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Cag seeks JS cover in rail graft probe

Feels constitutional rights infringed on as access to documents denied, JS body to summon top officials on July 20

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Comptroller and Auditor General (Cag) Asif Ali yesterday sought protection of the Public Accounts Committee (Pac) of the Jatiya Sangsad against violation of the constitutional rights of his office by the Railway Division.

Members of Pac took strong note of the division under the communications ministry and demanded

exemplary punishment for the guilty, terming their behaviour unprecedented.

They decided to summon the secretary of the ministry, director general of the Railway Division and officials concerned at its next meeting slated for July 20.

"My constitutional rights are jeopardised as the officials of the railway did not allow my officials to discharge their duties. My officials

were harassed when they went to probe irregularities in railway's activities," Asif told a Pac meeting.

"I want your protection as my rights have been infringed upon," sources quoted Asif as telling the Pac meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"We asked the comptroller and auditor general to submit a written petition to the committee. We will discuss it at the next meeting and

decide on the issue," Pac chairman Harun Al Rashid told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The Cag's office is entitled by the constitution to get any documents or information from government offices. As the Cag's office raised violation of its constitutional rights, we will probe the allegation."

Asif raised the issue at the end of the meeting and said he contacted

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

No immediate plan to amend constitution to ban hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led ruling alliance does not have any immediate plan to seek constitutional amendments aimed to ban hartal and cancel membership of MPs due to absence from the Jatiya Sangsad for more than 30 working days.

Alliance sources said the proposals have not even come up for discussion within the coalition as the government does not want to go for such amendments unilaterally.

About press reports on the issues, an influential policymaker of the BNP said no formal discussions on them have yet taken place in any forum of the government.

"Ban on calling and enforcing hartal and cancellation of membership of lawmakers due to absence

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Stop anomalies or face fund cut

Saifur tells secretaries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday warned of a cut in budget allocations if the secretaries fail to take immediate steps against serious financial irregularities found during audit in their ministries.

He also said external financial specialists would be appointed to certain ministries to put brakes on financial irregularities and facilitate speedy project implementation.

Saifur added the new budget has a separate allocation for appointment of such external specialists, which will be used to strengthen internal financial control of the

ministries. All the ministries should form their own budget designing and monitoring committees and audit committees, he observed.

Saifur talked to the secretaries at the Cabinet Division in the Secretariat as part of the government move to implement the Tk 58,000 crore new budget.

"It is often seen that the ministries do not work till December and all work begin after that. As a result, budget implementation suffers," he told the secretaries.

"But this time we want you to set all the plans by September so that from then on we can move ahead

with the budget plans," he added. Cabinet Secretary Saadat Husain told the meeting, "Poorly performing ministries tend to get away unpunished. We should see whether something can be done against them."

Project implementation depends on the co-ordinated roles of ministers, secretaries and the directors-general of the projects, Saadat said and urged the finance minister to organise a meeting with all the ministers to ensure better coordination.

The finance minister presented at the meeting statistics on how

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



PHOTO: STAR

Fish farmers mend their net to secure their produce in the rising waters in the low-lying areas of Trimohoni on the outskirts of Dhaka.

AL raises F-28 'kickback' in JS

UNB, Dhaka

An opposition lawmaker yesterday wanted to know about alleged kickbacks from the purchase of two F-28 aircraft for the national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

Raising a supplementary, Shahjahan Khan of Awami League said the aircraft were purchased despite allegation about 625 faults. He also asked whether there was any "commission" taken from the recent purchase.

State Minister Mizanur Rahman Sinha, who was replying in absence of State Minister for Civil Aviation

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Hasina says she received attack threats

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Leader and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina received repeated threats that said she would come under attack either in Istanbul, the place she was visiting, or in Dhaka on her return.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

1,435 defence men forced to retire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 1,436 army, navy and airforce personnel have been forced to retire or dismissed on disciplinary and administrative grounds from October 1, 2001 to June 15 this year.

Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, minister-in-charge of defence affairs in parliament, informed the House yesterday about the forced retirements in the armed forces in a written answer to a question from opposition lawmaker Faruk Khan.

The opposition lawmaker, however, termed the incidents of forced retirement and dismissal ill motivated. "The government should not have done it. It could not show any logical reason for such action," Faruk Khan, who is a former army officer, told reporters after yesterday's session.

The minister said the disciplinary actions—forced retirement and

dismissal -- were taken against the persons at different times for their activities against law and order and on administrative grounds.

During the period from October 1, 2001 to June 15 this year, the minister said 533 of the army were awarded forced retirement and 903 faced dismissal.

Fifty-nine army officers were awarded forced retirement and 27 dismissed. Also, 438 employees of army were given forced retirement and 735 dismissed.

Eight navy officers were sent into forced retirement and ten others dismissed. Furthermore, seven employees of the navy were asked to go into forced retirement and 65 faced dismissal.

In the airforce, according to the minister, 13 officers were given forced retirement and eight were dismissed. Also, eight airforce employees were forced into retirement and 58 others dismissed.

JS sits without quorum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar yesterday ran the House without quorum for about 10 minutes even after an opposition whip drew his attention to the crisis.

The House took up the day's order with only 35 lawmakers in the chamber against the minimum number of 60 required to conduct valid business.

During question time, Whip of main opposition Awami League Faruk Khan drew the chair's attention to the quorum crisis, but Sircar said the sitting could be run if anybody did not raise the issue.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Saifur asks banks to file money loan cases against top defaulters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday asked the Bangladesh Bank (BB) to take necessary steps making sure that the lending rate for new entrepreneurs do not rise on default loans.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Govt seeks acquittal of six drug peddlers

SHAHIDUL ISLAM, Ctg

A government counsel has sought acquittal of six charge-sheeted accused in a drug peddling case filed by the Department of Narcotics on instructions from the home ministry.

The six drug peddlers are reportedly activists and supporters of ruling BNP's Chittagong unit, sources said. They were arrested with about two kilograms of heroin worth over Tk 1.5 crore, cash and a revolver during the Awami League (AL) rule about three years ago.

Court sources said the public prosecutor (PP) in Chittagong Abdus Sattar submitted a petition

before the Court of Chittagong Metropolitan Fourth Additional Sessions Judge on May 13 to withdraw the case.

The PP lodged the petition in line with a memo (miscellaneous-21/2001, law-1, meeting-4/03, 2038) of the home ministry, signed and issued by Deputy Secretary SBIM Shafique Ud-Dowla on December 20 last year.

The memo said the previous government implicated the six in the case to 'politically harass them' and the incumbent government has decided to withdraw the case.

Hearing of the case completed last week, according to the PP Sattar.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Bac files twin graft cases against Jalil

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) yesterday filed two cases against Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil on charges of embezzling loans and legalising illegal income amounting to about Tk 1.5 crore.

Bac filed one of the cases with Naogan Police Station accusing him of embezzling Tk 16 lakh of a loan granted by Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank.

In the case, Bac said Jalil, a former commerce minister, violated bank rules in purchasing some machinery for his Faiz Uddin Cold Storage (Pvt.) Limited at Naogaon with the credit.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

SEDITION CHARGE

HC questions provision's constitutional basis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday asked the government to reply in two weeks as to why Section 124A of Bangladesh Penal Code that deals with sedition should not be declared unconstitutional.

A division bench of Justice Abdul Matin and Tariq Ullah Hakim made the ruling on a writ petition filed by Acting Chief Election Commissioner Saifur Rahman.

On June 26, Saifur filed the petition challenging a sedition case lodged against him by the government for participating in the Janata Mancha (people's platform) in 1996.

Barrister Amir-Ul Islam representing the petitioner told the court that as government and state are not a single entity, opposing the government should not be confused with anti-state acts. There is no anti-state element present in the sedition charge against Saifur, he added.

He contended that the government grossly abused Section 124A of Bangladesh Penal Code when it brought the sedition charge against Saifur Rahman. He argued that the section was inconsistent with the constitution and its basic structure.

Barrister Tania Amir also stood for the petitioner.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia addresses officers and members of the President Guard Regiment on the occasion of the regiment's 29th founding anniversary at its headquarters at Dhaka Cantonment.

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AL, BNP debate hartal vs police excesses in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday witnessed a noisy debate for about half an hour as lawmakers of ruling BNP and main opposition Awami League (AL) traded allegations against each other of violation of fundamental rights at times of political programmes like hartal, rallies and processions.

The opposition accused the government of using police to foil its political programmes and assault activists. Even legislators of the opposition could not escape police atrocities, AL members said.

Referring to newspaper reports

on government move to make laws to ban hartal, AL lawmaker and former minister Mohammad Nasim alleged the government has planned to deprive the opposition of its constitutional rights to protest.

Brushing aside the reports, BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the government has no plans to make any law banning hartal.

Although there is public opinion for banning hartal, the government has not taken any decision about it, Bhuiyan said. Any decision on the issue will be taken in consultation

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Congratulations

Our heartiest congratulation to our honourable Chairman Mr. Fazle Hasan Abed, Founder and Chairman of BRAC on getting the **Gates Award for Global Health 2004** in Washington DC recently. He was presented the **"Global Health Award 2004"** in recognition of the BRAC's extraordinary achievement in improving health in the developing world.

"Health, like social equality and freedom from poverty, is a basic human right, and is at the core of our vision for a just and enlightened Bangladesh."

- Fazle Hasan Abed