

Commission declares

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affiliation with the BNP-led ruling coalition, the Commission members said they would prove their neutrality through their work.

Justice Sultan denied that the ACC members were appointed on political considerations while Maniruddin Ahmed, one of the two ACC members, said, "I can make public declaration that I'm not involved with any political party."

Maniruddin, a member of the Pay Commission, resigned from the Pay Commission before taking charge as a member of the ACC.

The Commission held several rounds of meetings with anticorruption officials yesterday at the renovated building of the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac), which was dissolved with the formation of the Commission on Sunday.

M Maniruzzaman Mia, another member of the ACC, did not attend the meetings.

Welcomed by the former Bac officials and staff a portion of whom are supposed to get absorbed into the ACC, the Commission members went round different sections of the office and enquired about the manpower and facilities.

"We will have to work in a jihadi spirit," Maniruddin told the officials.

During the meeting, the ACC chairman told the former Bac Director General Maj Gen (Retd) MA Matin to work as secretary of the Commission. A notification in this regard might be issued today, said sources.

Another notification, meanwhile, was circulated yesterday that all the officials and employees of the now defunct Bac will work with the Commission.

During the interview, Justice Sultan and Maniruddin firmly said the Commission would work with honesty and sincerity and without any influence from outside to fulfil people's expectations and achieve its objective to combat corruption.

Asked how the Commission will deal with influential quarters and politicians in and outside the government, who are involved in corruption, Justice Sultan said: "Everyone irrespective of their identities will be subject to trial by the Commission...there will be no government control and the Commission will work freely."

Talking on the practice of withdrawal of corruption cases against political leaders after they come to power, he said, "We will not file any case with political motive and cases will be filed only on the basis of evidence. Our investigations will be neutral."

Maniruddin, however, declined to make a comment on the issue. He said: "Observe what qualitative changes the Commission makes."

Asked whether they would deal with the withdrawn corruption charges against political leaders, the ACC chairman said, "Withdrawal amounts to acquittal. And those who had filed the charges didn't protest after the acquittal."

Mentioning that cases against Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had been quashed by the High Court and those against Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina awaited disposal, he said, "This Commission will not file any case to harass politicians."

Asked what they would do if the government cuts their budget and other facilities once the Commission takes steps against the government top brass, he said, "The government would have no control

on the budget."

Pointing out that corruption has been rooted in all sectors including the police, customs and lower courts, the ACC chairman said reforms are necessary to combat the menace and they would take steps in this regard.

Asked which sector would be given priority, he said, "We are not beginning with any preconceived idea. Let us start our work first."

Talking on a huge number of pending corruption cases, he said that the Commission would have separate tribunal, judges and expertise to dispose of the cases.

On whether it would be possible by existing experts to deal with the changing patterns of corruption, he just said: "Let us see."

Replying to a question on whether existing laws are enough to cut corruption, he said, "Is anything enough always? If necessary, we would recommend amendments of the laws."

Asked whether the police officials, who themselves face allegations of corruption, would help the Commission in investigating graft charges, Maniruddin said: "We are bestowed with extra power and will have our men to verify their information."

Talking on the allegations of corruption by Bac officials now being absorbed into the ACC, the members said the Commission would scrutinise their activities for selection of the honest ones to work for the Commission.

On the all-pervasive corruption, Justice Sultan said the majority of the people are in a sorry state due to corruption in all spheres.

Saying that it would not be possible to combat corruption if the commoners, media people and all quarters do not co-operate with the Commission, Justice Sultan said. "You journalists best know the sources of corruption. Help us by providing information and advice."

"People have to have courage to give statement during the investigations of corruption charges and thus help us cut corruption."

During several meetings with different levels of anticorruption officials at the office, Justice Sultan and Maniruddin were briefed about the lack of logistics and the absence of an organisational structure of the Bac.

Briefing them on the overall situation, the former Bac DG Matin said many of the officers and employees of Bac had been apprehending that they would lose their jobs due to the formation of the Commission.

As Matin said they did not get time to prepare for working with the newly formed body the ACC chairman asked them to continue activities in the existing set-up.

"We'll have to speed up some work," he said asking the officials to work with honesty and sincerity without any fear or favour.

Maniruddin asked the officials to prove through their work that the commission is really an independent one. "Your new salary structure in the new pay scale coming in January will ensure that you would be able to do your duty honestly."

"We'll remove our bad reputation as the most corrupt country," he said mentioning that corruption blocks foreign grants and other facilities.

"We'll bring changes like that brought by Rab (Rapid Action Battalion)," former Bac director (Admin) Lt Col (Retd) MA Hannan Mridha, said.

GRAFT CASE Charge-framing hearing against Tarique Zia Jan 10

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday fixed January 10 for hearing on charge-framing against Tarique Rahman, son of former president Ziaur Rahman and director of Dandy Dyeing Limited and four others in a graft case.

Judge Mohammad Rezaul Karim Khan of the Special Court for Dhaka Division adjourned the hearing scheduled to be held today, following a time petition by the lawyers of the accused Tarique Rahman.

The four other accused are Dandy Dyeing Managing Director Maj (ret'd) Syed Iskander Mirza, MP, Director Gausuddin Al Mamun, former managing director of Sonali Bank M Ahsanul Haq and Abdul Khaleq Pathan.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) filed a case with Motiheel Police Station accusing Tarique Rahman and four others on September 14, 1996 and the investigation officer pressed charges against them on May 22, 1997.

In the case, it was alleged that in the name of M/s Dandy Dyeing Ltd. the accused sought loan of Tk 15.30 crore for setting up a textile dyeing factory on February 15, 1993. But the equity was fixed at Tk 1 crore only instead of Tk 5.60 crore, the amount proportionate to the loan, in collusion with the bank authorities.

Moreover, the value of the mortgaged land was shown to be worth Tk 18 lakh, whereas the real value is Tk 1 lakh and 20 thousand only.

Accused Tarique Rahman and three others were present in the court during the hearing while another accused Abdul Khaleq was absent.

VAT waived

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Kashem Haider said the VAT waiver would provide Bangladeshi products with a competitive edge in world market in the quota-free regime.

"We welcome the government for the decision. The government may lose some revenue but the incentive would benefit the country's economy in the long run," the executive of the country's apex trade body noted.

Baby sells

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village Khanpur in Shyamnagar upazila, decided to buy the baby and contacted Salma Khatun.

Salma Khatun came to Satkhira court and sold her daughter to Mazed for the price of Tk 300, using an affidavit filed at the office of a notary public.

When contacted, Salma Khatun said she intends to use the money from the sale of her daughter to buy clothes for her two other daughters. Abdul Mazed said that he decided to buy the baby because he has no children of his own. He added that he will pay Salma Khatun an additional Tk 2,000.

The pathetic incident overwhelmed all present there.

Cabinet secretary

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can replace him now.

Reliable sources said there were separate moves to get Secretary of the Planning Division Fazlur Rahman or Secretary of the Ministry of Communications Shafiqul Islam appointed to the highest post of the civil administration. Both are currently serving on contract.

They pointed out there is no instance of appointment of cabinet secretary from among contractual appointees. And this is why the prime minister declined to appoint someone else on contract service to the post of cabinet secretary, which is superior to the posts of other secretaries by four steps.

A lobby in the administration led by a top bureaucrat at the Prime Minister's Office had also allegedly worked against Saadat ahead of his appointment as cabinet secretary, highly placed sources said.

Indecision on the issue persisted for over a month and the government finally promoted Saadat to the post of cabinet secretary on May 6, 2002. Since then he has been facing obstacles and disturbances at times, especially at the time of extension of service, officials said.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, an influential cabinet minister on condition of anonymity said currently there is a vacuum of efficient, uncontroversial and neutral officials at top level of the administration.

He said there are a good number of efficient joint secretaries but the situation at the upper level of the administration is miserable. "The government is dead against giving contract service to retired officials but lack of efficient officials at top level is forcing it to go for this," he added.

Mahmudur

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such report," he continued to shout. It however is a fact that The Daily Star and some other newspapers ran series of stories on allegations of Mahmud's financial links with his previous employer even while holding the high-profile government post of the BoI chief.

He also blamed the journalists for not having enough knowledge about the country and the society, and suggested them learning more before commencing with journalism.

Nine city markets

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flammable materials, and on the first floors of these tin-roofed markets, particularly those of Dhaka City Corporation, hundreds of workers, mainly tailors and garment workers will just perish," an official of the fire service said, preferring anonymity.

He said that if fire breaks out during night hours, the fire service will not have access inside the market as the entrances are virtually sealed with multiple locks. "We cannot even pour water from the roofs as those are also sealed off with tins."

"In each of these markets there are over 1,500 shops crammed inside a small area where foreign and local bargain hunters converge every day," he said.

Fire officials also said that in concrete markets like Gausia and Chandni Chowk, narrow passages, an overwhelming number of small stalls, and a lack of proper fire exits make the situation all the more explosive. Moreover these markets have been built without Rajuk planning and proper installation of electric wiring.

Zainal Abedin, an employee of a cloth store in Gausia Market, said that all his colleagues have been living in fear since last Monday's blaze. He showed a tangle of electric wiring under the staircase and said electrical short circuits occur there regularly. None of the market officials were present to answer queries

yesterday.

Top Rajuk officials said that Gausia and many other markets in the city are "examples" of gross construction rule violations. They said that to address the problem of serious fire hazards they had proposed to revise the Building Construction Rules two years ago.

"Having consulted experts at various echelons and departments we proposed radical changes in the construction rules but the proposal is gathering dust at the ministry of Housing and Public Works," said a top official of Rajuk.

Rajuk officials also pointed their fingers at the DCC and said the DCC should not have constructed such hazardous structures, which house thousands of employees and shoppers at any one time.

Minister for Housing and Public Works, Mirza Abbas, told The Daily Star that his ministry was processing the proposals. "We hope to do something very soon," Mirza Abbas said.

Another top official of the fire service said that the DCC should not issue trade licenses to businesses that trade in highly flammable materials without a certification from the fire service.

Since independence, fire fighting has also become very difficult in the city due to the disappearance of water reservoirs, natural ponds and low-lying areas. During last Monday's blaze, the fire fighters had to procure water from as far away as two kilometers.

BoI chief resigns

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which it carried out through a committee headed by Mahmud. Before that the ministry of Industries had been issuing the permits.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in an executive order recently dissolved the 8-member committee without consulting Mahmud.

Admitting that the sudden dissolution of the committee angered him and prompted him to go for the resignation, Mahmud said, "The dismissal of the committee, along with some other unfortunate incidents in the last couple of days, was a catalyst for my resignation."

He said the government has every right to cancel any committee but it should not be done without consultation with relevant quarters. Besides, he said, "I was considering bringing some other people to lead such an important organisation as the BoI."

The BoI chief denied any accusation of corruption against him or his organisation forcing him to resign.

"You, The Daily Star people, are always making such allegations of corruption. Otherwise there was no report of corruption," he exclaimed in anger responding to a question whether there was any allegation of corruption against him or his organisation.

A number of media channels did

Manmohan

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submitted a memorandum to him urging him to impress on Myanmar and Bangladesh the urgency of flushing out the insurgents from those countries.

The Indian prime minister said 'illegal migration' from Bangladesh is another matter of concern to India. He regretted that Bangladesh has denied it. "Our border fencing with Bangladesh has to be of the type existing in Jammu and Kashmir (bordering Pakistan) with barbed wire and electric fencing," Singh said.

Referring to the controversial Illegal Migrants (Detection by Tribunal) Act, he said the law is not designed to encourage infiltration, rather to make sure minority communities are not harassed during detection of illegal migrants.

The BJP and Assam's former ruling party Asom Gana Parishad demand Foreigners Act to be invoked to deal with the problem because they say, IMDT Act has not succeeded in detecting illegal migrants in the state. The ruling Congress, however, favours IMDT Act and the Manmohan Singh cabinet has recently decided to retain the law.

Bangladesh documentary

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Dhaka Reporters Unity.

A total of 30 countries from across the world with more than 100 TV programmes took part in the competition for the 32nd Emmy Award this year.

The jury board nominated four countries—Bangladesh, China, Korea and Laos, for the final round. Chairman of the ATN Bangla Mahfuzur Rahman received the award at a ceremony at Hotel Hilton in New York yesterday.

The 25-minute documentary made in 2003 depicts a real life gallant act of a juvenile.

Abul Khair, a poor boy from Haziganj upazila of Comilla, out to collect snails like every other day in the water-submerged field along railway tracks on June 13, 1996, came across a crack on a rail track. Sensing an imminent danger for trains of derailment, Khair instantly ran back

accuse Mahmud of continuing taking financial benefits from a private company, Shinepukur Ceramics Ltd, a concern of Beximco Group, even after appointed to the high-profile government office. He was the managing director of the company before joining the BoI.

He also denied having any pressure from any quarter resulting in his abortive departure.

Mahmud joined the BoI on November 19, 2001 on a two-year contract, which was extended for another two years in November last year. His tenure was supposed to end in November 2005.

The BoI sources also told The Daily Star that tendering of resignation was but a trick, a drama played by Mahmud, to pressure the government and to gain further time, as he believes the government would not accept his resignation and would rather appoint him at a better position.

Huge arms

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grenades, 32 antitank and seven antipersonnel mines, 40 rocket launchers and 20 bombs from the same upazila. They also seized 37 radio sets, 10 binoculars, 1,062 rounds of AK47 and 7,601 rounds of M16 rifles, 169 heavy machinegun shells, 99 rounds of SMG, 130kg plastic explosives, five packets of gunpowder and various other chemicals and materials used for bomb manufacturing.

Although huge firearms and explosives were seized, the criminals have always remained beyond dragnets. Allegations are there that the criminals could not be nabbed due to lack of coordination among different forces -- the army, BDR and police.

Handmade

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High School found a six-inch high container wrapped in green tape. A one-yard wire hung loose from it.

On information, two experts of police removed the bomb the same day. They put it in a water-filled bucket.

Experts from Bogra Cantonment yesterday took the bomb to Atrialghat of Bangali River and exploded it there. They said it was a powerful bomb.

Earlier Railway Police on November 12 recovered 24 Gelatin 'high-speed explosive bars' and 124 'electric detonators' from a compartment of a Shantahar-bound local train at Bonarpura station.

Meanwhile, a cultural function featuring singer Mamta at the school playground was cancelled following the bomb recovery.

home and brought a red cloth from his mother to hoist a danger signal.

Soon after, as a passenger train rushed to the faulty part of the track, he successfully signalled the train to stop and saved the lives of several hundred people aboard.

The juvenile team on its own did all the jobs including the script writing, shooting and planning for the documentary.

"I'm happy that a documentary has been made on the incident," said Abul Khair now in his twenties and working with the ATN.

Narrator and cameraman of the documentary, Fatema Akhtar and Rabiul Islam Raju, both second-year intermediate students, among other team members and ATN staff, were present at the press conference.

The documentary, sponsored by the UNICEF and Partex Group, is scheduled for screening on ATN Bangla today at 5:45 p.m.

KAMAL MURDER Motive not yet ascertained

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Investigators could not yet find out the motive of the killing of senior assistant secretary Ibrahim Kamal.

Kamal, younger brother of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed, died at Holy Family Red Crescent Hospital early Monday after unknown assailants stabbed him near the hospital.

The police also could not arrest anyone in connection with the murder till 7:00pm yesterday.

Assistant Commissioner of the Detective Branch (DB) Moniruzzaman, who is leading the investigation team, said no significant development is made into the investigation.

"We are carrying out investigation taking into consideration two things," Moniruzzaman said, adding, "The way the assailants killed Kamal and fled the scene without taking anything from him suggests that it's a planned murder."

It may also be an act by muggers as Kamal's friends and relatives said he had no enmity with anyone.

US consulate in Mumbai closed over terror fear

AFP, New Delhi

The United States closed its consulate in India's financial capital of Mumbai yesterday, citing information about a terrorist threat, but an Indian official dismissed the possibility of an imminent attack.

The consulate was shut yesterday for one day "as a precautionary measure in response to threat information," said David Kennedy, spokesman for the US embassy in New Delhi, which remained open.

Indian officials later said the information received by the US was not accurate.

"Our investigations have revealed that the threat information received by the United States regarding attacks on its offices in India was incorrect," R.R. Patil, home minister of the western Indian state of Maharashtra, of which Mumbai is the capital, told reporters.

Without giving details, Patil said his department was informing the federal home ministry about investigations into the terrorist threat conducted by local police.

"We never comment on the characterisation of the threat. We believe that it's a prudent approach. We continue to make security for American citizens and American facilities as our priority," Kennedy said when asked about Patil's remarks.

The US State Department said Monday it had information that "terrorists may be planning attacks on US interests in India in the near future."

"Although not specific, the information suggests that an attack could be aimed at US interests in the cities of New Delhi or Mumbai (Bombay)," it said.

The notice offered few details about the threat information but said targets could include areas where foreigners are known to congregate. It urged US citizens in India to heighten security precautions.

AL top brass

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pace because of such indecision.

They also accused the high command of ignoring the party's poor organisational situation as a number of district units have not held councils for long. There are also conflicts among leaders of many district and upazila units.

Top AL leaders including party General Secretary Abdul Jalil tried to pacify the leaders, saying the unity process with the left-leaning parties was going in consultation with party President Sheikh Hasina. She is well informed about the nine-point demand, he said.

The party still stands by its 15-point demand declared on January 10 although it is now going on with a combined movement with other opposition parties, Jalil added.

Other leaders like Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak and Tofail Ahmed, however, maintained there is no inconsistency in taking crucial decisions. They pointed out the party chief was consulted before finalisation of the nine-point charter of demands.

Tofail told the meeting that most leaders criticised programmes like hartals and suggested alternative programmes but no-one said these at meetings attended by the party chief.

A number of leaders asked the party general secretary and other top leaders about the demand for reforms of the caretaker government system. They said the policymakers are not still clear about the reforms they want.

Jalil and other senior leaders asked all to give their views on reforms of the caretaker administration system and of the Election Commission to help finalise a fresh proposal.

Acting party President Zillur Rahman chaired the meeting at the party's Dhanmondi office.

Senior AL leaders meet tomorrow and on November 28 with top leaders of 18 district and 49 upazila units ahead of its December 11 human wall programme.

Rallies in Tentulia

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Policymakers of the opposition parties at a meeting yesterday also decided to hold mass contact programmes in the districts and upazilas that the human chain will touch from December 8 to 10.

They also decided to incorporate in their nine-point charter of demands the issue of equal rights of indigenous and religious minority people including the Ahmadiyya community. The issue will be added to the demand for proper implementation of the CHT accord.

Yesterday's meeting added one more upazila—Burichong in Comilla—to the existing 48 upazilas that the human wall will touch.

The combined rallies will be the first public appearance of top opposition leaders on a common podium in the anti-government movement since the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition took over in 2001.

At the rallies, the opposition leaders will explain their nine-point demands with the ultimate goal of unseating the present government, and urge people to join the united movement.

"We will address the rallies in Teknaf and Tentulia jointly and explain the key points of our demands at places along the human wall route from December 8 to 10 to mobilise people's support for the programme," Rashid Khan Menon, president of the WP told reporters after the meeting at the CPB office.

On the opposition plan for the biggest anti-government showdown, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said thousands of people will join the programme making it a success to show no-trust in the present government.

"Apart from the 18 districts that the human chain will cross, people from adjacent districts and other places will also participate in the

human wall," he said. "We will fight against the present corrupt government as we did against the earlier autocratic government". Jalil further said the opposition parties will begin to put up posters and distribute leaflets within a couple of days to publicise the programme.

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu said the opposition parties are preparing all-out to make the programme a success.

Rezaul Rahman Khan, a leader of the BSD (Mahbub), attended the opposition meeting for the first time yesterday. The party had quit the 11-party combine.

Opposition sources said two teams comprising top leaders of different parties will begin a tour from Dhaka on December 8—one towards Teknaf and another towards Tentulia. They will address rallies explaining different points till December 10.

Earlier on November 18, the opposition parties declared a simultaneous movement on a common nine-point charter of demands with the ultimate goal of dislodging the BNP-led coalition government. The parties will form a cross-country 900-kilometre-long human wall to show people's no-confidence in the government for its 'failure to deliver'.

Though the opposition parties declared to go for the human wall unitedly, there was discord over the preparatory joint visits to the districts ahead of the programme as some left-leaning parties were in favour of making the visits separately.

A meeting of the opposition parties on Sunday at the JSD office failed to reach a consensus on the issue though it mapped out the route of the human wall.

Later, the 11-party meeting on Monday agreed to join the combined rallies with the AL and other parties ahead of the December 11 showdown.

Pak PM flies to India

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and sports ties including a tour of Pakistan by the Indian cricket team.

"If I had to do a very objective analysis of where we are today versus 12 months ago, I think we are substantially ahead," Aziz said, adding that the main purpose of his visit was "to get the dialogue process moving forward."

In his first official visit to Kashmir last week, Prime Minister Singh rejected redrawing borders as a solution to Kashmir.

The statement effectively scuttled a suggestion by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf that Kashmir could be divided into seven regions -- any one of which could be demilitarised and placed under a United Nations mandate or under joint control or given independence.

In response to Singh's statement Musharraf told AFP in an exclusive interview that the "vibes" from New Delhi were not good.

Aziz is also scheduled to meet leaders of Kashmir's main separatist alliance, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, either over dinner on Tuesday or on Wednesday morning before meeting the prime minister, press reports said.

He is also due to have a breakfast meeting with Indian editors on Wednesday as well as hold talks with Vajpayee and opposition leader Lal Krishna Advani.

During their talks on Wednesday, the two prime ministers are expected to review recent developments in the peace process, known as the composite dialogue. A second round of talks is to begin later this month.

Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarpa said Monday that Aziz was visiting the region as chairman of SAARC, so the focus was likely to be on regional issues, but that discussions on bilateral issues were also expected.

Sarma said New Delhi was hopeful of progress. "We have been always hopeful that all the interactions will improve bilateral relations," he said.

On Sunday Foreign Minister Singh said Pakistan must be patient on resolving