

Opposition walks out on indemnity bill

Hasina vows to resist its passage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government introduced a bill in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, seeking indemnity for all actions including deaths and tortures during the recent army-led anti-crime drive across the country.

Opposition lawmakers staged a walkout in protest, as they termed the bill unconstitutional. "We cannot accept the bill as it will infringe on human rights and justice," Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina told reporters after the walkout.

She also vowed to resist passage of the bill in the parliament.

However, the government defended the controversial bill arguing that the constitution has provisions for such indemnity. "Indemnifying the army-led joint forces and others concerned is needed for 'greater national interest'," Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said while introducing the bill titled "Joint Forces Indemnity Act, 2003" in the House.

Besides, the AL walked out of the House twice in protest over a state-

ment issued by Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan on Bangladesh's inclusion in the US terror-risk list.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina had a straight confrontation in the House as they blamed each other for Bangladesh coming under stricter US immigration rules.

Uproars marked the House proceedings as the treasury and opposition benches spoke for and against introduction of the indemnity bill. The House, however, approved its placement with the lawmakers of

the BNP-led ruling coalition supporting and opposition lawmakers of the Awami League and the Jatiya Party (Ershad) walking out in protest.

The lone MP of another JP faction, Anwar Hossain Monju and an independent lawmaker Mohammad Ali stayed back. Abdul Quader Siddiqui of Krishak Sramik Janata League was not present at that time.

Earlier, senior AL legislator

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Petro dealers threaten business wrap-up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Petroleum dealers will withdraw their dealership if the demand for compensation for evaporation cost and operational loss is not met by February 22, their leaders said at a press conference here yesterday.

The government on January 22 assured the dealers to solve their problems within a month and formed an eight-member committee to examine their demands.

The government is now trying to avoid fulfilling its promise, leaders of the Bangladesh Petroleum Dealers, Distributors, Agents and Petrol Pump Owners Association alleged at the press conference, held at a city hotel.

They denied the allegation that petroleum dealers were mixing less costly kerosene with petroleum. Rather, such things happened at government owned depots, where 10 employees were suspended for such offence, they claimed. They however said the association has formed a committee to investigate the allegation.

They said compensation was not given earlier as government used to

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Govt gets down to advance budget-making

Revised retrenchment outlay to treble this year

INAM AHMED

In a departure from the normal practice, the finance ministry has got down to drawing two years' budgets in advance along with the next fiscal's.

The budget allocations will be made under a new formula. The ministries and divisions have been asked to mark up the actual budget of the last fiscal by 2.5 per cent to decide on the size of this fiscal's revised budget.

The same marking-up formula will be followed to plan the budgets

for FY04, FY05 and FY06.

The ministries have to indicate how many staff will be transferred from the development budget to revenue. A list of would-be recruits will be prepared as well.

The finance ministry has made it clear that it would not promise any fund for additional projects except those for growth, poverty alleviation, human resource development and operation and maintenance.

For the advance budgets of FY05 and FY06, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has to mention

any possible step in future.

For this year's revised budget, the foodgrains allocation in the food-for-work programme will be reduced by 25 per cent.

The revised budget will also increase the allocation for retrenchment of workers from Tk 400 crore to Tk 1,200 crore. The extra amount is needed because of the closure of a number of state-owned enterprises, including the Adamjee Jute Mills.

The finance ministry has also

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SHAZNEEN CASE

Husband of victim's sister cross-examined

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Cross-examination of Arshadul Haq, fifth prosecution witness in the Shazneen rape case and husband of the victim's sister, by the lawyer of the principal accused Shahidul Islam alias Shahid ended yesterday.

He was then cross-examined by the lawyers of three other accused in the case -- Hasan, Minu and Parvin.

It took place at the Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka.

After the cross-examination for about four hours, Kazi Rahamat Ullah, Judge of the tribunal adjourned the hearing till noon today.

During the cross-examination, Arshad told the court that cook Abdul Mannan informed them that

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Announcement

Today's edition is of 44 pages including a 28-page special colour section to mark the 12th anniversary of the newspaper. The issue is priced at Tk 10.

Notice

Today's 'Letters to the Editor' Page and the National Page have been shifted to Page 9 and Page 15.

Search for Columbia debris on Crew remains found, dozens hospitalised in Texas

AFP, Hemphill, Texas

Human remains believed to be from the crew of the Columbia have been found in Hemphill, Texas, police said, as the recovery efforts following Saturday's disastrous loss of the US space shuttle continued.

"I can confirm human remains from the space shuttle Columbia have been found in the debris," said Karen Steele, spokeswoman for Hemphill police.

Steele refused to give other details on the find, only noting that federal, state and local authorities "are working in coordination to gather evidence, remains and debris from the shuttle disaster."

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Billy Smith, emergency manager in Hemphill, said meanwhile that "no comment will be made concerning the human remains out of respect for the family of the shuttle crew."

Smith said at least one large piece of debris had been found underwater in the area.

NASA lost contact with Columbia at 8:00 am Saturday as it re-entered the Earth's atmosphere at 200,000 feet over Texas on its way to landing at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Hemphill, in eastern Texas, is located some 30 miles southeast of Nacogdoches in Sabine County, where various pieces of charred, twisted debris from Columbia have



PHOTO: AFP

An American flag flies near a four-foot piece of the US space shuttle Columbia that came down in a field near the town of Palestine, Texas on Saturday.

been recovered.

Across Savine County, where Hemphill is located, Smith said some 127 sites have been reported to have debris.

Authorities repeatedly urged residents -- including prospective souvenir hunters -- to refrain from

touching debris from the shuttle, which may be covered with toxic substances found in propellants used aboard the spacecraft.

"There have been reports of 36 people hospitalised due to handling debris," Smith said.

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Motijheel to get multi-storey car park

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will construct a multi-storey car park at Motijheel to make the area traffic jam free, an official release said yesterday.

The Tk100 crore project agreement was signed yesterday between the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) and the Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Centre (IIFC) of Economic Relations Division (ERD) at the communication ministry.

The project also includes construction of a multi-storey bus terminal and a commercial plaza on 7.5 acres of land at the BRTC depot in Motijheel. Construction work is likely to begin by the year-end.

BRTC Chairman Taimur Alam Khondaker and IIFC Executive Director Nazrul Islam signed the deal in the presence of Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, State Minister Salahuddin Ahmed and Secretary Rezaul Hayat.

"IIFC will prepare a project after feasibility study and implement the project mobilizing necessary funds from private investors," said the official release.

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STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) foiled three more push-in attempts in Lalmonirhat by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in the early hours of yesterday.

The BSF took back 200 people who were pushed into the no-man's land at Nazir Gomini on Friday.

The BSF proposed a sector commander level flag meeting with the BDR to be held at Nazir Gomini today.

The BDR has doubled its troops along the border at Lalmonirhat to foil any push-in bid, as the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) tried to push in hundreds of people at night. The push-in attempts were made through three border outposts at Panbari, Dhabolshuti and Bagdogra.

Eid-ul-Azha on Feb 13

UNB, Dhaka

Holy Eid-ul-Azha will be celebrated in the country on February 13.

This was decided at a meeting of National Moon Sighting Committee at Islamic Foundation here yesterday with State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharref Hossain Shahjahan in the chair.

The decision was taken unanimously as the moon was not sighted yesterday, said an official release.

