

CONSTITUTION CHANGES
Local body
chairmen
unhappy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers including Pourashabha and Union Parishad chairmen yesterday said at a roundtable the 14th amendment to the constitution on local government ignoring their reservations will be 'undemocratic', 'irrational' and 'immoral'.

The speakers said the amendment in its present form will fail to strengthen the local government and scuttle the move to decentralise it. Instead, they suggested, the government should focus on removing barriers to holding local government elections in time.

The cabinet recently approved a bill seeking insertion of a sub-article into the constitution after article 59(1) that says no elected representatives of city corporation, Pourashabha and Union Parishad will be able to continue on expiry of their tenure and the authority of the body will be designated to the district administration until another elected body takes over the charge.

The Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB) and National

FBCCI offers political reform agenda

More power for president, 20-ministry cabinet sought

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The apex trade body of the country yesterday came up with a set of proposals to reform key areas including politics, now in a confrontational situation.

The proposals called for increasing the power of the president, reducing the number of ministries to 20, strengthening the Supreme Judicial Council, creation of two posts of deputy speaker -- one each from the treasury and opposition benches -- and formation of citizens' committees to curb corruption of police.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) also suggested creating six provinces with Dhaka metropolitan area having the status of a special autonomous zone. Each province will have a provincial

government and police department, it proposed.

The FBCCI recommended reviving upazila system for further decentralisation of power.

It also suggested making provisions requiring all ministers to face confidence vote in parliament every two years for more accountability.

FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo released the proposals titled "FBCCI proposals to resolve national crises, political problems and confrontational politics towards achieving socio-economic development" at a press conference.

"We have sent the proposals to the prime minister and opposition leader. We will also send it to different political parties and trade and professional bodies," he said.

Mintoo said the business community condemned the government's 'mass arrests' to foil the

opposition bid to unseat the BNP-led alliance government by April 30. Such arrests go against the spirit of the constitution that guarantees human rights of all citizens.

They do not also support any unconstitutional change of government, he added.

Urging the feuding political leaders to take time to "cool off", the FBCCI said, "The cool-off period will be six months and we appeal to all groups and professionals to back us for the sake of national interest. We urge the opposition parties not to call hartal and the government not to crack down on activists of opposition parties to pave the way for dialogue for reconciliation."

The FBCCI proposals recommended that political parties will not support any siege of land and sea ports, highways, rail lines and



Awami League leaders, hemmed in by policemen, sit on the kerb at Zero Point yesterday on the third and final day of their "mass no-confidence" programme in the run-up to the party's April 30 deadline for unseating the government.

WB, IMF happy with economy, not with governance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) were 'satisfied' with Bangladesh's economic performance, but were 'unhappy' about its progress in administrative reforms, governance and curbing corruption.

"They have reservations about a few non-economic factors in Bangladesh," Saifur said yesterday at a press briefing on his weeklong visit to the WB and IMF headquarters in the US.

"The donors have asked us to take strong steps to improve governance and administration and curb corruption and address other issues," he added.

"We have told them we will form an anti-corruption commission. The recruitment process for consultants for the Agrani Bank and other nationalised commercial banks is in the advanced stage. We are going to form a regulatory commission for



Coconuts are in demand now as the summer heat has intensified. Selling at Tk 8 a piece, coconuts are also a solution to spurious bottled water.

HC fines RU Tk 5,000 for harming student

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday fined Rajshahi University Tk 5,000 for harming a brilliant student who appealed for re-examining his answer script of a subject four years ago.

The court ordered the university to re-examine the answer script of Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a month.

The court in its judgement observed, "It's a heinous act... The shameful example set by Rajshahi University by keeping the prayer pending years after years ignoring the importance of career of a brilliant student is disgraceful."

Mannan appeared in LL.B (Hons) examinations held in 1999 and secured 62.5 percent marks in 15 out of 16 papers. He was given only 32 marks in administrative law. Aggrieved by the result, he applied to the vice-chancellor to re-examine the answer script on October 24, 2000, but the authorities did not pay

Only 6 defence audit objections settled since independence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Only six of the 789 audit objections against the defence organisations have been resolved in 30 fiscal years since 1971-72 financial year, creating ground for more financial irregularities in the organisations.

The objections were against a number of organisations under the defence ministry including the Army, Navy and Air Force which have 783 objections to the expenditure of about Tk 285.60 crore in the fiscal years 1971-72 till 2001-2002, says a report of the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General's Office (CAG) which was placed before the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

"Non-resolution of the huge audit

objections over the years are creating ground for more irregularities in the organisations," the report noted, adding that in many cases, authorities did not even cite any reason in response to the objections.

The six objections were resolved in the 1984-85 fiscal year involving only about Tk 7 lakh and since then none of the other objections were settled. The report recommended intervention from higher authorities to immediately resolve the objections. However, none of the 35 audit objections of the 2001-2002 fiscal year involving about Tk 2.25 crore have been resolved.

It blamed violation of rules and laws, irregularities in signing agreements, depositing revenue income in non-revenue sector, extravagant

spending and failure to follow the rules and orders issued by the ministries of finance, establishment and defence for the financial irregularities.

Bangladesh Navy purchased 2, 67,699 cartridges causing a loss of Tk 21.41 lakh to the national exchequer. The report said 2,00,000 bullets were bought for BNS Bhatary in 2002, which were made in 1985 and were due to expire in 10 years' time. Another 67,699 round bullets were bought in 1999 after four years of their expiry date.

One objection said officials of the Ramu Army Camp in Cox's Bazar received hill allowances of Tk 42.12 lakh though the camp was not set in a hilly area.



Anniversary of Sher-e-Bangla's death today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 42nd death anniversary of Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Haque will be observed today.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday gave separate messages paying tributes to the late leader.

The president in his message said Sher-e-Bangla played the pioneering role in formation of Rin Salishi Board (Debt Arbitration Board) to set free the oppressed farmers from debt cycle during the British rule.

Freedom fighters call for anti-Razakar unity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some sector commanders and leading freedom fighters have urged their comrades-in-arms and progressive forces to join the ongoing agitation against the coalition government.

They made the appeal saying that the defeated forces of the liberation war, who are now in the government, are strangling the spirit of Independence War and avenging their defeat to the freedom fighters in 1971.

"The al-Badr and Rajakars (collaborators of Pakistani occupation forces) have captured state power and are now ruining the spirit of liberation war. To protect basic rights and ensure safety, the free-

dom fighters have no way but to launch a movement against the collaborators of Pakistani army and the alliance government," said former army chief Major General (ret'd) KM Shafiqullah, Bir Uttam, at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity office in the city yesterday.

He read out a statement of the 'National committee for implementation of freedom fighters demands and observance of a Freedom Fighters Day'. They demanded increased facilities and greater honour for the freedom fighters and trial of war criminals.

The national committee has called for a freedom fighters' rally in all district and upazila headquarters

JANATAR MANCHA
Court rejects discharge petitions

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected discharge petitions of former state minister for planning Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir and seven others accused in the Janatar Mancha (sedition case) case.

Judge Rabiul Hassan of the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court fixed May 16 for framing charges against Alamgir and others.

Earlier, defence lawyers submitted the petitions to discharge the accused and made submission on the petitions. But the prosecution lawyers opposed the petitions and prayed for framing charges against

Bulgarian president's car under Iraq attack

2 GIs, 8 guerrillas killed in other incidents; Britain ponders sending more troops

AGENCIES, Baghdad

Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov's convoy came under attack by gunmen late Sunday during a surprise visit to his country's forces in the southern Iraqi city of Kerbala, the defense ministry of Bulgaria said.

The ministry said the president was not hurt in the attack on his convoy, which was fired on as it traveled between the camps of

Bulgarian and Polish troops in the flashpoint city, where Shia militants have stepped up attacks against US-led forces in recent weeks.

"The president's car was shot up. No one was hurt," spokeswoman Rumiana Strugarova said.

"The attack took about five minutes, and we suppose the attackers were Shia militants. The president returned to Bulgaria in the early hours of the morning."

MASS ARRESTS
CPB stages mass hunger strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) yesterday staged mass hunger strike to protest against 'mass arrests of innocent civilians and repression of democratic agitation programmes by opposition parties, including the Awami League.'

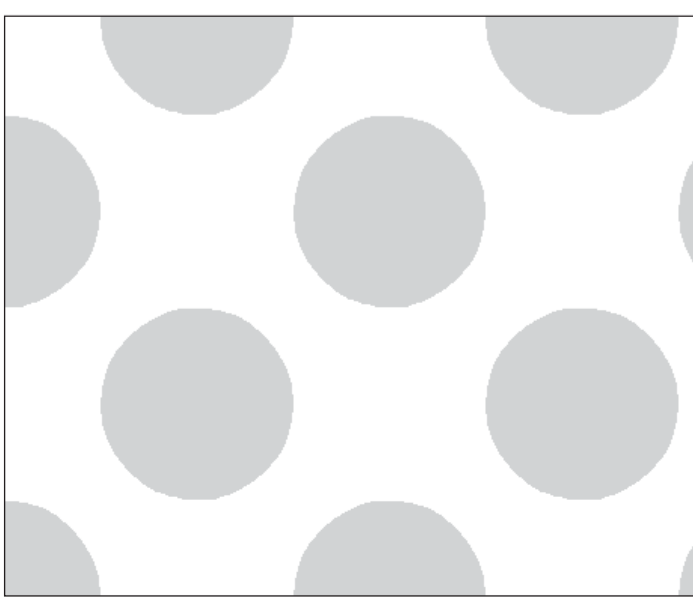
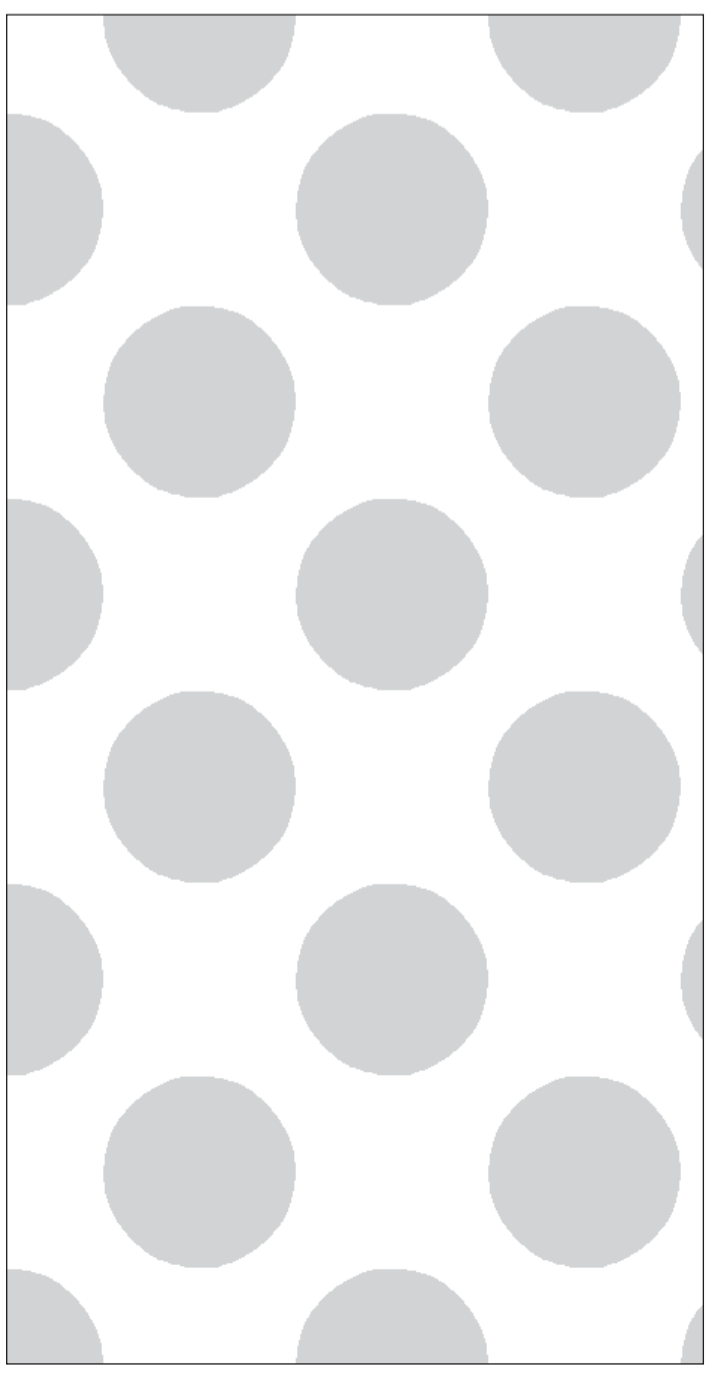
Expressing solidarity, intellectuals and politicians from other political parties also joined the token strike in front of the CPB office from 11:00am to 5:00pm.

CPB President Manzurul Ahsan Khan condemned the mass arrests of over 15,000 in the past week. "These mass arrests will be the final nail in the ruling coalition's coffin," he told the gathering.

"This incident will ignite a revolt and detach the government further from the masses."

CPB General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said this kind of arrests is a sheer violation of human rights.

Kabir Chowdhury, Shahriar Kabir, Syed Abdul Maksud, Muntasir Mamun, Mahfuza Khanam, Mamtaz Latif, Bazlur Rashid Firoz, Golum Kuddus, Zead Al-Malum, Mumtaz Latif, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haq Inu, and Siddiquir Rahman were also present and addressed the rally.



Iraq group threatens to kill Italians

REUTERS, Dubai

Al Arabiya TV has broadcast a tape it says shows three Italians held captive in Iraq and say their captors will kill them in five days if the Italian people do not protest their country's military presence in Iraq.

"A group calling itself the Green Brigade said it would release them if demonstrations are organised in Italy to protest against the government's policy in Iraq," the Arabic TV channel reported on Monday, quoting a message it said it received from the kidnappers.

Tobacco top cause of cancer: Seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Smoking tobacco and its allied products is the number one cause of cancer among the males, while women patients mostly suffer from cervix cancer in Bangladesh, speakers at a seminar said yesterday.

Refraining from smoking and using the allied products can reduce about 85 percent and up to 40 percent respectively the risk of developing lung cancer, the speakers said.

According to a survey on patients at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) from 1985 to 1992, about 21

percent were found to have developed lung cancer, 13 percent larynx, 12 percent blood and five percent windpipe cancers.

The same study said 24 percent of the women patients of the oncology department were diagnosed with cervical cancer, 17 percent with breast cancer and 12 percent with oral cancer.

The speakers said most of the cancers can be cured if detected at early stage and there are many signs to detect cancer.

Organised by Bangladesh Cancer

Prayer Timings		
April 27		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-29	6-34
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation