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JUDICIARY SEPARATION

Nine bureaucrats face contempt proceedings

SC finds distortion of its 12-point directive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday asked nine government officials why contempt proceedings should not be drawn against them for distorting the decisions of the court on separation of the judiciary.

A full court of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Husain also directed the officials to appear in person before court at 9:00am on December 11 to explain their position.

The order came after the attorney general, as asked by the court, explained why repeated time extensions were sought to implement a 12-point directive given by the court for separation of the judiciary way back in December 1999.

The court grilled Attorney General AF Hassan Ariff during yesterday's hearing, when it found "contradictory and confusing" the opinions of an inter-ministerial committee of bureaucrats on framing rules for the newly constituted judicial service. The law ministry had sought opinion of the bureaucrats' committee on the draft rules.

The court also questioned how the bureaucrats dared to disagree with the final drafts of the rules when these were awaiting final approval by the president.

The Appellate Division had corrected and sent back to the law ministry two drafts for formation of the Bangladesh Judicial Service (Constitution, Recruitment, Suspension, Dismissal and Removal) Rules 2004 and the Bangladesh Judicial Service (Posting, Promotion, Leave, Control, Discipline and other

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5 die after taking spurious alcohol

OUR CORRESPONDENT, KASHITA

Five people died and some 50 others have fallen sick after taking spurious alcohol in Daulatpur upazila until Saturday since November 12.

The victims in separate groups or individually took the liquor from Nabi homeopathy hall in the upazila on different days.

Sources said Rafiqul Islam, 41, son of Harez Mondol of Madapur village, died after being admitted to a local health complex on November 12. He took the poisonous alcohol the previous day.

Hossain Ali, 32, son of Kalu Biswas of Bagwan, died on November 13.

Of the dead Gias Uddin, 41, son of Nabir Sheikh of Mathurapur, died

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Election to reserved seats for women to be indirect

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday passed a bill for indirect election to the 45 reserved seats for women in parliament on proportional representation of parties or alliances amid strong protests and a noisy walkout by the main opposition Awami League (AL) lawmakers.

The AL legislators and a lawmaker of Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) termed indirect election to the reserved seats based on proportional representation 'unconstitutional and a disgrace to the women.'

The opposition members protested the bill and demanded a direct election to the women's seats in line with the election commit-

ments of all political parties, including the ruling BNP, and the demand of all women's bodies.

They said the method of allocating 45 reserved seats among the political parties and alliances as contained in the bill is very complex and impractical.

AL members Abdur Razzak, Suranjit Sengupta, Mohammad Nasim, Rahmat Ali, AKM Jahangir, Abdur Razzak, Shahjahan Khan, Atiur Rahman Atique and Panchanan Biswas, and GM Quader of the JP (Ershad) took part in the discussion.

Except for GM Quader, other lawmakers of the JP supported the bill.

The AL lawmakers before the

walkout also demanded of the government to withhold the passage of the bill until the High Court disposes of two writ petitions relating to the 14th amendment to the constitution, which provided for the 45 reserved seats for women.

The main opposition lawmakers demanded a statement from the prime minister on their demands and left the House as she did not respond.

Parliament passed the 14th amendment to the constitution on May 16. Women's rights activists and civil society members filed two writ petitions with the High Court challenging the provision of 45 reserved seats and the court

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Tata opening Dhaka office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indian industrial giant Tata Group yesterday told the government that it is opening an office in Dhaka 'very soon'.

Tata also proposed yesterday to set up a co-ordination committee drawing officials of both Tata and the government to ensure speedy implementation of Tata ventures.

A seven-member Tata delegation led by S Manzar Hossain, an executive of Tata Steel who has been named to head the Dhaka office, yesterday met State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharrat Hossain.

The Indian business conglomerate recently proposed to invest \$2

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GOVT RECRUITMENT BNP, allies happy with withdrawal order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the BNP-led ruling alliance are happy with the withdrawal of the cancellation order of recruitment of class three and four employees for district administrations and other low-level government offices.

The latest decision has dispelled the frustrations and resentment among ministers, lawmakers and leaders of the BNP and its allies, which were created by the last few weeks' 'drama' over the recruitment.

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Tk 24 lakh mobile sets missing from customs storage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, SYLHET

Seized mobile phone sets worth about Tk 24 lakh went 'missing' from the guarded customs godown in the city's Shahjalal Upashahar area.

Authorities describe it as a mere theft, but it is alleged that some customs officials handed the phone sets to a gang on the night of November 14.

Some 500 pieces of mobile phone sets and 200 pieces of battery brought in violation of customs rules were seized at the Osmani International Airport on September 29. These were kept under sealed locks at the customs godown in Shahjalal Upashahar area that day.

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Opposition holds rally at Tentulia

MUSTAK HOSSAIN, from Tentulia

Leaders of 14 opposition parties led by the Awami League (AL) yesterday expressed their resolve to dislodge the BNP-led coalition government through a mass movement across the country.

Addressing a public meeting at Tentulia bus stand, the opposition leaders blasted the alliance government for what they said is its absolute failure to tackle the deteriorating law and order and curb price hike of essentials.

The meeting held a day after a similar one at Teknaf was part of the

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PHOTO: STAR

A homeless baby girl cries standing in the midst of debris after Sunday night's fire at a slum in Jurain killed four people, including three of a family, and burnt down some 150 makeshift houses.

3 of a family, another killed in Jurain fire

150 makeshift houses burnt down, 600 rendered homeless

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A blazing fire killed four people including three of a family at a shanty town in west Jurain in the capital on Sunday, burning down at least 150 makeshift houses and leaving more than 600 residents homeless.

The dead are Jahanara, 35, a housewife, and her two children Fatema, 7 and Ibrahim, 5. Another child who died close to Jahanara's house has been identified as Shima, 7. All the bodies were sent to the Mitford hospital for autopsy.

The fire, reportedly originating from an earthen kitchen stove in one of the tin-shed houses at Tulabagh Railline Slum at about 11:30pm, swiftly burnt all the flammable goods. Jahanara and her two children were trapped in the blaze, witnesses said.

Fanned by a strong breeze, the flames quickly spread to the crowded neighbouring slums made of highly flammable bamboo sheets, sending sleeping residents in the neighbourhood rushing out in panic.

Some people, finding no other way to escape, jumped into the

adjacent waterbody, while others, mostly women and children, ran out on the rail tracks.

"I was asleep when I heard people screaming for help, shouting 'fire, fire'. Before I even had time to wake others up, I saw the blaze rushing towards us," said Dholu Mia, a 45-year-old man who owned three small lodging rooms for rental.

Aklima, another resident who has been living there since 1973, said, "I have lost all I had. My precious belongings and furniture have been reduced to ashes. Now I have no source of making a living."

Sitting in front of his house, Mohammed Anis said, "All my belongings including some cash I had saved have been gutted. My family of six may now have to live in the open for weeks until I have enough cash to rebuild my house."

The crowded, 25-year-old neighbourhood had only a few narrow passages for exit, but all the residents could escape in time, thanks to the nearby factory workers who rushed to the aid of the residents and helped douse the fire.

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AL leaders slate deaths in Rab 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two senior Awami League (AL) lawmakers yesterday criticised the deaths in 'so-called crossfire' involving Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and demanded the home minister's statement on the matter in parliament.

They demanded the same also on the 'killings by Bangla Bhai'. Standing on a point of order, AL lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta said Rab killed a central leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League in the name of crossfire in Chittagong on Monday while a few days ago, 'Bangla Bhai' killed a Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal leader in Rajshahi.

"If the so-called crossfire continues, no one knows when the ministers would be caught in the crossfire," Sengupta said.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar refused to accept the point saying law would take its own course.

Taking the floor, Mohammad Nasim said people in the country's northern region are in constant fear of violence unleashed by 'Bangla Bhai' and his men.

Nasim, a former home minister, said people wonder what gives such strength to 'Bangla Bhai' that even the prime minister's directive to arrest him did not work. He

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100m may die if flu pandemic occurs

A global outbreak is almost certain: WHO

AFP, Hong Kong

Up to 100 million people could die within weeks if a bird flu pandemic broke out, a senior World Health Organisation official warned Monday as he urged nations to make urgent preparations to mitigate its spread.

A global outbreak is almost certain and even widespread vaccination programmes would not be enough to halt its inexorable spread, WHO director for the Western

Pacific Shigeru Omi said in Hong Kong.

"The most conservative estimate is that 7-10 million people would die, but the maximum range will be more -- 50 million or even in the worst case 100 million people," Omi said in his starkest warning yet of the potential peril from a mutation of avian flu to a form that could be transmitted by humans.

"It will come," he said during a flying visit to the city where the H5N1 flu strain first mutated into a

strain lethal to humans.

Omi said it was impossible to predict when a pandemic would happen but said it would not take long to reach all corners of the globe.

"Before it would have taken a year to spread around the world but thanks to globalisation it will take just weeks.

"If we are not prepared the consequences will be serious."

Avian flu, he said, appeared to be entrenched in Asia following two

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BCL calls hartal in Ctg Dec 2 to protest custodial death of Mohim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of Awami League (AL), called a dawn-to-dusk hartal on December 2 in Chittagong in protest against the death of its leader Mohim in Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) custody early yesterday.

Mohim Uddin alias Mohim, assistant library secretary of BCL's central committee, died at around 12:30am when he was caught in a 'crossfire' between Rab and his henchmen at Chandanaish in Chittagong, said Rab sources.

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HR workers against indemnity to law enforcers

UNB, Dhaka

Local and international rights activists yesterday called for nullifying the impunity provision from the constitution as they found it a fundamental obstacle to the promotion and implementation of human rights of the citizens.

The promulgation of laws to indemnify the law enforcers and other persons is 'denial of fundamental rights and broadening path of discrimination, torture and inhuman treatment' which thereby

encourages and facilitates many other forms of impunity, they observed at a national conference on human rights.

The provision is also contradictory to many provisions of international human rights instruments and part III of the Bangladesh constitution comprising Articles 26 to 47A that define and protect fundamental rights of the citizens, the conference was told.

Their observations came from the concluding session of the two-

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Tigress found dead in Sundarbans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, KHULNA

Some fishermen found the body of a Royal Bengal tigress Saturday afternoon from the Sundarbans adjacent to Koira Patrol Outpost under Baniakhali Station of the western wing of the Sundarbans Forest Division (SFD).

The tigress was found dead with a nylon rope tied round her neck. Later, Station Officer Shaikh Shabidullah of Baniakhali Station retrieved the body of the tigress and sent it to Kashiabadi Forest Station the same night.

On Sunday morning, it was sent to Koira Upazila Livestock Officer Haripada Biswas for autopsy. After

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All set to hold Ijtema

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Preparations for holding the Biswa Ijtema at Tongi near the capital have been completed and devotees will start arriving at the Ijtema ground tomorrow.

About 95 percent work for preparing the ground is complete and volunteers yesterday were giving final touch to the huge canopy erected on 160 acres of land on the eastern bank of the Turag river.

A separate camp was set up at the northern corner of the ground to provide accommodation to foreign devotees. The camp has tin and bamboo-made fencing around it. Foreign devotees would be supplied cooked food at the camp.

Devotees from around 60 countries are expected to attend the Ijtema considered as the second largest congregation of Muslims next to Hajj.

The three-day Ijtema begins on

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PHOTO: STAR

Workers of Biswa Ijtema Managing Committee write signboards on the Ijtema ground in Tongi yesterday ahead of the second biggest Muslim congregation after Hajj, which is slated for a December 3 start.