

Munshiganj by-polls

FROM PAGE 1

The seats fell vacant when Mahi and Mannan resigned from the Jatia Sangsad and the BNP on March 10 to join the Bikalpa Dhara, founded by former president Badruddoza Chowdhury.

Talking to The Daily Star, some BNP lawmakers said the victory of BNP candidate Mosaddak Ali from Dhaka was a must to turn the tide in favour of the ruling alliance.

They felt a defeat would spur the opposition parties to question the government's moral authority to rule.

BNP Vice-chairman M Shamsul Islam, a lawmaker for Munshiganj-3, brushed aside the opposition claim that Munshiganj-1 brought to light the government's poor popularity form.

"People's opinion has not been reflected in the Munshiganj-1 by-election as the Bikalpa Dhara activists captured some polling centres and rigged votes," Shamsul, also the information minister, told The Daily Star.

'ERODING POPULARITY'

Immediately after unofficial declaration of Mahi's victory on Sunday night, Badruddoza, who was forced to quit the presidency under impeachment threats, said it was a victory against unbridled crime, corruption and price spiral of essentials under the coalition.

AL Presidium Member Abdus Samad Azad said the ruling party's failure to win the by-election despite rigging votes showed the government's eroding popularity.

"The result of the by-election proves the government has lost people's confidence and supports our demand for midterm polls," Mohammad Hanif, Dhaka City AL president told a discussion yesterday.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon also echoed the same view, saying it would spur the opposition movement against the

Bangla Bhai

FROM PAGE 12

from mainstream political parties.

The militant activities of the JMB came after some relatives and friends of local lawmakers were killed in armed attacks blamed on underground operatives of the banned Puro Banglar Communist Party (PBCP).

Police took two suspected PBCP leaders Rabiul Islam and Rezaul into custody for interrogation after two JMB members were killed in recent outlaw attacks.

It turned out that Moshir Rahman, officer-in-charge of Ratinagar Police Station in Naogaon, suspended on charge of failing to arrest Bangla Bhai, was among the interrogators, accused of intimidating Rabiul Islam and Rezaul into giving statements to court against an unnamed quarter.

JMB operatives abducted Niranjan from Kashiabari village in Atrai upazila in Naogaon on Friday in what could be the latest ransom

Falsely declared acid seized at Benapole

UNB, Benapole

Customs at Benapole land port yesterday seized 90 metric tons of sulfuric acid imported from India through false declaration.

Officials said Bangladesh Phosphate Company of Meherpur imported the consignment in five tankers from Exim Associates of India.

On secret information, customs seized tankers and found the consignment was imported through false declaration.

Following the seizure, the C&F (clearing and forwarding) agent concerned has threatened Joint Commissioner of Customs Hossain Ahmed with death, officials said.

They said Bangladesh Phosphate Company had earlier imported goods from India through false declaration, which were seized. The importer has been strongly lobbying to secure release of those consignments.

Norwegian aid dips

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking at a "Face to Face" programme with women journalists here yesterday she said increased funding might depend on improvement in the situation, as they are "accountable to the taxpayers" in disbursement of their money.

There are lot of possibilities of change in the situation for Bangladesh in the coming days, she said, praising some of the initiatives taken recently, including setting up anti-corruption commission and considering appointment of ombudsmen.

The Scandinavian diplomat said even being a less populous country, they allot 0.93 per cent of the GDP to development partners, which is 0.2 percent higher than the grants coming from other donor countries.

It is likely to increase to 1.0 per cent as Norway gives priority to social welfare for any development, she mentioned.

Norwegian annual grants for Bangladesh were worth 16 million US dollars, which went down to 10 million US dollars this year. The area of funding is good governance, education and private sector.

Answering a question, the Norwegian envoy said it is very difficult to see objectively the report on Bangladesh as the 'most corrupt' country but it caused

Abductors free schoolboy, pick expatriate

AMANUR AMAN, Kustitia

Abductors yesterday freed a schoolboy of Kumarkhali but kidnapped an expatriate, the third case of abduction in the last three days.

Four criminals on Friday picked up Sajib Uddin 15, son of Nasir Uddin and student of class nine, from near his house in Pouro Bazar in Kumarkhali and demanded Tk 7 lakh for his release.

Sources said Sajib's family bought his freedom for Tk 1.5 lakh after negotiations.

"We did not seek police help as the captors threatened to kill my son," Nasir Uddin, father of the victim, told newsmen.

Police said they did not take any move as no-one filed a complaint.

Abductors, meanwhile, kidnapped Yunus Ali, 34, son of Manir Uddin of Hasimpur in Kumarkhali, and demanded Tk 10 lakh for his release.

Family sources said Yunus, who has returned home from Malaysia recently, went to Mohendrapur village to realise Tk 2 lakh he had lent to one Tuzam Uddin. The kidnappers picked him from Mohendrapur bridge at gunpoint around 7.30pm.

Yunus' family also did not file any case on receiving death threat from the abductors.

Kidnappers killed nine out of 72 people including 24 students they took hostages in the district since January. Police succeeded to rescue only four, while seven are still missing and the rest paid their captors for freedom.

Some organised outfits of criminals and outlaws are repeatedly carrying out abductions, police and the victims said.

There are allegations that police often ask the victim's family to buy freedom.

A high official of police said, preferring anonymity, that "the criminals even threaten us to kill the victim if we launch tougher action." The victim's family sometimes also asks us not to move, he added.

25 BRTC buses

FROM PAGE 12

deckers.

A quarter is destroying state property this way at a time when the BRTC submitted Tk 7 crore DSL (Debt Service Liability) to the government exchequer for the first time since its launching in 1961, he said.

"Despite incurring losses, the government used to run the BRTC services to ensure that no transport service does monopoly business. As it is now making profit and has gained a competitive position, bus owners' association is opposing the BRTC," Taimur added.

Asked on why the state-run service did not insure its carriers despite recurrence of such incidents, the BRTC chairman said they tried to plug expenses in premium deposits as their vehicles faced fewer accidents.

"We will have think anew as the situation has taken a new turn," Taimur said.

Fire extinguishers will be placed in all BRTC buses soon, he said, adding the organisation will buy an ambulance with first-aid facilities to rush to the spot if any BRTC bus is damaged or accidents occur.

On what precautionary measures the BRTC will take to prevent recurrence of arson attacks during coming hartals, the BRTC chairman asked the government to take tougher action.

He asked passengers to remain careful while in BRTC buses and urged them to capture any person if he or she tries to damage any state-owned vehicle. "We'll give reward for this," he added.

To create awareness among people, the BRTC will soon display the buses that were burnt and could not be rebuilt at Paltan Maidan or Bangabandhu National Stadium, Taimur said.

"We have decided to give Tk 20,000 to the families of each of 10 people who died in the Friday night arson attack on a BRTC double-decker bus near Hotel Sheraton crossing," Taimur said and asked the victims' families to contact the BRTC authorities.

Canadian

FROM PAGE 12

cern at the serious health condition of Proshika President Qazi Faruque Ahmed and Vice-president David William Biswas.

"It has come to our attention that both are being held without access to adequate medical care, risking serious long term health impacts," the letter said.

It urged the state minister to ensure regular access of the detainees' family members to Dhaka Central Jail where the Proshika top officials are held.

The letter also drew attention of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

1 killed

FROM PAGE 1

Angry supporters of Mahi, who was reelected MP in Sunday's parliamentary by-election in Munshiganj-1 constituency, put up barricades on the Munshiganj-Dhaka Highway at Nimtala.

Mahi put off his victory march and staged a demonstration at Chawkibazar here demanding arrest of the killers of Masum in next 24 hours.

Mahi defeated four-party alliance candidate Momin Ali by a big margin in the by-election to retain his seat, which fell vacant after his resignation from the ruling BNP.

Dutch court fine

FROM PAGE 12

Bangladesh's flag will become liable to confiscation in EU territories in case Bangladesh government fails to pay 4.2 million euro (Tk 32 crore) in fine for not purchasing computers from a Dutch company after an agreement.

The computers and accessories were intended to be used for implementing an education ministry project funded by a grant of the Netherlands.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs yesterday assigned Education Minister Dr Osman Faruk to head the committee that includes representatives from the ministries of education, law, foreign affairs and economic relations division (ERD).

"This was a one-sided judgement, which was made without hearing Bangladesh's version," Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman told journalists after the meeting at the secretariat. "The government was not even given any scope for an appeal."

Bangladesh could not even appeal, as the case was settled about four months before it came to know about it in February.

In December 2000, the Netherlands government had agreed to provide about Tk 49.95 crore as grant for introducing computer courses at secondary and higher secondary levels in 3,382 educational institutions under a project that was scheduled for implementation by March 2001.

The ERD unilaterally signed the agreement with the Dutch company Tulip Computers International BV in June 2001. As per Dutch law there is no scope for appeal once a verdict is made.

After BNP came to power, the

government cancelled the procurement initiative, finding the price offer to be inflated and unsolicited.

The government also decided to purchase 10,000 computers at its own expense, at which the Dutch company hit back with a lawsuit.

"We neither got any money nor any computer. Yet, we are being compelled to compensate for the deal. This is sheer injustice," said Saifur with a tinge of frustration. "The committee we've formed will decide on our next course of action and then we will explain the matter to the Dutch envoy here."

The foreign ministry will communicate with all the EU ambassadors here in an effort to put the issue to rest, sources said.

Militant camps

FROM PAGE 12

said.

Suspect arrestee Md Tusher was implicated in the case filed with Rangunia Police Station.

Asked about the delay in filing the cases, the police officials said they took time to determine the charges.

Police said they got the identity and other details of the suspected masterminds and trainers of the camp in Rangunia but declined to reveal anything.

In separate raids on June 1, police busted the two arms training centres, arrested the three suspects and seized some training materials.

Iskander and Enamul, meanwhile, were placed under another five-day remand yesterday on completion of the first five-day remand.

Police suspect the people behind the two camps have link to the Islamist outfit Harkatul Jihad.

RMG export may fall

FROM PAGE 1

categories like shirt, jacket and sweater, Bangladesh owns competitiveness in terms of quality and price. Export orders in these categories have also been increasing in the current fiscal."

[Due to the expiry of quota regime,] "Small industries may have to close down, which would affect export volume, but big RMG (ready-made garment) manufacturers will have chance to boost export after the quota withdrawal," Prof Mustafizur maintained.

The professor said as phasing-out of quota for RMG comes into force next year the upcoming budget should include measures to face the [post-MFA] challenges.

Finance ministry sources said the next budget might have some such measures and incentives for the RMG sector. One of them said the government might set up a linkage fund which would provide loans at lower-than-market interest rate to the sector's backward linkage industry.

On remedial policy response, the IMF said the impact of the MFA quota removal could be mitigated "through a more aggressive exchange rate movement, a more rapid reduction in anti-export bias, and a more concerted effort to improve the investment climate and upgrade infrastructure."

The Fund said, even if the government adopted those measures, "The RMG exports could still fall, a virtually no growth in FY05, and a decline of 5 percent in FY06," as the measures would take some time to

bring results.

While examining the extent of negative impact of quota withdrawal, the IMF study report recalled the 30-percent plunge that Bangladesh experienced in its exports to the US market of products whose quotas were removed in FY 2001-02. In that fiscal, the country's overall exports to the US fell by 16 percent.

That year in European Union (EU) market, Bangladesh's exports of products whose quota were removed fell by 20 percent, but its total exports to Europe fell by only two percent, due in part to Everything but Arms initiative that the EU had introduced in March 2001.

Though Bangladesh will lose its quota preference in the US market after 2004 and its preferential access to the EU market will also diminish, the Fund said, "With duty-free access to the EU and Canadian markets, Bangladesh will be somewhat sheltered from the full effects of competition. Bangladesh's key competitors will continue to face duties in these markets on the order of 12 and 22 percent respectively."

While discussing the issue with the government last month, the IMF Poverty Reduction Growth Facility mission asked to take policy measures to face the challenges. The mission also promised the government of extending its support to counteract the impact of quota removal on the country's balance of payment.

9 Iraq militias

FROM PAGE 12

"One 13th Corps Support Command soldier is dead and one is injured as the result of a mortar attack on their base camp near Baghdad at about 8:00 am," the statement said, without elaborating.

Three Iraqis, including a member of the former Iraqi Baath regime, were killed in two separate attacks in the northern ethnically-divided city of Kirkuk.

"Masked men fired eight bullets into 45-year-old Shamil Mohi-uddin, a former Baath official, at his house in Kirkuk's Hussein neighbourhood," police chief Turhan Yusef told AFP.

In a separate incident, police colonel Sarhad Qader, said "the bodies of two Arab brothers, Sattar and Bassek Saleh, who were 25 and 28 respectively, were found in the street riddled with bullets and with their hands tied."

However, according to plans presented by the US-run coalition in Iraq, some 60,000 former militia men will have entered the programme by July 1, with the vast majority joining Iraqi security forces, about 10,000 going into retirement and others getting new job training or joining private security firms.

A senior coalition official said \$200 million, to be administered by Iraq's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, had been set aside for paying pensions to veterans or to provide jobs, training and education to former fighters.

"To reward former resistance fighters for their service, opportunities have been created for them to join state security services or lay down their arms and enter civilian life," Allawi said in his statement.

"Those who choose to return to civilian life will receive valuable job training and other benefits. By doing this, we reward their heroism and sacrifices, while making Iraq stronger and eliminating armed forces outside of government control."

Coalition officials estimated that 90,000 militiamen would be

Govt agencies asked to repay BPC dues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs yesterday asked various government agencies to clear their dues with Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) in specific instalments.

The government agencies owe the state-run corporation over Tk 2700 crore for purchase of oil, meetings sources said.

The BPC's biggest defaulter Bangladesh Biman has Tk 457 crore in arrears. Biman, however, claims the outstanding bill is actually Tk 329 crore.

The cabinet committee ordered the national airline to repay Tk 300 in 20 equal instalments. It also decided Biman would have to pay the BPC in cash for purchase of oil in future.

The Power Development Board (PDB) has Tk 110 crore arrears with the BPC. The committee asked the PDB to pay the sum in 11 equal instalments of Tk 10 crore.

Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation, defence ministry and some other government establishments have also been asked to pay off their dues.

Dhaka sees Iraq interim govt positively

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday described the formation of the interim government in Iraq as a positive development in the process of establishing the will of the Iraqi people.

It also welcomed the appointment of Ghazi Ajil Al-Yawar as the president of the interim government, a spokesperson for the foreign ministry said.

Bangladesh hopes that the interim government will take all necessary measures to establish security, peace, stability and maintain territorial integrity and restore full sovereignty of Iraq for the benefit of their people, he said.

Nurul Islam

FROM PAGE 1

'highly classified information' violating the Official Secrets Act.

It was probably Bac's first instance of filing a case under the 80-year-old act, sources said.

The three employees of the PMO accused in the case are: Dinarul Islam, private secretary to prime minister's private secretary, Syed Nurul Islam, computer operator, and Mohammad Selim, data entry operator.

Bac alleged that Nurul in connivance with the employees leaked information keeping the prime minister in the dark that hurt national interest and security.

The anti-graft body accused him of taking away 12 compact discs (CDs) written with two sets of notes and summaries of sensitive files and keeping in his custody more files and notes containing Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's signature with intent to leak out additional information.

Bac inspector Md Julfikar Ali filed the case with Teigaon police station.

A 12-member Bac investigation team earlier seized 12 compact discs (CDs) from Nurul Islam desk in the PMO.

Bac alleged the former acting secretary deployed the computer and data entry operators Selim to prepare the CDs. The secretary used the scanner and CD writer kept in his and his personal secretary's room.

The anti-graft body also recovered photocopies of 654 pages of summary of information signed by Khaleda and kept in three files.

PM asks cops

FROM PAGE 12

received by State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Shahudul Haque and Principal of the Police Academy M Anisur Rahman.

The prime minister recalled the heroic role of the members of police forces during the Liberation War that remains a glorious chapter of national history.

She further said the police created glorious tradition through their utmost sacrifice during their duties.

"All of you are the successors to the tradition and the responsibility is incumbent upon you to uphold that dignity and tradition from right now," the prime minister told the new officers.

She said the officers of the police cadre will have to attain necessary skill and quality to perform their duties accurately.

The prime minister informed them that the government had taken various initiatives to modernise the police force as good governance and development are complementary and the police have a great responsibility to help achieve both the goals.

Khaleda said the government is working for development following a roadmap. "Increase of investment, production and export is imperative for the development and you have to ensure a congenial environment."

Post and Telecommunications Minister M Aminul Haque, Prime Minister's political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, Mayor of Rajshahi City Corporation Mizanur Rahman Minu, BNP leader Begum Sarwar Rahman, MPs, elite and guardians of the new officers were present at the function.

Outstanding issues

FROM PAGE 12

of parliamentary elections in India was indicative of "people's rejection of the forces of divisiveness and intolerance," Kalam raised the issue of "most gruesome" riots in Gujarat.

"It is a matter of serious concern that the forces of communalism have been able to vitiate the atmosphere in the country leading to outbreak of riots, the most gruesome face of which was witnessed recently in Gujarat," he said without naming any party or outfit.

Gujarat is ruled by Bharatiya Janata Party whose federal coalition government was voted out of power in the elections.

Pointing out that the verdict of recent general elections is "for establishing the rule of law, and repairing our secular fabric," the president said.

He said the government is determined to combat communal forces and would adopt all measures to promote and maintain communal peace and harmony so that minorities feel completely secure.

Kalam also said the government would enact a "model law to deal with communal violence and encourage states to adopt it".

"My government is committed to preserving, protecting and promoting secular values and enforcing the law without fear or favour to deal with all obscurantist and fundamentalist elements that seek to disturb social amity and peace," he said.

The government would examine the question of giving constitutional status to the Minorities Commi-ssion, would strive for recognition and promotion of Urdu language and set up a commission to look into direct affiliation of minority professional institutions with central universities, Kalam said.

He also promised the government would take steps to spread modern and technical education among minority communities.

Referring to Jammu and Kashmir, Kalam said the government would uphold the state's special constitutional status and hold sustained dialogue with all groups and different shades of opinion there in consultation with the democratically-elected state government. The state will be given assistance to rebuild its infrastructure quickly, he added.

He said the government was determined to tackle terrorism, militancy and insurgency in the northeastern states of India as a matter of urgent national priority

Venus blocks out

FROM PAGE 1

the naked eye, and worse still through an open telescope or binoculars can result in blindness.

Astronomers recommend indirect projection as the safest way to observe the passage of Venus across the Sun, which was predicted by the German astronomer Johannes Kepler in 1627 and first viewed by Briton Jeremiah Horrocks in 1639.

People who want to follow Venus glide from their homes must use an exposed fresh (unused) X-ray film, which is light darkish black. This big sheet must be placed over the lens of the telescope or binoculars before watching.

It will prevent direct rays of the sun from causing permanent damage to the eyes. The viewfinder of the telescope should be covered as well.

People can visit one of the many institutional internet sites planning to stream pictures. But this is an event that should be caught in some fashion.

Enthusiasts in Dhaka can rush to the National Science and Technology Museum from where they will be able to witness the rare event from 11:15am to 4:00pm.

Bangladesh Astronomical Association will also organise the

NGOs getting bigger

FROM PAGE 1

three-year health programme as an integral part of it.

Noting the astounding delay, the World Bank (WB) withdrew about half of the \$52-million fund it had provided for the HIV/AIDS project. Donors are also pressuring the health ministry to hand over the project's management to NGOs.

According to official sources, the ministry and the Unicef are now in the process of selecting suitable NGOs to carry out the major project components, like interventions among vulnerable groups, safe blood transfusion and communications and advocacy.

In addition, Brac will implement a separate HIV/AIDS programme involving 15 million Swedish kroner.

The Tk 640-crore National Nutrition Project, funded by the WB and other donors and scheduled to take off in July 2000, could manage to launch only recently due to bureaucratic tangles.

Disagreements between the WB and the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecneec) resulted in the delay of almost two and a half years for the project design to be finalised and okayed by the Ecneec, sources said.

Then, months were spent just to select the NGOs to be assigned with the 23 area packages of the project which aims to reduce chronic and acute malnutrition, particularly among women and children.

Against this backdrop, the WB withdrew Tk 150 crore from the project funds in February last year.

Ten NGOs -- Brac, TMSS, Shed, Sard, Bees, Bosd, Vard, UJMS, SGS and Heed Bangladesh -- are now implementing the project in 105

and the states will be given special assistance to upgrade and expand their infrastructure.

Referring to education, the president said steps would be taken to "remove the communalisation of the school syllabus that has taken place in recent years".

Professional competence will be the sole criteria for appointment to prestigious institutions like Indian Council for Historical Research, Indian Council for Social Science Research and National Council for Educational Research and Training, he said.

The Congress and the Left parties in the past accused the previous BJP-led government of communalising education and appointments to leading research institutions.

The president unveiled the economic agenda of the Congress-led government saying pace of rural development would be accelerated, public investment in agriculture would be stepped up significantly to substantially boost farmers' income and a substantial portion of government investment would be channelled to villages.

Kalam talked about speeding up economic reforms but said, "These reforms will have a human face and will ensure that the benefits flowing from such reforms reach the urban poor and rural areas where the vast majority of our population lives."

He said the government would ensure that the economic maintains a growth rate of at least seven to eight percent every year for a sustained period and in a manner that generates employment.

The debate on the motion of thanks on the president's speech begins today.

40 feared dead

FROM PAGE 12

were rescued by local villagers, said Sitaram Singh, a lawmaker from Sheohar.

"At least 25 others have died. But 15 people remain unaccounted for and may have been washed away by the strong current of the Bhagmati," Singh said.

Dubaghat is 70 miles north of Patna, the state capital.

Sinha said a team of divers was carrying out search operations with help from volunteers from nearby villages.

Boat accidents are frequent in India, where villagers living along rivers often use rickety, unsafe boats and life jackets are seldom available.

magnificent display in the Kalabagan Kriha Chakra playground through Celestron 8-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain Telescope and other equipment.

The special alignment of the Earth