

Hasina speaks to newsmen House prorogued without discussing pressing issues

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina is skeptical about present parliament's efficacy in addressing people's problems and finding solutions because of what she said government's hostile attitude and lack of transparency.

"I went to the parliament to speak for the people and their misery but was heckled repeatedly... I'm not sure what awaits this parliament and democracy, and what more awaits the people," she said.

Talking to some journalists who represent foreign media at her Dhanmondi house yesterday, she said the House was prorogued without discussing pressing issues like price-hike, corruption, "fraud" involving wheat and jet fuel, campus situation and so on.

Even the prime minister did not speak a single word on any matter during the session, Hasina said, and wondered why she (PM) remained absent from the discussion on the crucial issue of law and order and avoided the PM's Question Time fixed for Wednesday.

Referring to her concluding speech in parliament Tuesday night, the opposition leader said whenever she tried to speak about wheat scam, corruption, "involvement of the prime minister, her son and MPs, and excess by the Chief Whip's son", her mike was switched off as many as five times.

"This is unfortunate... There is no instance in any parliament of the world that the mike of the Leader of the Opposition is switched off."

Recounting the prime minister's public pronouncement that the opposition would speak in parliament as long as they want, Hasina said she knew that she and her MPs would not be allowed to speak on problems facing the people.

"They denied me and my MPs the opportunity (to speak) and abruptly ended the session... I don't know where the weakness of this government is. Why they want to impose a blackout on news of the

grim situation and facts from the people?" she said.

About installation of the first-ever private terrestrial television ETV, she said no government in the past dared to open up the media by allowing private terrestrial TV. Now the private channels are restrained from even covering the parliament session.

"If we had any intention to make money through corruption, why would we have made the press and electronic media open," she said.

The former prime minister said both local and foreign direct investment came down substantially for lack of good governance and transparency as well as lawlessness. "Even the country's foreign development partners questioned the government's competence to curb terrorism."

She noted that all previous corruption cases against the prime minister, ministers and MPs of the present government are being withdrawn by executive orders. On the contrary, "false cases" of corruption are being filed against her and her party leaders to satisfy the political vendetta of the ruling party.

Citing some contracts signed during the AL reign, Hasina asked the journalists to find out if Dr Muhammad Yunus or BNP's Zahiruddin Khan or the Malaysian Sheba Telecom had to spend any money or even offer a cup of tea for getting licence for cellular phones -- Grameen, Aktel or Sheba.

Besides, she said, two big contracts were signed with American AES for setting up the Meghna and Haripur power plants. "Ask the AES chairman or its local agent to ascertain whether they had to pay a single penny to get the contract because all offers were given through a transparent process," she told the reporters.

About the purchase of Mig-29s from Russia, the former PM said the tender price of the fighter planes was USD 289 million, but they were procured for USD 124 million, including the cost of carrying and

Shazneen case

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petition by principal accused in the case Shahidul Islam alias Shahid.

During the cross-examination yesterday, Latifur Rahman told the court that Shaniram and Badal were not on the staff at his residence. Contractor Hasan, another accused in the case, appointed them to assist him.

In response to a question from a defence counsel, Rahman said that on the night of the incident at his residence, he got down from the first floor on hearing a scream and went to the place of occurrence within 30 seconds.

Meanwhile, in its order rejecting the bail petition of the main accused, the court mentioned that Shahid's name was included in the FIR and he gave statements admitting his involvement in physical assault and murder of Shazneen. Earlier, his bail petitions were repeatedly rejected and there was no new grounds for granting him bail. So, the bail petition is rejected.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, was the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom.

Accused Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shaniram and Minu, now in jail custody, were produced before the court yesterday. Another accused, Parvin, was not produced as she

Israeli aggression

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the only means to realise their legitimate and inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent and viable state in Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital.

Morshed Khan reiterated Bangladesh's commitment to extend all possible support to Afghan people's efforts to rebuild and reconstruct their country.

Speaking on other issues on the agenda, he said that Dhaka remained committed to opposing terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

As one of the vice presidents of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM), Morshed Khan also chaired an important part of morning session of the meeting.

HSC results

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during the HSC examinations as measures to check cheating, he said.

Moreover, a record number of examinees were expelled this year. The government is against the concept of "mass pass", which does not reflect a student's merit, the official said.

The prime minister has expressed satisfaction with the decline in large-scale cheating in examinations.

She directed the officials of all education boards to take more pragmatic steps to free public examinations from cheating.

Professor Serajul Islam Chowdhury termed the HSC results a 'tragic waste of national resources'.

Chowdhury held lack of motivation of both teachers and students responsible for the slide in pass percentage.

The Jessore Education Board with 74,639 entries and 28,623 successful examinees took the lead over others with the percentage of pass at 38.35. The number of first division achievers is 9,279, the second division 16,037 and the third division 3,307.

The Dhaka Education Board, with 1,53,959 entries 56,301 successful candidates, trails close behind at 36.57 per cent. A total of 20,581 candidates scored the first division, 29,149 the second division and 6,571 the third division.

The Sylhet Education Board with 15,205 entries and 4,362 successful

candidates came third at 28.69 per cent of pass. Seven hundred and fifteen achieved the first division, 2,558 the second division and 1,089 the third division.

A total of 37,503 students sat for the exams and 8,470 came out successful under the Barisal Education Board with the percentage of pass at 22.58. One thousand, nine hundred and seventy examinees achieved the first division, 5,334 the second division and 8,470 the third division.

The Chittagong Education Board with 44,456 entries and 9,934 successful examinees has secured the percentage of pass at 22.35. A total of 2,753 candidates were placed in the first division, 5,457 in the second division and 1,724 in the third division.

As many as 163,999 students sat for the HSC exams under the Rajshahi Education Board -- of them 29,812 came out successful, putting the percentage of pass at 18.18. Of the successful candidates, 6,443 secured the first division, 18,594 the second division and 4,775 the third division.

Under the Comilla Education Board, 48,534 students entered the HSC exams and 8,316 passed, with the lowest percentage at 17.13. Two thousand, one hundred and four candidates were placed in the first division, 5,119 in the second division and 1,093 in the third division.

From the next year, the tradition of publishing HSC results in numeric grades will give place to alphabetical grades.

pilot training, following state-to-state tough negotiations.

"Today the government is filing corruption case on the one hand and on the other prime minister's brother Syed Iskandar got the Mig agency and went to Russia to buy spare parts of the aircraft damaged from not doing the D-checking in time," said Hasina.

Hasina reiterated her allegation that the Khaleda Zia government had indulged in corruption in buying two Airbus from France at USD150 million though the tender price was USD130 million.

"I feel sad that I saved money for the country but cases are being filed against me to bluff the people while all corruption cases filed against them are withdrawn one after another by executive orders," she said.

HSC exams

Female students do better

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The performance of the female students is comparatively better than the males in this year's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) Examinations.

The percentage of female candidates who passed the examination is higher in the five educational boards -- Dhaka, Chittagong, Jessore, Rajshahi and Sylhet.

The combined pass percentage of the female students is 37.89 in the Dhaka Education Board, 23.90 in Chittagong, 38.76 in Jessore, 18.99 in Rajshahi, 29.32 in Sylhet, 15.28 in Comilla and 21.21 in Barisal.

The combined pass percentage of the male candidates is 35.60 in Dhaka, 21.24 in Chittagong, 38.10 in Jessore, 17.67 in Rajshahi, 28.22 in Sylhet.

However, male students showed better performance in the two boards of Comilla and Barisal. The combined pass percentage of male students is 18.44 and 23.53 in Comilla and Barisal board respectively.

Alim, Fazil

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1,317 came out successful. Three hundred and eighty three students obtained first division, 923 second division and 11 third division. The pass percentage in the examination is 36.21.

Alamgir freed

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Alamgir's counsel sought direction of the court asking the government not to harass her client any more.

"The arm of the executive may be long, but the arm of the judiciary is longer," said Justice Abdul Aziz. "The court is always there to protect your fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution."

From the High Court, Dr Alamgir went to a private hospital in Gulshan for treatment.

He said he had lost 22 kilograms due to torture in jail. "I was detained on false cases. I was subject to a political conspiracy," he told reporters at the hospital.

Later, AL President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina paid him a visit in the hospital.

LTTE

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disarming or decommissioning weapons held by thousands of LTTE cadres in the island's north-east, a position accepted by the Colombo government.

The Tiger spokesman said the movement's fighters wanted a greater say in running a civil administration in the island's northeast, and to play a pivotal role in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of war-ravaged areas.

Analysts said the rebels' U-turn on their long-standing demand for a separate state indicated they were serious about embracing peace.

Diplomatic sources in Colombo said they were "stunned" by the LTTE's announcement that pushed the peace process into new territory.

In a further positive sign, the Norwegian government announced that the two warring sides would hold three further rounds of peace talks on October 31-November 3, December 2-5 and January 6-9.

"The parties are off to a promising start and they are taking practical steps to bring the process forward," Norwegian deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen told the press conference.

The Norwegian peace brokers also said the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE have agreed to set up a joint task force to monitor humanitarian work in Sri Lanka's embattled northeast.

"The joint taskforce will have members of the government, the Tamil Tigers as well as representatives of the Muslim community who are the second-largest minority in Sri Lanka," it said.

Lack of good governance

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on the occasion. Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, who was scheduled to attend the conference as a special guest, did not turn up.

Justice Rahman described the problems people face for the malpractice of the state and the market or the private sector.

He said the people who depend on government should remember it called the armed forces for traffic management having failed to solve traffic jam.

"Government and autonomous bodies are the top defaulters without paying crores of taka in utility bills for years. Also there is no step to establish government's transparency and accountability as defined in the constitution," he added.

On the other hand, he said, "due to habitual problem there is no positive result of privatisation in Bangladesh. About 500 state-owned enterprises have been privatised, but there is no trace of half of those."

Professor Sobhan said people see the machinery of state as part of the problem rather than the solution.

"In the eyes of the citizens... the state is itself the source of breakdown in law and order. The patronisation by successive govern-

ments of a criminal class, who have become instrumental to functioning of our principal political parties has brought the machinery of law enforcement into contempt."

In this context, "law enforcement agencies, knowing that there is no premium on doing their duty, have now effectively commoditised themselves and offer whatever services the complainant or law breakers are willing to pay", he added.

He also said subordinate nature of the lower judiciary fails to guarantee legal rights of the victims of partisan law enforcement. "It is no accident that successive regimes have reneged on their commitment to separate the judiciary from the executive."

The same thing happened in the administration and has been 'parochialised and committised' to an extent where it has become dysfunctional, he mentioned.

He said the culture of partisanship has now infected the bureaucracy where professional advancement is delinked from performance or integrity and increasingly linked to political identity and the extent of patronage by an officer.

"As a consequence the Public Service Commission, once directed

by people of recognised administrative authority and integrity, has now become an instrument of political patronage and jobbery," Professor Sobhan observed.

Pointing to the public healthcare system, he said people have to pay a public service provider even for hospital beds, clean sheets, basic diets, bandages, medicines and bedpan.

On education sector, Professor Sobhan said, "Our institutions of higher learning have not so much become politicised as criminalised."

He said the student politics is "really the patronisation of gangs of armed businessmen who use the campus for commercial advancement and extortion in return for military services rendered to the major political parties".

"Teachers are divided and politicised not so much on ideological grounds but for reasons of career advancement," he mentioned.

The inaugural session of the BEA conference was followed by two working sessions that focused on state, market and institutional transformation and rural economy, infrastructure, agriculture and local government.

Khulna AL leader

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attend her. He also insulted her using obscene language, Nasima said while talking to the press yesterday at the Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) where she shifted at about 2:00am yesterday and laid on the floor of ward 11.

At about 4:00pm yesterday, Nasima was still groaning in pain at the KMCH where she reportedly did not receive proper medical treatment. Hospital gynaecologist Dr Mrinal Kanti said Nasima's medical test report confirmed she was raped.

"My only fault is that I led a procession at skid ghat in protest against assault and torture on Chhobi Rani Mondol. The procession coincided with opposition leader Sheikh Hasina's visit to Khulna over the Chhobi Rani issue," Nasima told newsmen at the KMCH. Till the time of writing this report, none from the Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) administration visited the AL leader.

Nasima earns her living by trading in sugarcane and is involved in AL politics in ward 21 of Khulna City. Her husband Babul Howlader is a labourer at skid ghat but he lives with his second wife.

Sources said Tuesday night's gang-rape is a sequel to an earlier attempt to rape Nasima on the evening of September 2 when she was abducted by armed BNP goons

and taken to the office of Town Defence Party (TDP) at the skid ghat. There, the miscreants tore off her clothes but her screams drew neighbours to the spot, and she was spared.

On September 4, Nasima filed a case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Khulna, under sections 9(4) and 10(2) of Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000. The CMM ordered the OC of Khulna Thana to investigate the case against the six BNP cadres at skid ghat accused in the case.

Nasima said yesterday that OC of Khulna Thana Tozammel Hossain castigated her for lodging the case against the BNP activists, and refused to investigate the case, terming it false and calling her a whore. Also, the accused pressed her to withdraw the case or face dire consequence.

On September 17, the OC of Khulna Thana issued a press statement saying Nasima filed a false case with the CMM's Court, as he said there was no evidence to prove the incident of attempted rape on September 2. Nasima's statement was concocted, the OC said in his press statement, which was issued without prior permission of the police commissioner.

Dr Aftab murder Sylhet BMA to observe token strike Sept 22-24

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A half-day hartal was observed at Golapganj upazila headquarters yesterday protesting the killing of Dr Aftab Hossain, Assistant Director of the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Upazila unit of Awami League, Bazar Committee and transport owners and workers enforced the hartal.

Meanwhile, the Sylhet unit of BMA at a meeting yesterday decided to observe a two-hour token strike for three days from September 22 at the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital demanding exemplary punishment to the killers of Dr Aftab.

Dr Aftab Hossain was murdered by unidentified assailants on Saturday night. His body was recovered from a bush at village Ghoshgaon in Golapganj upazila Sunday morning.

Chink in frontier

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Kim Jung-Ro told AFP. The establishment of transport links has been heralded here as a historic breakthrough in efforts to unite the rivals North and South.

The four-kilometre wide buffer zone dividing the Koreas, known as the demilitarised zone (DMZ), was set up following the 1950-53 Korean War that never ended in a peace treaty.

The zone runs 250 kilometres from sea to sea and is uninhabited but strewn with millions of landmines.

North and South Korean troops enter the no-man's land today on mine-clearing operations under recent cooperation accords between the two rival states.

"We are ready to get the work done up there from tomorrow," said Lee Jong-Hyon, a South Korean army captain leading a military demining team, while standing before several sets of heavy demining equipment.

At the groundbreaking ceremony here, a metal gate to the zone, bolted for 50 years, swung open to pave the way for the entry of demining teams.

"We are burying a history marked

DCC reception to students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Th Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) yesterday accorded a reception to 98 students from 28 educational institutions in the city who secured GPA-5 in this year's SSC examinations.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Haq Milon were the chief guest and special guest respectively at the reception held at Mahanagar Nattiya Mancha, a DCC press release said.

Speakers at the reception emphasised the need for creating more job opportunities in the country so that talents of meritorious students could be utilised for nation building.

The mayor gave away crests and certificates to the meritorious students.

Hunt for outlaws continues: 60 more held in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Police have so far arrested 169 people in connection with the attack on Chak Makimpur police camp in Belkuchi upazila on Monday.

Of the arrested, 50 were interrogated yesterday by two separate police teams. Each of the teams comprises an assistant police superintendent, one inspector and two sub-inspectors.

Over 250 law enforcers, including policemen, APBN and BDR personnel yesterday raided different areas in Belkuchi and Sadar thana, but they could not recover the arms and ammunition looted from the camp by the outlaws.

Saifur

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the banks as the key reasons for the slide in efficiency.

He also said non-performing assets (NPA) are doing harm to the economy.

He suggested that the recommendations by the bank reform committee headed by Economist Wahiduddin Mahmud be properly implemented.

Magurchhara claim

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failing to fulfil minimum work commitment. The five per cent additional share was given to Petrobangla as an incentive for letting the oil company work in those blocks even after its failure to fulfil the minimum work commitment and not as a compensation for damaging the Magurchhara gas structure, sources said.

Petrobangla made the claim on the basis of a report by a probe committee consisting of government officials and experts and an expert from Occidental.

Petrobangla could not send this claim before July this year because of an unwritten government policy to remain silent over the Magurchhara disaster, sources said.

Before the claim was sent, the then Unocal Bangladesh chief told the press that the compensation has been settled through the supplementary agreement. In 2000, the oil company in a document also made such an arbitrary claim and even mentioned a figure of over Tk 350 crore that had been 'paid' to Petrobangla. The matter ended after Petrobangla issued it a warning asking it to refrain from giving any such fictitious figures.

The production sharing contract (PSC) for blocks 13 and 14 was terminated on January 11, 1998 for failing to fulfil the minimum work obligation by the US company, which was drilling at least one exploratory well in each block in the three-year initial operation period. This was in addition to its negligent operation that led to the Magurchhara explosion. Not only

US envoy

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slowest ports in the world, she informed that its inefficiencies were costing the country more than US\$1 billion a year.

Turning to trade balance, she said last year US exports to Bangladesh reached at \$ 308 million, giving Bangladesh a \$2 billion trade surplus with US.

She informed Bangladesh sold goods worth almost \$6 billion to the world last year and a large portion of these goods, approximately 40 per cent, went to the United States.

The luncheon was also addressed by AmCham President Aftabul Islam, Executive Director of AmCham A. Gafur and Vice-president of GETCO Nazmul Huque.

MCCI

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ous year. Per capita income both in nominal and constant terms increased by 1.1 per cent and 0.5 per cent respectively against the decline by 2.4 per cent and 2.1 per cent in the previous year.

Against the growing income, per capita consumption increased by 0.3 per cent in nominal terms and 0.7 per cent in real terms during the review period, it added.

The economic growth rate reached 4.8 per cent, exceeding the initial projection by the International Monetary Fund by 1.05 percentage points. The growth rate of QIP of all industry reached 4.7 per cent in 2002, with QIP of manufacturing growing by 4.09 per cent and that of power sector by 11 per cent, the highest in last three years.

In the external sector, the balance of payments remained favourable during the review period. The current account surplus stood at US\$398 million, which was not only due to higher inflow of remittances, but also owing to improved trade balance particularly from lower import of consumer goods.

The capital account also recorded improvement during the review period reflected by the increase of short-term capital by \$110 million.

In January-June 2002, trade deficit declined by \$288.33 million or 21.32 per cent to \$1063.99 million. Trade deficit increased by \$474.98 million or 54.14 per cent to \$1352.32 million in the same period of 2001, the MCCI added.

Bangladesh's test

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and needed another professional job done to join hosts Sri Lanka in the last four.

The only man missing in the regular Aussie line-up is batsman Damien Martyn through a hip injury. Jimmy Maher or spin bowler Nathan Hauritz will replace the right-hander. Martyn top-scored with 73 against New Zealand.

But the absence of Martyn would have a little or no effect on the strength of the all conquering Australia.

Khaled Mashud's men will walk into their 54th ODI match with two things to achieve. Firstly, they will keep their fingers crossed to win the toss in the morning so that they can bat first, not the Australians.

Secondly, they should try to surpass their previous best of 178 against Australia in the 1999 England World Cup. In that match, the eventual world champions sent Bangladesh on a leather chase to overhaul the target in only 19.5 overs.

Australia won both the previous meetings by seven wickets.

But the recent run of disappointing performance of Bangladesh in both one-day and Test matches and

did Occidental fail to fulfil the work obligation it also did not apply for the extension of the PSC 60 days prior to its termination as per the PSC provision. After the PSC was terminated, Occidental lobbied hard and the process for a supplementary agreement began. During the process, Petrobangla proposed several clauses like compensation for the burnt gas at Magurchhara or inclusion of BAPEX as a partner of Occidental. But these were rejected by Occidental and a deadlock followed. Finally Occidental's high officials 'verbally' promised to the political high-ups that all compensations for the blow out would be paid.

Accordingly, as per the political government's wish Petrobangla had to be happy with a five per cent additional share in the supplementary agreement and signed it. But the fact remains that no clause of the agreement has something to say about the compensation for the Magurchhara gas structure damage, sources said

Bush sticks

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would continue to push for a new UN resolution on disarmament to show Iraq how determined Washington was.

Bush's tough stance was boosted by a new opinion poll out Wednesday, which indicated growing public support for his policy toward Iraq.

The CNN/USA Today/Gallup survey showed that 93 per cent of respondents believed the United Nations should pass a resolution imposing a deadline on Iraq to submit to weapons inspections or face grave consequences.

The EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana meanwhile was headed to Washington for talks with US officials Wednesday and Thursday.

Former UN weapons inspector Richard Butler echoed some of Washington's scepticism yesterday.