

Indian parliament adjourned amid pandemonium

Opposition continues to demand sacking of federal minister

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's BJP-led opposition NDA disrupted proceedings of parliament for the fourth day yesterday to press for sacking of a federal minister, accused in a 30-year-old massacre case and parliament adjourned amidst pandemonium for a three-week recess till August 16.

Opposition members stalled proceedings in both houses of parliament -- Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha -- demanding that Coal and Mines Minister Sibu Soren be dismissed and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh makes an announcement to this effect in the House.

In hardening of stand by the opposition, leaders of the opposition in both the houses met here yesterday morning prior to resumption of parliament session and decided to stall proceedings till their demand was met.

Senior BJP leader and NDA parliamentary party spokesman V K Malhotra told reporters that the opposition would continue with their policy to press for their demands.

Yesterday was the last day of the first phase of parliament's budget session.

Soren, a prominent tribal leader from the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand and chief of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), faces a non-bailable arrest warrant issued by a court in the state in connection with the killing of nine persons way back in 1975.

Police searched Soren's ministerial residence here on July 21 but the minister is reported to have gone into hiding soon after the warrant was issued. On not finding Soren there, the police pasted a copy of the warrant on the wall of his house.

Soren has moved Jharkhand High Court seeking quashing of the warrant

Rail, road links

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Yusuf issued a warning that no nepotism and corruption or waste of relief would be tolerated.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre reported that the floods in the northern and central districts are likely to worsen.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports that two people drowned in Kharela Gupinathpur village in Kasba upazila, when a boat carrying up to 12 people capsized in gushing water. Three more people died of diarrhoea in the district.

The flood situation in Sylhet showed a little improvement as floodwater continued to recede from some upazilas, but the floods in other upazilas remained unchanged as the Kushiara river was in full spate.

The situation in Sunamganj marked a little improvement although the Surma river was flowing 81cm above the danger mark. Many areas in town were reeling 4 to 5 feet under water. With a new death in Sadar upazila yesterday, the total death count in the southeastern district climbed to 17 since the first week of July.

BSS reports: Seven people, including three children, drowned in Boalia village in Kishoreganj yesterday evening, when an overcrowded boat carrying 35 people to relief camps sank.

Most houses, businesses and government offices in Habiganj town remained 3 to 4 feet under water and road links between the district headquarters and Banichang, Lakhai and Nabiganj upazilas were cut off.

Our Bogra correspondent reports the government provided as little as 61 paisa on average for each flood victim in seven upazilas in the district.

Thousands of flood victims are waiting for food, but 281 tonnes of rice are in stock in a government warehouse, as the authorities did not prepare the final list of victims for relief.

Five boys and girls at ages 5 to 8 drowned in the flood-hit Shariatpur district, private news agency UNB said.

Twenty-two people of Chandipur

2 Bangladeshis

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Sharma said work on the 4,095-kilometre fencing would be completed by 2006.

"Already 50 percent of the fence is complete and we can say illegal migration from Bangladesh had come down by 25 percent," he told reporters in Kolkata, capital of the West Bengal.

Sharma also said about 2.5 percent of India's total number of female sex workers were Bangladeshis.

"We believe Bangladesh should take more proactive role in ensuring that women are not trafficked from there," the security chief said.

FM not aware of Pak PM's visit to Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday said he was not aware of Pakistan Prime Minister Choudhry Shujaat Hussain's private visit to Dhaka next month to attend a wedding ceremony.

"No, I don't know about it," he told reporters at Zia International Airport on his return from Islamabad where he led the Bangladesh delegation to the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Council of Ministers' meeting on July 20-21.

Some newspapers here reported that the prime minister of Pakistan would come to Dhaka on August 4 to attend the wedding ceremony of the son of Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, parliamentary adviser to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Replying to a question, Khan said he had a meeting with the Pakistan prime minister, discussing Saarc and bilateral matters.

The prime minister of Pakistan might come to Dhaka within a few months after the flood and the summer were over, he said adding "I am not aware of his private visit to Dhaka."

Jhenidah docs continue strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Doctors' strike in Jhenidah continued for the second consecutive day as Sadar hospital and health complexes remained inoperative much to the inconvenience of a large number of patients throughout the district yesterday.

Doctors in Jhenidah went on a 72-hour strike from Thursday morning in protest at Wednesday's rampage by a section of people on various establishments of the doctors.

Earlier on Wednesday thousands of people rampaged through a number of private clinics, diagnostic centres and doctors' houses after being incensed by the news of Kabirul Nur Ahad Khan, also a member of Ansar Battalion, being transferred to Madaripur. Sources said locals acted on general belief that doctors manoeuvred the transfer as Nur Ahad's growing popularity as a medicine man was hampering their business of private clinics and diagnostic centres. A clash between police and the angry crowd on that day left at least 50 people including 20 policemen injured.

Ansar personnel Nur Ahad, 45, of Jhenidah, for the last two weeks had been treating people with a remedy he claimed to have found in his dream, sources said. People from every corner of Jhenidah and adjacent districts poured in for the "remedy for every disease".

Superintendent of Police (SP) in Jhenidah Abdullah Al Mahamud yesterday described Nur Ahad's transfer as routine. He said actions would be taken against those who instigated Wednesday's violence.

They detected more than 70 of these large chunks of DNA that were altered in normal human cells.

These were large differences that have not been reported before -- involving much more DNA than so-called single nucleotide polymor-

ZIA still safe

FROM PAGE 1
erosion in areas close to the airport, has engaged labourers to fortify the Tongi-Ashulia embankment with sandbags.

Meanwhile, flight operations from Sylhet MAG Osmani Airport resumed yesterday. Out of 12 flights operated from the airport, Bangladesh Biman Airlines operated nine while the GMG Airlines operated three.

Airbus flights, however, were yet to resume, said the authorities.

The international airport in Sylhet remained closed since July 19 after it went under knee-deep water, forcing the authorities to suspend all flights.

AL withdraws

FROM PAGE 1
and key witness to AL lawmaker Ahsanullah murder. It kept the flood-hit areas out of the purview of hartal.

As the AL called the shutdown, LGRD and Co-operatives Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan urged the opposition to withdraw it considering people's suffering due to the ongoing floods.

On Thursday, leaders of 12 leading business bodies appealed to the AL to withdraw the hartal considering the prevailing flood situation.

However, the main opposition ignored both the appeals and stuck to its stance.

Addressing a meeting in Tongi on Thursday, Opposition Leader and AL president Sheikh Hasina also urged people to observe Saturday's hartal to protest the killing of Sumon.

Jalil said the BNP-Jamaat coalition government has totally failed to face the situation and their loyalists are busy making money by misappropriating the relief for the flood-hit people.

"When people are suffering because of floods, the prime minister's presence at an entertainment function is nothing but a mockery with the distressed people," said the AL leader referring to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's presence at a function at a private television channel Thursday evening.

The AL leader said the government has so far allocated only 28 paisa per person in the affected areas.

The ALCWC meeting recalled the devastating flood in 1998 and said that the then opposition BNP enforced nine hartals during that flood period ignoring sufferings of the people.



A family from the flood-hit low-lying areas in Dhaka takes shelter on the pontoon at Badamtali Launch Terminal yesterday.

New genome test finds big differences among people

REUTERS, Washington

A new way of comparing DNA has turned up surprising genetic differences among normal, healthy people, researchers said on Thursday.

The researchers found -- by accident -- that some people are missing large chunks of DNA, while others have extra copies of stretches of DNA.

Writing in the journal Science, the researchers have dubbed these differences "copy number polymorphisms." They are found in genes linked with cancer risk, with how much people eat and with reactions to drugs.

Thus, a relationship between CNPs and susceptibility to health problems such as neurological disease, cancer, and obesity is an intriguing possibility," the researchers wrote in their report.

The team at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York, the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden and elsewhere used a new kind of DNA test called Representational Oligonucleotide Microarray Analysis (ROMA).

"It can detect differences in DNA from any two sources," said Cold Spring Harbor spokesman Peter Sherwood.

The researchers were looking for genetic differences linked with cancer. "As a control in the cancer experiment they compared normal to normal DNA, expecting it to be pretty much the same," Sherwood said in a telephone interview.

They detected more than 70 of these large chunks of DNA that were altered in normal human cells.

These were large differences that have not been reported before -- involving much more DNA than so-called single nucleotide polymor-

phisms, which are well-known single-letter changes in the A, C, T, G nucleotide code that makes up DNA.

"They looked at blood and normal tissues from 20 people from different geographical regions. They found that probably on average about five of the people would have the same difference, the same CNP," Sherwood said.

Everyone has two copies of each chromosome, except for the X and Y chromosomes that separate men from women. The researchers found that each of their healthy volunteers had just one copy of each CNP.

"If they happen to marry and have children with someone who has the same CNP, maybe the children will be affected," Sherwood said.

The researchers also found possible mistakes in the map of the human genome published by the Human Genome Project.

In 20 people they found a stretch of DNA on chromosome 16 that does not appear there in the published sequence of the human genome -- but rather on chromosome 6. "It is extra copies of a gene that no one knew about," Sherwood said.

Comparisons of human to chimpanzee genomes have found similar swaps, when a gene migrates from one chromosome to another.

Just as chromosomal rearrangements have played a significant role in primate evolution and human disease, structural polymorphisms may play an analogous role in determining genetic diversity within the human population," the researchers wrote.

Some of the CNPs, the researchers said, were found in unstable genetic regions where reshuffled genes are associated with conditions such as Prader-Willi and Angelman syndromes, cat eye syndrome and spinal muscular atrophy.

HC orders Sena, BJP to pay Rs 20 lakh each for calling bandh

PTI, Mumbai

The Mumbai High Court yesterday asked the Shiv Sena and the BJP to pay Rs 20 lakh each as compensation for the bandh they called on July 30, 2003 in connection with the serial bomb blasts.

The compensation will be collected in a fund that will be used subsequently for public utility services, a Bench consisting of Chief Justice AP Shah and Justice SU Kamdar observed.

The court was hearing a PIL that urged for Rs 50 lakh compensation by both the political parties for causing public losses by calling bandh.

BJP and Sena justified the bandh saying it was spontaneous and not forced on the people while the state of Maharashtra listed out several measures it had adopted to tackle bandh or similar situations in future.

Star TV channels

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previous contract with the Asian Securities and Investment Limited (ASIL), owner of the majority share of local distributor Nationwide Communications Limited, because of its alleged defaulted subscription fees.

The MIL managing director said all agreements that ASIL might have with sub-distributors stand terminated automatically.

Chandra Shekhar Shethy, vice-president (distribution) of STAR Television, said it gave MIL the distributorship of STAR channels, adding: "MIL can now provide or suspend connections with anyone."

"With the signing of the agreement between MIL and ABE ASIL or any other party posing as the agent or distributor does not have the right to distribute STAR channels in Bangladesh," the MIL managing director said.

He mentioned that MIL submitted applications to the Board of Investment and Bangladesh Television for permission to distribute and to the information ministry for a no-objection certificate (NOC). "We hope we'll get the permission and the NOC in a month," he said.

The channels up for distribution include STAR Plus, STAR Movies International, STAR News, STAR Gold, STAR World, Channel (V) International, National Geographic Channel and Fox News ("STAR Channels").

The annual turnover from the television channel business in Bangladesh is estimated at about Tk 30 crore. STAR Group has been broadcasting over 40 services in seven languages for more than 300 million viewers in 53 countries across Asia.

Two lecturers

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intervention of the dean of social science faculty and senior teachers.

The authorities selected another candidate, Farhana Ferdous Luma, ignoring one with much better academic records. Luma secured first class 13th position in BSS and first class 20th position in MSS.

But the one who was not selected stood first class first both in BSS and MSS and is a part-time lecturer in Agriculture University, Mymensingh, since October 2002.

A five-member committee headed by Pro Vice-chancellor AFM Yusuf Haider selected the candidates.

The syndicate is likely to approve the selection this evening.

When contacted, Prof Haider refused to make any comments on qualification of the candidates, saying: "The C&D committee of the department finalised the list of candidates."

The vice-chancellor could not be reached over telephone for his comments.

Revenue shortfall

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declarations of imported goods.

CCH officials however deny the allegations of their involvement in tax evasion. They blame reduction in duties on some imported items including scrapped ship, milk powder, oil seeds, sugar, and petroleum products for the fall in revenue income.

The revenue target of CCH, a key collection point, for the current fiscal has been set at over Tk 11,000 crore, customs sources said.

Small UN contingent to return to Iraq in Aug

Baghdad wants Arab troops to protect UN

REUTERS, AFP, United Nations/ Cairo

The new UN chief envoy for Iraq will go to Baghdad next month along with a small team to reestablish a permanent UN presence, Secretary General Kofi Annan said on Thursday.

Veteran Pakistani diplomat Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Annan's newly appointed special representative for Iraq, dismissed concerns UN officials would be unwelcome in the country torn by lawlessness but acknowledged security was a top concern.

"I believe there is every reason for the Iraqi people to see the UN mission in Iraq as a mission in their service -- for them -- and it will be my job to strengthen that impression," Qazi told reporters.

The world body at one point had some 600 international staff working in Iraq following the US-led invasion.

All were pulled out last year after a bomb attack on UN offices in Baghdad killed 22 people, including Qazi's predecessor, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

But from what he has heard, Qazi said Iraqis "believe the UN has a vital role to play ... in bringing about a political transition in which the entire Iraqi people are stakeholders."

While all security precautions would be taken, "ultimately, of course, life is in Allah's hands," Qazi said.

Just a handful of UN staff are in Iraq at the moment -- a team of technical experts helping set up a national conference on Iraq's political future, and a security liaison team.

Hundreds of other UN staff are working on Iraqi projects from neighboring Jordan. But a large permanent presence in Iraq would need soldiers to protect them, particularly if the world body is to help prepare for elections expected in January, Annan said.

The Security Council has called for a dedicated force to protect UN staff. But no country has yet agreed to contribute troops although several have discussed the possibility including Pakistan, Nepal, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine.

Pakistan has indicated it would send soldiers only if Iraq's interim government asked it to and if other Muslim countries sent troops, Annan said.

Until the force was in place, the world body could work on the "absolutely essential" tasks of election preparations and the political transition, using interim security arrange-

ments. But it would be unable to do much on reconstruction, institution building and human rights matters, "and this I think the international community understands," Annan said.

AFP adds: Iraq called on Arab states Thursday to contribute troops to protect the United Nations and its staff when it returns to the violence-wracked country.

"We asked Egypt to make the necessary contacts with leaders of some Arab and Islamic countries to contribute forces to protect the UN mission," Prime Minister Iyad Allawi told reporters after meeting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

"This mission has an important role and it should be protected," he added.

Iraq has refused to accept troops from neighbouring countries on its soil, fearing their presence might exacerbate ethnic tensions, but has said that forces from other Arab and Islamic states could serve as peacekeepers protecting UN personnel.

Egypt has said that it will not send forces to Iraq, but expressed readiness to train Iraqi security forces. The details of the arrangement are still under review, according to the Egyptian press.

The Iraqi premier met Egypt's Interior Minister Habib al-Adly on Wednesday and attended an impressive demonstration by Egyptian riot police and anti-terrorist squads of their capabilities.

But Egypt did not immediately say if it would respond positively to Allawi's request for troops to protect the UN mission.

Allawi, describing the presence of the United Nations in his country as "crucial," said he received a telephone call from Kofi Annan on Wednesday in which the UN secretary general expressed a desire to upgrade operations in Iraq.

The United Nations significantly scaled back its presence in the country after a bomb attack on its headquarters last year that killed 22 people including UN envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello.

De Mello's replacement Ashraf Jehangir Qazi has yet to take up his post in Iraq because of the dire security situation.

Allawi is in Egypt on the second leg of a regional tour, his first foreign trip since his government took power from the US-led occupation at the end of June. His next stop is Syria.

Turkish train disaster

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the criticism and insisted that the old lines were appropriate.

There were conflicting reports of casualties, with the government crisis centre, Health Ministry and Transportation Ministry earlier saying that between 128 and 139 people were killed. The ministries lowered the toll late Thursday without any official explanation.

"A mistake was made in the death and injury toll because of the contradictory information that reached us," said Ayhan Cevik, mayor of the nearby town of Bilecik. "According to the latest information we have, 36 people were killed in the accident and 60 were injured."

The area was devastated by a 1999 earthquake which killed more than 17,000 people, and casualties were rushed to five nearby hospitals equipped to handle disaster emergencies.

Officials initially said they were investigating all possible causes for the accident, but parliament speaker Bulent Arinc later ruled out sabotage. "No officials have any fears concerning sabotage," he said. "There is no such thing."

When it derailed, the train would have been traveling at a normal speed, because the tracks near Mekece were not geared to carry high-speed cars, state railway

authority deputy head Ali Kemal Ergule said.

But survivor Muhittin Anik said he went to the restroom of the train five minutes before the crash and noticed that the speed indicator at one side of the train showed the train to be traveling about 85 mph.

"It really is a fast train," he recalled a friend joking.

At the scene, rescue workers combed through the debris, looking for survivors. Paramilitary soldiers carried luggage from the debris and piled it on the side of the road.

"There were bodies lying all over the place," said Hikmet Feridun Turan, the mayor of nearby Pamukova and one of the first people to reach the scene. "Body pieces. Heads lying on the ground. I don't want anyone to ever see anything like that."

The crash occurred at 7:45 p.m. By midnight, most of the rescue efforts were winding down.

Erdogan cancelled a trip to Bosnia and travelled to the area by helicopter.

Suleyman Karaman, the head of Turkey's railway authority, said a team had been sent to the area to try and determine the cause of the crash. He quoted the conductor as saying the train was traveling at a normal speed and that the "could not understand what had gone wrong."

2 US troops

FROM PAGE 1
travelling in on Thursday night north of Baghdad hit a US tank, the military said yesterday.

A military spokesman said the van was carrying at least 19 people and that the accident happened at about 10:00 p.m. (local time) near Taji, 27km north of the capital.

"This is all we know for the time being and we are investigating the incident," he said.

Gunmen assassinated a senior member of Iraq's fledgling armed forces as he traveled to Friday prayers in the northern city of Mosul, police said.

Brigadier General Salim Blais and one of his neighbours who was travelling with him were killed by gunmen in a drive-by shooting.

Eight Iraqis were wounded, including a little girl who lost a leg, when a bus they were travelling in hit a roadside bomb yesterday in the northern part of Baghdad, police and hospital sources said.

"We have received eight injured, including an eight-year-old girl, whom we had to amputate her leg

below the knee," said Doctor Ilham Ilah at a hospital in Khadimiya, north of the city.

A bus carrying 20 passengers ignored orders from police not to enter an area that was being cordoned off for a suspected roadside bomb, according to police and witnesses.

Meanwhile, the US military carried out an airstrike yesterday against a suspected hideout of alleged Al-Qaeda operative Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi in the flashpoint town of Fallujah, said the military, without indicating if there were casualties.

The military said it carried out the attack at 6:33 am local time on 10-12 suspects who were in the courtyard of a house in the southwest part of Fallujah, 50 kilometers west of Baghdad.

"The anti-Iraqi forces were struck while in the courtyard of a house; the house was left intact," said the statement.

A hospital in Fallujah said it received five injured, including two children, after the attack.