

# Vital poll pledges

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tion cares little about strengthening democracy by implementing the four pledges.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed keeps saying that the judiciary would be separated within the coalition's tenure and the anti-corruption commission bill passed in the next session of parliament. Yet, sessions begin and end without passage of any bills. And, he never stops claiming that the credit for initiating the process of establishing an independent human-rights commission and ombudsman goes to the incumbent government.

For the last 28 months, the government's only success on this front has been preparation of drafts on the issues that are either pending with the parliament standing committees or the cabinet committee or have been left on the backburner.

**SEPARATION OF JUDICIARY:** Despite constitutional bindings to separate the judiciary from the executive wing of the state, no government has ever taken concrete steps to implement them. In 1995, nearly 500 judges of the lower judiciary filed a writ with the High Court to separate the judiciary. After four years of legal battle between the government and lower court judges, the highest tier of the judiciary finally asked the government to implement its 12-point directive.

**THE OMBUDSMAN:** In 1980, the government passed an act for installation of an ombudsman, and after 22 years, on January 6, 2002, the coalition government brought the act into force through a gazette notification.

However, on February 11, 2002, the law ministry proposed to the cabinet for amendments to some provisions of the act, which in turn formed a committee to scrutinise the bill. Since then no one knows what has happened to the bill.

In an interview with The Daily Star in May last year, the law minister said the issues are not that simple to be executed overnight and the press quoted him as saying that implementation of the four pledges are not in sight, to which the minister sent a rejoinder in exasperation. Seven months on, the coalition's election pledges are far from being implemented.

Interestingly, the government has recently moved to raise the number of seats in parliament, which will require it to go for as sensitive a measure as bringing amendments to the constitution. But, it needs no such move to live up to its promises of separating judiciary and forming the commissions and office of ombudsman, which could go a long way to better governance in a country riddled with corruption, injustice and infringement of human rights.

## Anti-Ahmadiyya

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stressing non-violence and tolerance.

The sect breaks sharply with mainstream Islam by not insisting Mohammad was necessarily the last prophet.

Irene said there were "two Bangladeshes": one that has witnessed "growth in abuse without accountability," including attacks on the Hindu minority, and another with dedicated groups committed to women's rights, children's rights and other issues.

She said the problems in Bangladesh, which is deeply polarised between its two major parties, did not originate with the election of Khaleda Zia in 2001.

Bangladesh has for some time now seen a failure of governance," she said.

More than 100,000 people are taking part in the World Social Forum, a yearly meet of anti-globalisation activists.

# 20 die in blast

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nationality or their names," Kimmitt said.

The wounded included six Americans -- three soldiers and three civilians, another spokesman said.

A Reuters Television cameraman saw a woman lying in the road, one foot blown off and a high-angled video still on the other. Others lay slumped on the curb or in the roadway.

An Iraqi soldier helped lift a body from the street, pausing briefly as a gunshot rang out in the background.

At the nearby Yarmouk Hospital, about 20 people were admitted with blast injuries. At least one man was taken in on a stretcher, his body covered in blood and a transfusion bottle held above him by an attendant.

"I can't hear you, I can't hear," cried Raqad Iyas Ibrahim, sitting on a bed with her head bandaged and blood congealing across her face.

"I saw a car, I really don't know what happened, I saw windows smashing, then I just fell. I don't know, I don't understand," she said, breaking down in sobs.

Insurgents battling US occupation forces regularly attack the US military and those they see as cooperating with them.

A roadside bomb injured two British soldiers in the southern city of Basra Sunday, but the wounds were very minor, a British army spokeswoman said.

## Russell killing

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the judgement in seven days and punishment of the fugitives will be effective from the date of surrender or arrest.

The convicts in the dock remained calm all through the pronouncement of the judgement and did not comment on it.

Russell's wife Jakia Bhuiyan told The Daily Star she was satisfied with the judgement but demanded immediate arrest of the fugitives and swift execution of the verdict. Russell's relatives alleged the fugitives threatened them with death by phone.

## PP still skips court for not having judge of his choice

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A special public prosecutor (PP) at the First Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression (FSTPWC), Dhaka has refrained from attending hearing of cases for not having a judge of his choice.

Hearing of 200 cases was adjourned and about 300 accused in these cases were left to suffer, as PP Abul Khayer did not attend court for six days.

Judge Dudmiah Sarker at the first tribunal handed over his charge to Kazi Rahamat Ullah, the judge of the second special tribunal, after he was transferred on January 12. And the PP has been absenting since then. He however sent two of his assistant PPs to the court yesterday after some dailies carried the news of his unprecedented boycott.

Several advocates requested him in vain to attend the court. "That court is not for me. I will not attend any hearing in that court," Khayer said to lawyers and The Daily Star yesterday.

"I am ready to hear the cases, but I cannot do it without hearing the prosecution," Judge Rahamat Ullah told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked about the matter Dhaka Bar Association President Mohammad Israfil said, "Law and justice do not permit such whimsical act. He certainly obliged to attend the hearings as per order of the judge," Israfil said.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan PP Abdulla Mahmud Hasan said he would ask PP Abul Khayer to attend the hearing today.

"If he does not follow my instructions, I will try to proceed with hearing by making arrangements with the judge or with the authorities concerned," he said.

## Dolphins

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and were hunted for use in traditional healing, for the alleged medicinal properties of their flesh.

In addition, the experts said Indian interference with river flows into Bangladesh had increased water salinity.

They were alerted to the salinity problem when they noticed a salt-water dolphin species living in the Sunderbans.

Experts at a recent seminar arranged by the WDCS and WCS said viable dolphin populations existed in the Sunderbans and the Karnaphuli river system. Their recommendations will be formally presented to the government.

Meanwhile, the IUCN has built watch-towers in Manikganj and Madaripur and is encouraging local people to observe and appreciate dolphins.

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## Padma Bridge

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh, through the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, he added.

He expressed satisfaction over proper utilisation of Japanese assistance, reforms undertaken by the present government and economic momentum gained under the leadership of Khaleda Zia.

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## Chatter

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imposed on its diplomats there in response to recent multiple threats against the mission and US interests.

Reeker said yesterday it was prudent to be cautious and vigilante against terrorist groups anywhere in the world but he did not give details of any terrorist outfit in Bangladesh.

Washington, he added, was happy with the security measures taken by Dhaka for protecting American interests and people in Bangladesh.

He said the two sides have focused on many common issues, including fighting terrorism.

"Our focus is to make sure these terrorist groups cannot take roots in Bangladesh, they cannot hijack your democracy and the goals of your country," Reeker said.

Reeker said the United States wanted Bangladeshi troops to join peacekeeping operations in Iraq and to help the Iraqi people rebuild their lives after the fall of former president Saddam Hussein's regime.

"Your troops have played a laudable role in United Nations peacekeeping missions and I think the decision has to be taken by your (Dhaka) government," he said.

Bangladesh, the world's third-largest Muslim-majority country, saw almost daily anti-American demonstrations in the industrial city in protest at the murder passed off, bringing life to a virtual halt.

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# Close down PMO

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for quality improvement: taking growth-supportive, poverty reduction-oriented and low-waste programmes.

Comprised of seven members, Perc worked for two years and published two interim and two special reports that detected huge anomalies in government expenditure and suggested measures to cut the waste.

It recommended lowering the number of ministries to 22 from 38 and suggested a set of ways to cut down ministry costs including dropping party in Ramzan.

Such parties are contrary to the spirit of the holy month of restraint, it added.

"I'll arrange a meeting between the Perc members and the prime minister soon for fast implementation of the recommendations," the finance minister said.

"I believe it will convince the prime minister and encourage her to implement the findings of the report."

Saiful said a dual-approach would be followed to realise the suggestions: recommendations that can be implemented at the ministry level would be realised through inter-ministerial meetings and big issues would be tackled at the cabinet level.

"For instance, when the closure of a ministry comes up, the issue of employees should be discussed. It

requires an overall consideration," Saiful explained.

Perc also recommended integration of revenue and development budgets under a mid-term budget structure.

To improve cost management, waste should be controlled in the revenue sector and the last day of monetary disbursement should be May 31 instead of June 30 to that end, the report said.

It identified a raft of problems in the development budget.

Perc observed that projects under the development budget had little relations with government's mid-term development goals and there was a domination of unapproved projects.

As the number of state-owned enterprises decreased, the government should merge similar corporations to save costs.

The government should stay away from forming municipalities in the next five years and focus on fulfilling of basic conditions instead, the report said.

It should focus on collecting municipal taxes and stop grants to the municipalities failing to collect less than 75 percent of the taxes.

Perc reiterated its position on meglye train project, saying it was an untested and highly expensive technology that the nation cannot afford.

It was a file against Ratan, son of Abdus Sabur of Bokta in Lohajang, Munisganj, and his three accomplices.

At Keraniganj, the extortionists blasted bombs and opened fire on Monir Hossain, 49, and his brother Eklas Uddin, 34, owners of Mayer Doa Mill, when they refused to give them Tk 20,000. They were admitted to the DMCH.

In another incident, ATM Abdul Halim of Malibagh Chowdhurypara found the lock of his room broken when he returned home at 3:30pm yesterday. The burglars stole cash, gold and other valuables said to be worth about Tk 2 lakh from his house.

Lamy described regional integration, domestically generated growth, increasing revenue earnings and inflow of foreign direct investment as keys to economic development of a country like Bangladesh.

The EU trade commissioner also thinks there is an urgent necessity for resuming the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations.

"We should start the WTO talks as soon as possible," he said. "We can provide help through market access, but there is competition in the market, which has to be gained through utilising various advantages like a working labour force."

He felt other developed countries like US and Japan also should provide duty- and quota-free access to goods from the LDCs, including Bangladesh.

Lamy welcomed the recent development of striking a free trade agreement -- Safta -- in the South Asian region. This kind of regional integration will enable the member states to develop significantly, he observed.

Pascal Lamy left Dhaka for New Delhi yesterday afternoon. He will attend a conference of Asian trade ministers in Indonesia Wednesday on the last leg of his visit to the region.

## 3 shot in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Locals caught a mugger from a gang after they shot a tannery trader at Hazaribagh, while at Subadda in Keraniganj extortionists shot two brothers yesterday.

Tannery trader Zakir Hossain is receiving treatment at Sikder Medical College Hospital, while the mugger, Ratan, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) after a mob beating.

Zakir was taking Tk 3 lakh to his house when the muggers waylaid and shot him. But they failed to snatch the sum as locals rushed to the spot and caught the ratter with revolver.

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