move from the government side was still visible to bring the opposition to parliament.

AL insiders said cases against party leaders, repeated attacks on opposition activists, intimidation at public rallies and processions, harassment of opposition leaders, preventing AL leaders from entering the airport to receive party chief Sheikh Hasina on her return from abroad, fuel price hike and annulment of Father of the Nation's Family Members Act are among the reasons fuelling anti-government agitation by the main opposition party.

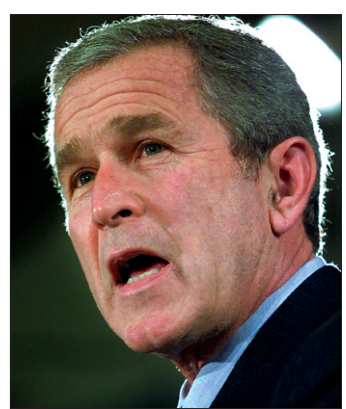
With the party chief back home from a month-long private foreign tour, the AL would now fix a date for the party central working committee meeting. It would review the latest political situation and determine a 'strategy' to face the government sponsored 'atrocities', said the insiders.

Annoyed at police obstruction at Zia International Airport and on way to it to receive the party chief on Saturday, AL leaders and activists expressed mixed reaction and differing views on what the party should do immediately.

Several leaders, preferring anonymity, strongly favoured intensified street agitation against the government while others wanted movement both inside the House and on the street.

Although both the ruling coalition and the main opposition party advo

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Bush faints

AP, Washington

President George W. Bush fainted briefly in the White House residence after choking on a pretzel while watching a National Football League playoff game on television, White House physician Dr. Richard Tubb said.

The doctor, an Air Force colonel, said Bush quickly recovered Sunday and was doing well.

"He fainted due to a temporary decrease in heart rate brought on by

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Project to link mobile, fixed phone networks uncertain

ABU SAEED KHAN

A much-awaited project to interconnect the country's four mobile phone operations to the fixed telephone network of the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) faces uncertainty due to differences over investment model.

CityCell, GrameenPhone, AKTEL and Sheba have agreed to jointly finance a US\$ 3.6 million turnkey project to expand the BTTB's networks and get 31 interconnection links each in return.

These links would enable each mobile phone company to connect up to 62,000 users to the BTTB's fixed telephone network. Currently, more than 80 per cent of the 655,000 mobile users are deprived of such standard facility. But various complications are overshadowing the fate of the interconnection project.

According to the BTTB proposal, the mobile operators would have to pay regular rent for using their self-financed interconnection links. Despite investing almost \$1 million in the project, each operator would additionally pay Tk 1.92 crore (\$328,266) at a go for using the 31

interconnection links. Each operator would then pay Tk 37.20 lakh (\$63,535) as annual charge for these links.

It took the mobile operators more than three years to decide on financing the BTTB's expansion of six nation wide dialling (NWD) exchanges in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Khulna. They would also invest for expansion of the BTTB's local exchanges in Gulshan, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Mogh Bazar, Motijheel, Mirpur and Nilkhet. Alcatel of France supplied these NWD and local exchanges.

But the private operators complain that they have been burdened with an 'over-designed' expansion plan. On October 15 last, the BTTB sent to the mobile operators Alcatel's \$3,620,921 quotation to 'upgrade' rather than to 'expand' its 12 exchanges.

Alcatel's quotation however indicates that the mobile operators can expand the BTTB's infrastructure for \$1.20 million. But the BTTB has added \$2.50 million for the items having no relevance to the interconnection issue.

The BTTB has earmarked \$2 million to 'upgrade' the

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Gynaecologists for cricketers!

SPORTS REPORTER

Cricket is indeed a funny game; funnier sometimes are actions of the game's organisers. Not convinced? Here's the catch!

Gynaecologists-- and on top of that female ones-- will be on duty at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong to treat the all-male cricketers of Bangladesh and Pakistan during the second Test and first one-day international matches of the Coca-Cola Series.

The CJKS (Chittagong Zila Kira Sangstha), organisers of the two international matches in the port city, took everyone by surprise yesterday when it drafted three gynaecologists into the eight-member doctors' panel, one of the 23 sub-committees, for rendering medicare to the players.

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SAFF meet postponed

AP, Kathmandu

Bangladesh's suspension by the world soccer body has compelled organisers to postpone the regional South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship slated to begin in Dhaka later this month, a soccer official said yesterday.

"It has been decided that the tournament be postponed," the South Asian Football Federation's chairman, Ganesh Thapa, told The Associated Press after an emergency meeting of soccer officials in Katmandu.

The South Asian Football Tournament was scheduled to begin Jan 26 in Dhaka, but FIFA's suspension of Bangladesh debar the country from participating or hosting any international event.

Teams from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives were expected to participate in the South Asian tournament.

FIFA slapped the suspension on the Bangladesh Football Federation last week because of "government interference" in the federation.

According to FIFA, the committee reached its decision because the lawfully elected executive committee of the Bangladesh federation had been removed without just cause. This was a serious violation of statutes of FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation.

Thapa, who also heads the All Nepal Football Association, met with Sirajul Islam of Bangladesh, who is the SAFF secretary, and decided on the postponement.

"The SAFF executive will meet within the next two weeks to decide where and when the tournament will be held," Thapa said.

FIFA said the suspension would remain in force until Bangladesh's elected executive was reinstated.

The Asia Football Confederation

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Mockbul's son Masud gets bail in Murad murder case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday granted bail to Masudur Rahman Masud, son of former Awami League lawmaker Alhaj Mockbul Hossain, an accused in the Murad murder case.

Judge Ahmed Jamil Mostafa passed the order upon a bond of Tk 30,000 with two guarantors.

In its order, the court mentioned that the charges brought against Masud were not primarily proved and the accused was not taken on remand.

Moreover, the complainant of the case did not mention the name of Masud in the FIR and the accused did not give confessional state

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AL convention No positive response from any party yet

REAZ AHMAD

No political party has so far confirmed participation in Awami League's 'National Convention on Crimes Against Humanity', now billed for January 27 and 28.

The two-day convention was originally scheduled for January 17-18 and then for January 19-20. But it was changed as the timing coincides with the three-day Biswa Ejtama, the second largest congregation of world Muslims that begins on January 19 near the capital.

The convention, conceived by AL chief Sheikh Hasina in November last barely one and half months after her party's polls debacle, is aimed at projecting alleged violations of human rights since the BNP-led alliance government took over on October 10.

It will adopt a set of recommendations to create public opinion against alleged human rights violations in the country. It will be held at the

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BNP convention No date or venue finalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Secretaries general of components of the BNP-led four-party alliance yesterday discussed holding of its planned national convention on "repression and oppression" on opposition leaders and activists and the people during the five-year rule of Awami League.

The first meeting among them since the alliance was voted to power, held at the official residence of BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, reviewed performance of the government and decided to hold the convention as soon as possible.

However, no date or venue of the convention was finalised at the two-hour meeting.

"Possibility of holding the planned convention this month is thin, but we will soon finalise the date," Mannan Bhuiyan said.

Briefing reporters later, Bhuiyan said the meeting decided that a list of those killed by 'terrorists of AL government' would be made public at the convention. Close relatives of those killed will be present at the convention and their statements will be published.

Lists of those 'disabled' in AL attacks, victims of AL cadres' toll extortion, loot, acid attacks and rape will be presented at the convention, he said.

A report on repression on minorities by AL men will also be made public. There will be a photo exhibition on repression during AL rule. Special supplements will be published in national dailies on the occasion of the convention, Bhuiyan mentioned.

Besides, "Sabash Bangladesh" video series will be telecast. The alliance plans to make video films on AL repression, he said.

Replying to a question whether the convention will take place after the AL-proposed convention, Bhuiyan said he has no idea about AL's convention.

"When we were in the opposition, we had planned to hold a convention on repression on opposition and incidents of human rights violation during

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Sub-inspector at Tejgaon police station Tariqul Alam was arrested for possessing an unlicensed pistol yesterday.

SI arrested with illegal arms in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detective Branch of police yesterday arrested a sub-inspector of Tejgaon police station with a foreign made illegal pistol.

The arrested SI was identified as Tariqul Alam, 29, son of Abdur Rashid of Degashiya, Gofargaon, Mymensingh.

A team of DB headed by additional deputy commissioner Ruhul Amin and AC Mohammad Ali Hossain Fakir went to Tejgaon thana to investigate a newspaper report that said four sub-inspectors of the thana had liaison with four top terrors of the city.

The DB team obtained a list of plainclothes sub-inspectors of thana and had the thana officer-in-charge Humayun Kabir call Tariqul asking him to come to the police station.

After his arrival, the DB team started questioning Tariqul on the basis of the newspaper report. At one stage, ADC Ruhul Amin asked him to show documents related to his service gun. But Tariqul could not produce any valid documents for his gun that had 11 bullets in it.

Tariqul was shown arrested in an arms case filed with Tejgaon police station by sub-inspector

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