

40,000 cases pending with money loan courts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 40,000 cases are pending with money loan courts--depriving the government of getting back Tk 9148 crore loans.

Conventional money loan court laws failed to recover more than five per cent of the total pending loans.

So the government amended the laws and introduced a new system for quick disposal of all pending cases, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said at a press briefing at his office yesterday.

The new system to be effective from May 1 will provide for disposal of cases in three months.

Among the cases, about 22,000 are pending for over five years, 5700 for four years, 4600 for three years and 4300 for two years. In the last one year, hearing of 3400 cases did not take place, he said.

"The country is gripped by a loan default culture. The banks often tend to provide loans without

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PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia opens *Dhaka Padajatra* as part of a countrywide road march at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium yesterday.

CITY POLLS

AL urges PM not to visit Sylhet

Complaint against Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A complaint was lodged with the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) yesterday against Finance Minister Saifur Rahman for alleged violation of election code of conduct.

The Sylhet City Corporation election is scheduled for March 20.

Advocate Faruque Ahmed Chowdhury in his complaint said the finance minister is trying to influence voters at public meetings by saying that there would be no development work if ruling BNP-backed mayoral candidate MA Haque is not voted.

Saifur, who is a parliament member from the city, made such statements at several public meetings including the one held at the Government Alia Madrassah Maidan on February 4, organised by the 4-Party Alliance, the complainant said.

Besides, the minister is using government facilities in campaigning for the candidate.

He also attached newspaper clippings with the complaint to substantiate his allegations and sought the CEC's intervention in this regard.

A copy of the complaint was also submitted to the Additional Divisional Commissioner, who is the Returning Officer for the polls.

Meanwhile central leaders of Awami League called upon Prime Minister and BNP chief Khaleda Zia not visit Sylhet ahead of the polls, saying this will influence the election.

Addressing a press conference at a local hotel yesterday afternoon, they also reiterated their demand for deployment of army to ensure a free,

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Change returning officer, deploy army for polls

Pir's 48-hour ultimatum

A CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A mayoral candidate for the Barisal City Corporation polls yesterday accused the returning officer of political bias.

Enayet Pir Khan backed by the main opposition Awami League threatened to launch a movement if the returning officer is not changed and troops are not deployed for the polls.

He issued a 48-hour ultimatum at a press conference at a local hotel.

Enayet alleged that the returning officer leant towards the ruling alliance-backed candidate Mozibur Rahman Sarwar.

Enayet blamed the supporters

of the alliance candidate for unleashing violence.

Meanwhile, the BNP's rebel mayoral candidate Ebaudul Huq Chan returned home from hospital ignoring doctors' advice and went on electioneering.

Chan was admitted to the Sher-e-Bangla Barisal Medical College Hospital with heart attack.

The ruling BNP expelled Ahsan Habib Kamal Friday for contesting the mayoral polls without party approval. Kamal has speeded up his election campaign.

The polls will be held on March 20.

Concern over non-confirmation of 6 judges' jobs

UNB, Dhaka

One hundred and sixty-five leading citizens in a joint statement yesterday expressed concern at the non-confirmation of the appointment of six additional judges of the High Court despite the Chief Justice's recommendation.

"We are observing that the government is not considering honesty, integrity, intelligence, success and professional capability in the appointment and confirmation of additional judges to the HC," said the statement.

It alleged that the government is appointing judges on the basis of their allegiance to certain political party and quarter which is pushing the judiciary towards uncertainty.

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ICT course at SSC, HSC levels likely

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is considering the introduction of a course on Information Communication Technology (ICT) at Secondary and Higher Secondary level education, sources said.

This move has been initiated to produce computer knowledgeable manpower and thereby have stake at the global job markets.

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Rising from the ashes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Wednesday's fire at the Begunbari slum have turned them pauper. But it could not rob them of their resilience.

The slum dwellers have started their life almost from the scratch.

"We have lost everything -- we are left with nothing but the dresses we were on," says Momena Khatun as she cooks at the ravaged shanty. "Things will be tough for us, but we have to survive at any cost."

Momena has been living here for 12 years. And she's not the only one who is fighting for a new life.

After the fire, four children are still missing from the slum. Local said the children were sleeping inside a small room.

About 650 families or 3,000 people are now in serious crisis for shelter.

"I have sent my wife and children to village," said Md. Rafiqul Islam, a shop owner at the Karwan Bazar fish market.

To begin life anew, Jarina Khatun has bought pan for cooking.

"I cook for three families who even don't have an oven left," says she.

The Begunbari slum raised by bamboo poles sprawls on a pond. Some have already started building new shanties.

Rizia Begum said she bought an embroidery machine for Tk 10,000 a few days before the fire. Now, she has no means of eking out a living.

Many had TVs, VCDs or cassette players. Some even had refrigerators. But not anymore.

Children and women are still looking for small things of some value amidst the ashes. As if like the Phoenix, they want to rise again.



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Momena Khatun who lost her shanty to Wednesday's fire at Begunbari in Tejgaon tries to forget the shock by concentrating on cooking.

Bush for action to end Iraq's 'wilful charade'

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush said yesterday that Iraq was acting out a "wilful charade" to thwart UN inspectors and that he was ready to wage war if necessary to disarm and topple Saddam Hussein.

"As a last resort, we must be willing to use military force. We are doing everything we can to avoid war in Iraq. But if Saddam Hussein does not disarm peacefully, he will be disarmed by force," he said in his weekly radio address.

Bush also stepped up pressure on the UN Security Council to approve a new resolution paving the way for military action, saying that Baghdad has shown no intention of complying with UN disarmament demands.

"Inspection teams do not need more time, or more personnel -- all they need is what they have never received, the full cooperation of the Iraqi regime. The only acceptable outcome is the outcome already demanded by a unanimous vote of the Security Council: total disarmament."

Bush scoffed at the notion that Iraq's destruction of banned al-Samoud missiles -- as demanded by the inspectors -- constituted as sign that Baghdad is complying.

"Our intelligence shows that even as he is destroying these few missiles, he has ordered the continued production of the very same type of missiles," he said.

"Iraqi operatives continue to play a shell game with inspectors, moving suspected prohibited materials to different locations every 12 to 24 hours. And Iraqi weapons scientists continue to be threatened with harm should they cooperate in interviews with UN inspectors," he said.

"These are not the actions of a regime that is disarming. These are the actions of a regime engaged in a wilful charade."

Bush also reiterated that the Iraqi leader has ties to terrorists like those who carried out the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and could given them chemical or biological or arms.

"The attacks of September 11,

2001 showed what the enemies of America did with four airplanes. We will not wait to see what terrorists or terror states could do with weapons of mass destruction," he said.

Reuters from UN adds: The United States asked UN Security Council members to be prepared to vote on a resolution authorising force against Iraq "from Tuesday onwards," US Ambassador John Negroponte said.

"There will be no vote on Monday but we are advising delegations to advise their governments to be prepared to vote as early as Tuesday, from Tuesday onwards," Negroponte told reporters after several hours of closed-door consultations among the 15 council ambassadors.

The United States, Britain and Spain on Friday amended their draft resolution to include a March 17 ultimatum for Iraq to obey disarmament demands or face war in an effort to get wavering council members to support possible military action.

1,184 women, kids suffered acid burns during 1999-02

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 1,184 women and children became victims of acid violence in the country from 1999 to 2002.

This was stated yesterday by Monira Rahman, Executive Director of Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), at a function at the Jatiyo Press Club, attended by about 200 acid violence victims. It was organised by ASF marking the International Women's Day.

One of the victims -- Mahmuda told the gathering that she suffered acid burn injury only because she refused to marry a man.

Another victim-- Doli -- and parents of some other victims also spoke, sharing their horrific experiences.

The function was addressed by, among others, Reaz Uddin Ahmed, president of the club and Ashiqul Hoque Chowdhury, Executive Director of Square, a pharmaceutical company.

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Two girls flee safe custody

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two girls have fled from a safe custody and four others were injured in an escape attempt at Lalmatia in the early hours of yesterday.

The six girls broke the fourth floor windowpanes of the custody at around 3:00am and used their saris to climb down the safe custody of the Women Affairs Department.

The girls had recently been brought from the Dhaka Central Jail, said Mohammadpur police.

Two managed to land and get away successfully while two others fractured their legs and waist. The injured were admitted to the Orthopaedic Hospital.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 9		6-05 pm
Mar 10	6-13 am	

Prayer Timings		
Mar 9		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	5-00
Maghrib	6-12	6-19
Esha	7-35	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

ULFA devastates oil refinery in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Tribal rebels devastated one of the world's oldest oil refineries yesterday in a series of coordinated attacks in the eastern Indian state of Assam, officials said.

Flames leapt more than 100 meters high after the mortar attack around midnight (1830 GMT Friday) at the century-old Digboi Refinery, 530 kilometers east of Assam's capital Guwahati.

About the same time, suspected rebels blew up a nearby crude oil pipeline of state-owned Oil India Limited at Kathalguri, a police spokesman said.

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which is fighting for an independent homeland in the Indian state, claimed responsibility for both attacks.

"We have blown up the tank at Digboi and the crude oil pipeline and have instructed our boys to carry out more such attacks in the next few days," ULFA commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah said in a statement to local media.

Kanteshwar Gogoi, an official of the refinery, said he heard "two big sounds of explosions" before the fire broke out.

There were no reports of casualties from the attack, but hundreds of nearby residents were evacuated, police said. Some 200 firefighters, army soldiers or paramilitary troops

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PHOTO: AFP

Flames engulf the century-old Digboi Refinery, some 530 kms east of Guwahati, yesterday after suspected tribal rebels attacked two oil installations there.