

Reserved seats for women in JS condemned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different women organisations yesterday protested the restitution of the reserved seats for women in parliament for what they said was being not consonant with demands of the gender across the country.

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) yesterday urged the government to repeal the newly enacted provision in the constitution and arrange direct election to the reserved seats for women.

The association said distribution of reserved women seats among the political parties in proportion to their parliamentary seats primarily appears to be democratic. But becoming a legislator without direct mandate of the constituents is not in line with the ethics of democracy, it added.

The provision of reserved seats lapsed in April 2001 was not also renewed in time, a statement of

BNWLA alleged.

Different civil society, non-government organisations and women activists have been demanding a rise in the number of the reserved seats and direct election to those since 2001, the statement said.

All major political parties in their election pledge promised to ensure women representation in parliament, but the nation has observed with frustration that the government has reneged on its pledge, it alleged.

Bangladesh Mahila Samity yesterday in a statement condemned the 14th amendment of the constitution. The Samity said the amendment does not reflect women's true demand of taking part in direct election.

Development Organisation of the Rural Poor (DORP), an NGO, demanded increase in the number of reserved seats for women to 100 and a direct election to those.

Morshed Khan gets bail in graft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Special Court for Dhaka Division yesterday granted bail to Foreign Minister and former chairman of Arab Bangladesh (AB) Bank Ltd M Morshed Khan and two others in a graft case.

Judge Rezaul Karim Khan issued the bail order upon a bond of Tk 20,000 with two guarantors.

The two others are Abdur Rahim Chowdhury, former managing director of AB Bank Ltd and M Faizur Rahman, managing director of Asian Surveyors Ltd.

The accused along with their lawyer Barrister AKM Fokrul Islam appeared before the court at 3:45pm and prayed for bail.

The lawyer for the accused told the court that the case was filed during the tenure of the Awami League government for harassing them politically and

the charges brought against them were false, fabricated and concocted.

The accused were earlier granted bail by the High Court.

After hearing both sides, the court passed the order and fixed May 29 for hearing on charge-framing against the accused.

Three other accused Harun

Ferdoushi, proprietor of M/s Marshal Services Ltd, Abdullah Al Mamun, executive director of Asian Surveyors Ltd and Giasuddin Al Mamun, now on bail, were also present in the court.

In the case filed with Motijheel Police Station, it was alleged that the persons received about Tk 3.5 crore in loan from the principal branch of the AB Bank showing "forged documents" for the mortgaged property through "abuse of power and mutual understanding".

The loan was sanctioned for the purchase of Jazd Distillery Limited, a disinvested unit of Bangladesh Shipa Rin Sangstha, the FIR said. It was also alleged that the land mortgaged with the bank in 1994 was already sold out to another person and the price of the land was also inflated.

The bank officials, without surveying the land or examining the documents, recommended sanctioning the loan, the FIR added.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) filed the case accusing M Morshed Khan and eight others on October 19, 1996. The investigation officer pressed charges against Morshed Khan and five others on December 13, 2000 showing 14 people as prosecution witnesses.

Bangla Bhai

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The JMJB lynchpin went to Pabna with a large number of activists in minibuses and trucks under the cover of dark, as the police apparently snapped their links with the group, believed to be an outgrowth of the Jama'at ul Mujahedin Bangladesh with a militant past.

Sources said Bangla Bhai holed up in Bagmara in Rajshahi or Naldanga in Natore, backed by relatives of a deputy minister and supporters of another BNP lawmaker. Villagers saw Bangla Bhai in Sikdari village in Bagmara on Saturday night.

Contacted by cellphone, Bangla

Bhai said he was staying in Bagmara but declined to name his location. "I am safe here. But I am not running organisational activities."

Sources close to the JMJB said Bangla Bhai also went to Dhaka, where the outfit is believed to have its headquarters, after he left Rajshahi.

A senior police official told The Daily Star, asking not to be named, that arresting the lynchpin or stopping his militant activities turned impossible for police, as he said the JMJB is sponsored by an influential quarter.

PM asks AL

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"So return to the House and participate in development efforts in the interest of the country and its people," Khaleda, also the Leader of the House and chairperson of the ruling BNP, said in her valedictory speech to the close of the 11th session.

"My government would not allow anybody to create anarchy on the street and damage public property," she warned.

PRESS ROLE

The prime minister also came down heavily on newspapers, saying the press was failing to play a responsible role.

Questioning reports on relief operations in tornado-hit Netrakona and Monga-affected northern regions, she said: "The government provided a large amount of food, medicine and other supplies for the tornado-affected people, but the press reported that no food was given.

"They (journalists) do not visit the scenes, but write reports listening to unrelated people," the prime minister said, adding, "nobody should write whatever they like taking the opportunity of press freedom."

Citing a newspaper report that no food assistance reached the tornado-hit locality, Khaleda said "the gentleman of the newspaper" could have visited the affected area with "two chhatak (a scant amount) of rice in his pocket".

"Many newspapers are not playing the right and responsible role," she alleged.

Claiming that price spiral of essentials could only be found in newspapers, Khaleda said there was no large-scale price hike.

Referring to some market reports in newspapers dating back to 1998 and 2000 when the AL was in office,

she said current level of prices were not as high as then.

Illustrating different development initiatives in education, health, communications, power, environment, telecommunications, poverty reduction by the present government, the premier said: "In the last two and a half years, we have done more than what the people expected and we will do more in future."

Taking a swipe at the AL, she said the opposition party did not believe in democracy and failed to play the responsible role of an opposition.

In an oblique reference to the Indian polls, she said the opposition might take heart from the results, but the people of Bangladesh were different. "If you do not play your role with responsibility, people will reject you," Khaleda said.

She accused the AL of reneging on its no-hartal promise and said the party was in the thick of calling frequent shutdowns to hurt the economy.

The Jatiya Sangsad session, longest ever in the parliamentary history of Bangladesh, began on January 18 and spread over five months with big recesses.

The parliament passed 14 bills, including the much-talked-about 14th amendment to the constitution and anti-corruption commission bill in the session.

The AL attended the session on May 12 breaking an 11-month boycott to unanimously adopt an obituary reference on lawmaker Ahsanullah Master, who was assassinated in a Tongi rally on May 7.

Babul gets 4-week bail

UNB, Dhaka

Nurul Islam Babul, a business tycoon, was granted bail for four weeks on health ground by the High Court yesterday in an attempted rape case.

A housewife filed the case with Badda police on March 20, the day he was arrested in connection with the killing of a dredger worker.

The interim order came while admitting an appeal for hearing against refusal of bail by the lower court.

Granting bail, a bench comprising Justice Nozrul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Farid Ahmed also asked the accused to surrender before the trial court for seeking bail after the expiry of the interim order.

Babul, also owner of Bengali daily Jangonot, submitted doctor's prescription that he has been suffering from cardiac complications and needs to be treated abroad.

Barrister Rafique-ul Huq and Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud appeared for Babul who faces a number of other criminal cases.

SLICED WOMAN BODY

Sister identifies victim three days later

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ADhaka court yesterday placed four people, arrested in connection with the Thursday's retrieval in Mohammadpur of a woman's body in nine pieces, on remand.

Mohammadpur police produced Enamul Haq, Suman Khalashi, Akbar Hossain and Farug Ahmed before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate with a seven-day remand prayer. However, the court granted five days' remand for each, sources said.

The victim's elder sister Selina Yasmin Poynter notified the slain teenage girl as Shamima Sultana Ria, 17, at 10:00pm on Sunday night. Police, however, are yet to confirm.

Popy also claimed that her sister was an SSC (Secondary School Certificate) examinee of South Majippara in Kalkini, Madaripur.

Following her information, police held the quartet on charge of murdering the teenaged girl on the same night.

According to Popy, Ria came to her Mohammadpur house four months ago and started staying with her.

She went to Sumon, a resident of Madaripur and owner of a phone-fax shop near their house, to inquire him about her missing sister. Sumon, who had intimacy with the slain girl, gave her an address at Pallabi in Mirpur and told her that she could find Ria there, she added.

Popy told police that she failed to locate the address despite frantic efforts.

However, morgue sources said Popy went to Dhaka Medical College Hospital thrice --Friday night, Saturday morning and Sunday night -- with her relatives, but could only confirm the victim's identity on the third day.

She identified Ria seeing her fingers and hair-band, three days after, police retrieved the nine-piece body from two sacks.

Rocca arrives

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minorities in Bangladesh are likely to be high on the US agenda in the discussion.

Rocca is going to visit tomorrow the Ahmadiyya complex in Bakshibazar in the capital, the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam in Bangladesh.

Earlier in January, the government banned all publication and dissemination of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, in the face of pressure from Islamic bigots.

Rocca's visit to the complex follows Congressman Joseph Crowley's continued criticism of the government's treatment of the Ahmadiyya issue. Crowley visited Bangladesh in January.

Rocca today will speak as the chief guest at a luncheon with American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham) on the topic "US Policy in South Asia."

He is scheduled to leave on Thursday.

£40m robbery

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shutters in a white van, according to police.

They then forced their way into a secure area containing a large quantity of precious metal and bank notes.

But as the men tried to escape, officers who had been lying in wait fired special bullets- designed to deflate tyres with minimal damage into the van's wheels.

Two suspects then hijacked a white van, forcing the driver to smash through entrance gates and drive to Stanwell, Surrey, where the two men are thought to have switched vehicles, police say.

The gang is thought to have had inside information about the warehouse.

But officers are believed to have spent months gathering intelligence on the raid, and knew exactly when it was due to happen.

"In preventing this attack, we have foiled what would have been one of the biggest robberies ever committed in the UK. We believe that these men were part of an organised criminal enterprise," said Detective Superintendent Barry Phillips.

JUDGE ASSAULT CASE

Court rejects naraji petition

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected a naraji (no-confidence) petition filed by the driver of retired Supreme Court Justice Naimuddin Ahmed in a case filed for alleged assault on the Justice.

Metropolitan Magistrate Jahangir Alam of the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) rejected the petition as court earlier accepted the final report, clearing the accused of the charge.

Mohammad Nurul Islam, driver of the Justice, filed the naraji petition against the final report submitted by investigation officer (IO) of the case Sub-Inspector Mir Mosharruf Hossain on January 28.

Advocate Abdur Rashid Badsha Mian, the petitioner's counsel, expressed anger at the rejection and told reporters that they would move the High Court.

In the petition, Nurul Islam said the IO, in connivance with and under the influence of the accused Dr Anwarul Karim, secretly submitted the final report to the CMM's Court

which accepted it. The IO did not record statements of the Justice and other eyewitnesses who were near the place of occurrence. The IO also contrived to submit minor charges to the court to save the accused, the complainant said.

The court after a hearing rejected the petition on the grounds that it was filed three months after the court accepted the final report.

Police on November 11 last year arrested Dr Anwarul Karim, a former teacher of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), from his Shantinagar house on charge of assaulting the retired justice, who was also a former election commissioner.

Dr Karim was produced before the CMM's Court, Dhaka the following day and granted bail upon a bond of Tk 5,000.

Police sources said Dr Karim allegedly manhandled Justice Naimuddin during an altercation between them on the night of November 8 at Paribagh Petrol Pump in presence of the driver and others.

Batting blues again

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order failed yet again with four wickets falling for 21 runs inside the first 10 overs.

The Tigers never recovered from there and only two men went to reach double figures with opener Hannan Sarker making 36 off 55 balls and number seven Manjarul Islam remaining unbeaten on 33 from 43 deliveries.

Fast bowler Fidel Edwards put Bangladesh on the backfoot with two wickets in an over. Mohammad Ashraf, sent in to open with Hannan,

was brilliantly caught by Dwayne Smith at point for a duck as he played an uppish square-drive off the second ball of the third over. In the last ball of that over, skipper Habibul Bashar (2) was taken down the leg by wicketkeeper Ridley Jacobs.

Rajin Saleh then gave Chris Gayle catching practice in the slips

in left-arm paceman Ian Bradshaw's first over and the hopelessly out of form Alok Kapali fell to a similar dismissal like Bashar. Both made just one.

Smith was the star for the West Indies as he fielded stunningly that followed a decisive run-a-ball 62 not out after the home side were put in. After taking Ashraf's catch, the 21-year-old ran all the way from backward point to extra cover to take Hannan.

The free-stroking right-hander had earlier rode his luck to hit his first fifty in ODIs while Bangladesh paceman Tapash Baisya returned with the best bowling figures of 5-1-16-4 for a Bangladesh in limited-overs matches.

Both teams left for Grenada on Monday where they play the final ODI on May 19.

Hasina threatens

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Hasina, also main opposition AL president, reiterated her claim of BNP leadership's link to the AL lawmaker's assassination which was part of a blueprint to erase her party from the political landscape by systematically killing its prospective leaders.

She asked local people to identify the property of ruling coalition people in their locality, which she said was accumulated through graft corruption and plundering of public money. She drew attention to what she said was ill-gotten wealth of the BNP leadership and asked the public to take note of it.

Referring to the palatial house (Khoab) in Gazipur town of Giasuddin Al Mamun, who is a friend of Tarique, she wondered how the ruling BNP-led coalition men could accumulate so much wealth in two and a half years when Ahsanullah, who was elected lawmaker twice and also was a upazila chairman, could not even own a small house.

The former prime minister said instead of arresting the accused in the murder case, the government indiscriminately arrested AL leaders and workers and innocent people and framed them in cases under the Speedy Trial Act.

"Police are searching the houses of AL leaders and harassing their families and by doing so, they are

protecting the killers," she said and demanded withdrawal of the cases filed against antigovernment demonstrators during the spontaneous protests following the assassination.

She once again dismissed the promptly issued government press note which hinted that the lawmaker's assassination was the outcome of an internal feud in the Awami League and said the prime minister in her capacity as the home minister will have to take responsibility for the killing.

Hasina asked why the prime minister, who is also the leader of the House, did not see the slain MP's body or console the bereaved family members.

Cases would be lodged against the prime minister, her son Tarique Rahman and Tarique's friend Mamun if any more of her party people are killed. She also said Tarique's cronies were involved in the political violence.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil and leaders Suranjit Sengupta, Motia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim, Rahmat Ali, Obaidul Kader, Abdul Mannan, Abdus Shahid, Akhtaruzzaman, AKM Mozammel Haq, Azmat Ullah Khan and Tanzim Ahmed Soheli also spoke.

Saifur for e-voting

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success of e-voting in Indian general election, Saifur said this at a function organised by Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) marking the World Telecommunications Day at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

He, however, came down heavily upon the politicians for their refusal to accept the electoral outcomes.

"Our politicians maintain a culture that indulges raising indiscriminate allegations of rigging when defeated in the poll," said the minister in his speech as the chief guest.

Post and Telecommunications Minister M Aminul Hoque and Telecommunications Secretary Faruq Ahmad Siddiqi addressed the function as special guests.

Telecommunications minister in his speech said the government is committed to developing the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector.

"The country would have a tremendous boost in ICT when it would be connected with the global information super highway via submarine cable by July 2005," Hoque said.

Telecommunications Secretary

BNP keeps

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Senior BNP leaders are also in touch with top leaders and lawmakers of former president HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party. "Most of the Jatiya Party lawmakers and leaders are with us and we are confident that the party is not going to join hands with AL," said a key cabinet minister, also wishing anonymity.

Depression over Bay

UNB, Dhaka

The depression over northwest Bay and adjoining central Bay moved slightly northwestwards at 6:00pm yesterday.

It was centred about 480-km southwest of Chittagong port, 425-km southwest of Cox's Bazaar port and 375-km south southwest of Mongla port.

It is likely to intensify further and move in a north northwesterly direction, Met office said in a special bulletin.

Maximum sustained wind speed within 44-km of the depression centre is about 40 kph rising to 50kph in gust or squalls. Sea will remain moderate.

Under its influence, squally weather is likely to affect the ports.

Maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar and Mongla have been advised to keep hoisted local cautionary signal number three.

All fishing boats and trawlers over the north Bay have been advised to take shelter immediately, the bulletin added.

Burnt UCBL worker hangs by a thread

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Commercial Bank Ltd (UCBL) employee, who suffered critical burns Saturday, is struggling for life at City Hospital in Panthapath in the city.

Shaiba Chowdhury Irani, 30, who suffered burns in 90 percent her body when a UCBL driver threw petrol and set fire on her, has the least possibility of survival, hospital sources said.

Irani, married and mother of an eight-year-old son, was returning to her ground-floor office after offering prayers when driver Ranjit Barua, who fell in love with her and was refused, burnt her.

Ranjit committed suicide under a speeding train at Khilgaon Rail Crossing in Motijheel the same day.

US finds shell with 'sarin' agent in Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

A small amount of the nerve agent sarin was found in a shell that exploded in Iraq, the U.S. army said yesterday in the first announcement of discovery of any of the weapons on which Washington made its case for war.

Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt told a news conference the substance had been found in an artillery shell inside a bag discovered by a U.S. convoy a few days ago. The round had exploded, causing a small release of the substance, he said.

"The Iraq Survey Group has confirmed today that a 155 (mm) artillery round containing sarin nerve agent had been found. The round had been rigged as an IED (improvised explosive device) that was discovered by a U.S. force convoy," he said.

"A detonation occurred before the IED be could be rendered inoperable," Kimmitt said, adding that two members of an explosives team had been treated for exposure to the substance.

Kimmitt said the round, designed to mix the sarin in flight, belonged to a class of ordnance that the ousted government of Saddam Hussein claimed to have destroyed before the 1991 Gulf war.

"It is a weapon that we believe was stocked from the ex-regime time, and it had been thought to be an ordinary artillery shell set up to explode like an ordinary IED... when it exploded it indicated that it actually had some sarin in it," he said.

IEDs are bombs usually planted at the side of the road to explode as coalition vehicles pass.

Honduras jail fire kills over 100

REUTERS, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

A huge fire at a prison in northern Honduras has killed 102 inmates, all of them members of a violent street gang the government is trying to break up.

Police spokesman Wilmer Torres yesterday said the early-morning fire at the prison in the northern city of San Pedro Sula followed an explosion that was apparently caused by a short circuit.

Most of the victims died from suffocation and another 27 were taken to the hospital with burns.

Morshed

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exact date and itinerary for the visit will be set after the new government takes oath and a new foreign minister takes office," said a foreign ministry official seeking not to be named.

Stock crashes

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Gandhi faced her first crisis yesterday, before even taking power, when pivotal leftists refused to formally join her government and markets crashed on fears over economic policy.

The ousted Hindu nationalists and their allies said they would boycott the swearing-in of Italian-born Gandhi as prime minister to "express people's sentiments".

Outgoing prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee would, however, attend the ceremony in "keeping with the tradition," said Venkaiah Naidu, president of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Shares on the Bombay bourse plunged as much as 17.5 percent -- the worst fall in its 129 years. Trading was halted twice, for a total of three hours, before the index closed 11 percent down, extending big losses last week. The rupee and bonds also fell.

The crash, including a big drop Friday, has wiped tens of billions of dollars off the value of listed companies. Hundreds of brokers and small investors protested outside the bourse on the day Gandhi was due to visit the president to claim power.

Leftist parties, which hold more than 60 of the new parliament's 545 seats, decided not to formally join Gandhi's Congress party and its allies in the coalition expected to be sworn tomorrow.

"Not join the government," senior Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) leader Somnath Chatterjee told reporters when asked what the party's decision was.

Leaders of the dominant Marxist party, with 43 MPs in the newly-elected parliament, took the decision at the end of three days of hectic parleys in the capital.

The Communist Party of India (CPI), which has 10 members elect,

earlier said it was not joining the government but kept the issue open for the CPM and other leftists.

Both parties have already pledged they would support a Congress-led government from the outside.

"As of now we are not joining the government. We will extend outside support," CPI National Secretary Atul Kumar Anjaan told AFP.

The party, however, left the issue open saying that if all the left parties favoured joining the government, it would also do so.

The move was expected because the leftists compete directly with Congress in their state strongholds. But they also bitterly oppose the return to power of the ousted Hindu nationalists, which would be the inevitable result if Gandhi falls.

BOYCOTT

"We will be abstaining from the swearing-in ceremony to express the people's sentiment," Naidu said.

A headline section of the BJP has stepped up a campaign against Gandhi's foreign roots saying only Indians should occupy the highest elected office.