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Govt ditches plan to rein in unruly bank unionists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has budged from its stance on reining unruly trade unionists in as it ditched proposals from the recently approved amendment to the Bank Company Act on stopping their abuse of property in government-owned banks.

The act approved last week also aimed to bring an end to malpractice by bank directors, but it faced stiff resistance from the bank owners who found its newly inserted clauses 'unacceptable' and are trying to get them dropped, sources said.

Politically backed trade union activists however did not need to put in much effort to resist the latest move. The government dropped the clauses carrying stringent measures against them during the amendment, the sources added.

One of the proposals that was dropped was the first sub-clause of Clause 57 of the act that said trade union leaders will not be allowed to use bank cars and telephones for running trade union affairs. Another one stipulated a maximum three years' jail term with Tk 1 lakh penalty if a trade union activist was found guilty of physically harassing a bank official. Besides, the guilty would have to pay Tk 500 each day for defaulting on the penalty payment.

"But the cabinet meeting did not approve these two amendments in the face of opposition from some cabinet members," said a source in the cabinet, adding "It is clear that moneyed bank owners exert less power than a handful of unruly politically backed union leaders do."

Bankers, the owners apart, initially welcomed the amendment, but now it is drawing criticism.

A high official of a nationalised commercial bank said, "We have been asked to cut costs. But trade union leaders use bank cars for personal purpose. They also take cars from government pools whenever they want. And the banks pay for their fuel cost."

"They also use telephones for meeting personal ends. They make long-distance calls and the banks bear the cost," added the official, who preferred to remain unnamed.

"CBA (collective bargaining agent) leaders also impose themselves on the bank officials on administrative issues. And there are instances where they force officials into granting loans to clients. When officials refuse to act accordingly, they sometimes get transferred, but become obvious target of harassment and verbal abuse," the official noted.

"We cannot take action against them since political parties harbour them."

"[The dropping of the proposals] is a signal that the government will not be able to make much progress in its banking reforms now," observes another banker.

The Bangladesh Association of Banks (Bab), meanwhile, is lobbying hard for dropping of the clauses on the directors' tenure, terms and number. At a discussion of Bab on Sunday, ruling BNP lawmaker and Director of United Commercial Bank Limited MA Hashem suggested talking with the prime minister.

Hashem said he met Law Minister Moudud Ahmed who told him there was nothing much to do. He however quoted Moudud as saying that the matter remains 'open' and bank owners 'may try to reach their objectives'.

Bab Chairman Syed Manjur Elahi told the meeting, "We have tried through the prime minister's principal and political secretaries but to no effect."

AL's 12-hour hartal today

Ballot rigging added to issues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League enforces a dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal today to protest what it said was unprecedented rigging in Thursday's by-polls in Dhaka-10, bomb blast at a meeting of Suranjit Sengupta in Sunamganj, murder of a Khulna editor and killing of policemen by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal cadres in the capital.

However, to facilitate smooth filing of nomination papers by intending candidates to Gazipur-2 parliamentary by-election billed for August 1, the major opposition party has kept Gazipur Sadar and Tongi areas out of the hartal's purview.

The hartal decision was taken at an urgent meeting of AL's Working Committee at the party's Dhanmondi office on June 22 with Sheikh Hasina in the chair. The party later added the issue of Thursday's vote rigging as a point to intensify its shutdown call.

Earlier, AL had directed two of its front organisations to withdraw their hartal on June 30 and enforce it on July 3.

To drum up support for today's hartal, different AL front organisations yesterday brought out processions in the city's Muktangan and Bangabandhu Avenue areas amidst strong police resistance.

DHAKA-10 BY-POLLS

60pc votes cast were false, say observers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 60 percent of the votes cast in Thursday's Dhaka-10 parliamentary by-election were false, said election observers of Bangladesh Manobadhikar Somonnoy Porishad (Bamasop), a coalition of 300 rights groups, yesterday at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Rampant anomalies like fake-balloting, lawlessness at polling centres amid overwhelming presence of ruling alliance activists and laxity of both polling officials and law enforcers marred the by-polls, said Bamasop President AHM Nouman, whose two teams observed 15 polling stations in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Farmgate, Dhaka University campus and Tejgaon areas.

At the polls, no long queue of voters was found until noon, as at best 15 percent voters turned out in those areas, Nouman noted in a written statement. While genuine voter turn out was so thin, groups of four-party alliance activists were found casting ballots time and again, he added.

The statement also said supporters of election symbol paddy sheaf were found roving about the polling centres unobstructed by law enforcers and canvassing for their candidate, while the presiding officers did not accept agents of kula symbol when they reported in the morning. Polling agents of kula were found only at one centre.

Nouman said Assistant Presiding Officer Hasnain Khan at the Bangladesh Institute of Ceramics centre had told him that the ballotting was going on in an appropriate manner.

"But immediately after, Md Murad Ali, voter No 09184, alleged someone else had already cast his vote," Nouman said. "When I brought the matter to Hasnain Khan's notice, he hurriedly wrapped it up and pretended to be busy."

"Our high hope for a fair election was frustrated each time we entered a polling centre with depressing sights of irregularities," the Bamasop president said.

"The by-polls has not been free and fair," said Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, chairman of Jatiyo Nirbachon Parjobekkhan Porishad (Janipop), which has been working as an election-monitoring organisation since 1995.

No polling official seemed ready to respond when observers pointed out anomalies in the election process, he said.

The Janipop chief said excessive use of money, particularly by the two principal contenders, corroded the moral basis of the election.

In a written statement, the Janipop said the parliamentary by-election was marred by high instances of fraud -- enough to call into question the validity of its final results.

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Harris says vote rigging photos tampered with

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury yesterday alleged the pictures ran by some newspapers on fake voting at Thursday's parliamentary by-polls to Dhaka-10 were not true.

"In this age of advanced technology, press photographs can be easily tampered with," he informed BBC Bangla Service last night.

Chowdhury brushed aside the allegations of anomalies and claimed the by-election was absolutely fair.

On fake voting reported by election observers, he said, "Some observers are also there who have positive views about the election and you [media] should pay equal attention to them."

On army deployment at every

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Legal battle on Dhaka-10 by-polls this week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A legal battle will begin in a couple of days to challenge the validity of Dhaka-10 by-polls that ended Thursday amid allegations of fraud, intimidation and violation of a court order on all-centre army deployment.

"We will go to the High Court (HC) to challenge the election and bring a contempt charge against the government for not complying with the HC order on army deployment at each polling centre," said Bikalpa Dhara candidate Abdul Mannan, who lost out to ruling alliance candidate Mosaddak Ali Falu.

Sources said the Attorney General's Office was also learnt to be

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Bangla Bhai men released on minister's 'diktat'

One of them was prime suspect in AL leader murder

ANWAR ALI *from Rajshahi with* BINDU SAHA *in Pabna*

Police on Thursday freed three militants of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), including the prime suspect in Awami League leader Yasin murder case after local leaders of the ruling coalition negotiated their release reportedly under instructions of a deputy minister.

Of the released, Abdul Kuddus, son of Abdus Samad of Kathalbaria in Bagmara is the key accused in the Awami League (AL) leader Yasin murder case. The other two are Zakir Hossain of Bagmara and Hafizur Rahman of Gaibandha. A senior police official of Rajshahi suspected the two to be involved with Yasin murder.

Maria union AL Publicity Secretary Yasin Ali Mridha was

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Held militants brought to Dhaka for quizzing by JIC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barisal*

Barguna police failed to make any headway in their probe and sent six out of 33 alleged cadres of Islamic militant outfit Jagrato Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) to Dhaka yesterday for quizzing by the Joint Interrogation Cell as their two-day remand was extended to five days. The other 27 arrestees are at Barguna Jail.

The six include Maulana Waliullah, Imam of Barguna police line mosque, Maulana Mustafa Hassan, a teacher at Tiakhali Halta Madrasa in Barguna, Asadul Islam, a student of Barguna Government College, Alamin, Masum Billah and

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Probe on into Biman's Dubai cargo scam

Govt deprived of crores that find way into pockets of officials, agents

M SHAMSUR RAHMAN

The government has launched investigations into a recently detected scam pointing to huge financial losses to Bangladesh Biman's cargo operations in Dubai. A three-member probe team led by Joint Secretary M Shahabuddin left Dhaka Wednesday to dig into the racket.

Sources said frauds committed by some cargo sub-agents in Dubai in connivance with Biman staff have deprived the national carrier of crores of taka in revenue. A number of documents obtained by The Daily Star indicate the sub-agents have been recording and paying for far less volume of goods than were actually shipped through the airlines.

HOW IT WORKS

Biman's general sales agents (GSAs) for passenger and cargo are Dnata in Dubai and Transworld in Sharjah.

When a customer who wants to ship a cargo approaches these agencies, they try to book space with Biman. Biman official concerned refuses and says there is no space available. But, at the same time, Biman tells the customer to make booking and give customer-details to keep him on waiting list.

Then, within a few hours, the customer gets a call from a cargo operator saying they can ship the cargo. These operators take the business and send the cargo, while the conniving Biman officials get kickbacks.

Separate documents are then prepared -- one for the Dubai office, where the lesser volume is recorded, and another for Dhaka office, where the actual volume is shown for clearance.

For instance, copies of an airway

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Fruit trader stabbed to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers yesterday stabbed a fruit trader to death and took away Tk 50,000 from him on city's Tipu Sultan Road of Sutrapur.

The dead, Samiran Chandra Das alias Kalu, 32, was an employee of a fruit supplier company, Dhaka Farm. After office hours, he used to supply fruits to several shops at Wari, Tikatuli and Gopibagh on his own.

Police and Kalu's wife Hena Rani said he was killed by the goons hired by his business rival.

Yesterday at about 6:30am Kalu came out of his house at 13, North Mosundhi, Sutrapur for Badamtoli to purchase fruit. He was carrying Tk 50,000. As he reached Chamu Dental Clinic on Tipu Sultan Road at about 6:40am, three assailants stopped his rickshaw and ordered him to hand them the money. On refusal they

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ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS

Guardians weary of high fees

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Most private English medium schools in Dhaka charge guardians high fees for their children's education in the absence of a government policy.

Most schools of good repute justify the fee hike, citing the rising cost of living and maintenance.

"We increase fees in school as the cost of electricity, essentials and stationery is rising by the year," says Yasmeen Murshed, chairperson of Scholastica, the largest private English medium school in Bangladesh.

But guardians do not believe these were any justification for such hike. "The increase in schooling cost outpaces the price hike of essentials or electricity. The rising cost of living and maintenance as the reason for such increased fees sounds absurd. Schools don't even pay tax as we pay," says Mahmud Chowdhury, who finds it hard to ensure good education for his son.

Pre-school admission fees range between Tk 5,000 and Tk 40,000 in different schools, which were less than half a few years ago.

Most reputed schools are increasing the students' yearly fees. Guardians now pay Tk 8,000 to Tk 15,000 in yearly fees for a student in addition to monthly tuition fees of Tk 800 to Tk 5,000 or even higher.

Over 1.5 lakh students study in several thousand private English medium schools across the country.

"These schools are charging whatever they wish as there is no regulation," says Hasan Mohammad Zahid, a guardian, whose wards study in an English medium school in Dhanmondi.

"The school authorities know we cannot take our children out of school even if we want. High fees are common to all schools," Zahid says.

Samira, a mother of two, points out that the schools impose additional fees now and then, piling pressure on the guardians of limited income. "They charge us for class parties. Why do we need class parties every month? Why do we have to pay additional Tk 200 for that?"

The high fees do not reflect the infrastructure of most schools. The Daily Star correspondent found students attending classes in overcrowded rooms shut out of sunlight. Some schools built classrooms on the landings of staircases and have no playgrounds or appropriate recess points.

Guardians question the quality of teachers in general. Many schools provide O and A levels tutorials under the Cambridge University and University of London, but do not follow standards of teacher recruitment as they do not have any managing committee.

A managing committee, elected by guardians, is mandatory for private educational institutions to run, according to a government rule.

"The school authorities fear the schools will lose control of their money-making strategy and have to ensure transparency if such committees are formed," says Arif Hossain, a parent.

"Many schools operate like businesses. They earn high not only from fees but from book and stationery sales. Buying uniforms from the schools for children is a must."

A school in Dhanmondi made blazers compulsory as wintertime school uniform and asked guardians to have the blazer tailored from the shop on the school premises. Guardians were forced to buy fabric from the shop as the school selected

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93 rescued from traffickers

BSS, *Satkhira*

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel yesterday rescued 93 people, including 30 women and 19 children, from a bus near Kalaroa Upazila headquarters while they were being trafficked to India.

Acting on a tip-off, BDR men raided the Satkhira bound passenger bus from Barisal and rescued the people. They hail from Barisal, Pirojpur and Shariatpur districts.

They also picked up an Indian woman named Rekha Hawlader, 35, wife of late Jibon Hawlader of Koyradanga village in South 24 Parganas from the bus, suspecting her as one of the traffickers

The BDR handed over the rescued people and the Indian woman to Kalaroa police.

Five killed in Rajendrapur road accident

UNB, *Gazipur*

Five people were killed and 20 others injured in a road accident on the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway at Rajendrapur in Gazipur Sadar uapzila yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred at about 8:30am when a Sripur bound passenger bus from Dhaka crashed into a private car coming from the opposite direction, killing five people on the spot and injuring 20 others.

Identity of the victims could not be known.

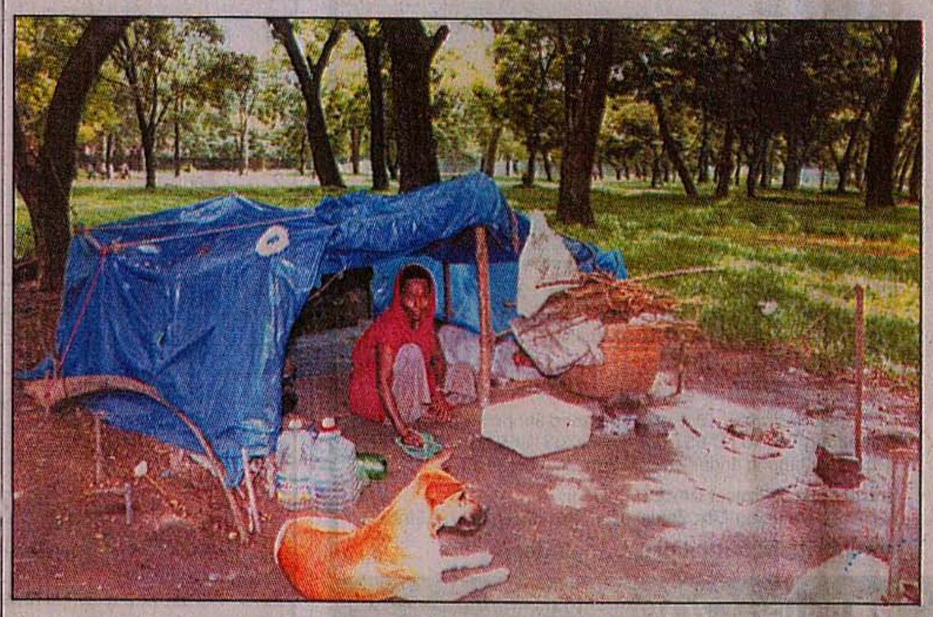

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Flimsy shanties of plastic sheeting as the one in picture on the green of Suhrawardy Udyan turn into haunts of drug addicts after sundown.