

Government, ACC

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of a rule that has not yet been framed. The conflict was quietly brewing between the bureaucrats and the ACC since it came into being over assigning some Bac staff.

The conflict surfaced when an ACC letter, issued by ex-Bac director (administration and establishment) Lt Col Hannan Mridha, asked 13 secretaries of different ministries to provide information on the whereabouts of 1,028 motor vehicles that were purchased under different development projects.

The wording of the letter angered the secretaries, sources said. Besides, the Bac director is still serving as a 'reserve government employee', which means he cannot issue letter on behalf of the ACC, the bureaucrats argue.

The secretaries feel that the ACC undermined the image of the administration by implying that officials have gobbled up these cars, although, in reality, various ministries are using these cars, ignoring some government procedures.

The ACC thinks that in accordance with the law, these Bac employees are now ACC staff. Section 35 of the ACC Act and that the service of the officers and employees of the dissolved Bac will be vested in the commission after scrutiny in line with a rule.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan has been claiming since taking over office that the former Bac staff will continue serving the commission like they served the Bac.

Attorney General AF Hassan Arif in a letter on December 15 explained this rule to the ACC chairman after the latter enquired about whether the Bac staff are now staff of the ACC. The attorney general in the letter said that the act allows Bac officers and employees to work in the ACC from the day Bac was dissolved. They will continue in service until withdrawn by the government on the request of the commission under section 35 (2), he said.

The ACC later informed the Cabinet Division about the attorney general's interpretation. In response, the cabinet secretary in a letter said although the act vests all properties of Bac in the ACC, the staff have not been placed under it. "Therefore these employees should be treated as government's reserve officials and staffs," said Dr Saadat Hussain, the cabinet secretary.

Only the officials and staff who the commission will find qualified will work for the ACC, and "the remaining staffs will be considered as the government's surplus staffs", Hussain had also contented.

Earlier on November 24, the ACC chairman issued a circular assigning former Bac director MA Matin, a retired major general, as the director-general and secretary

of the ACC. Matin was already serving Bac on contract. The commission chairman in another circular on the same day also empowered Matin to run administrative operations and make decisions.

On December 8, Sultan wrote a letter to the Cabinet Division and the Ministry of Establishment notifying them of Matin's new assignments and asking for further actions on the matter. On December 11, the government cancelled the contract of Matin.

On December 14, the ACC chairman wrote to the Cabinet Division and the establishment ministry contending that the cancellation of the contract is apparently against Section 35 of the ACC Act and that it will hamper the ACC functions. He urged the government to rescind the decision.

On December 18, without commenting on the cancellation of Matin's contract, Hussain replied that all the ACC decisions should be adopted at formal meetings of the commission. It is necessary for Cabinet Division officials concerned to see the minutes of the meetings where the ACC took its decision.

Sources said the letters from the ACC chairman gave the impression that it was his individual decision, not of the commission, prompting the government to appoint acting secretary Reza-e-Rabbi as the ACC secretary on December 22. The commission did not accept his joining letter, sparking the conflict. A writ petition challenging Rabbi's appointment is pending with the High Court.

Sources said some decisions of the ACC were not taken by its commissioners at formal meetings, a fact which has reportedly provided a section of Bac officials with vested interest the opportunity to influence a commissioner or the chairman in making those decisions.

For example, the ACC letter on the motor vehicles was sent without informing or consulting Commissioner M Maniruzzaman Miah. Miah reacted angrily to the sending of the letter which he knew off from newspapers the next day.

Sources said Miah had earlier expressed his reservations about assigning former Bac officials to specific ACC responsibilities without formulating a rule and organogram for them. Confusions over authority in the ACC further surfaced last week when Lt Col Mridha in a letter, which the commissioners did not know about, asked the ACC public relations officer not to talk to the press without commission's consent.

This prompted Miah to issue yesterday an official notice that said all officials should inform the commission before issuing such letter.

Sources pointed out the ACC has decided to shift its office because it felt that some corrupt Bac officials are very active at the Segunbagicha office.

The government on Sunday approved creation of posts of personal staff of the chairman and commissioners of the ACC.

Plan to link

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update the national building code to save large structures from earthquake effects.

The old part of Dhaka city is most vulnerable to damage and casualty in case of any massive earthquake as there is hardly any open space left for its residents to stand and take shelter, the meeting observed.

The meeting stressed the need for raising awareness among the general people of preparation and ways to save lives during natural calamities. The experts observed that had there been necessary forecasting system, the December 26 tsunami could have been predicted well before it struck.

The experts told the meeting that though the country was not affected seriously by the recent tsunami, it should be on alert to any such disaster, particularly earthquakes.

Despite the faint possibility of a tsunami, the country should include it in its comprehensive disaster management programme, they said.

The representatives from meteorological department told the meeting that the project to set up four new observatories would be complete by June this year.

Move taken to introduce

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Representatives of scientific research organisations, chamber bodies, banks, financial institutions, non-governmental organisations and others concerned are on the task force, formed at an inter-ministerial meeting with Environment Minister Tariqul Islam in the chair.

Many of the participants said the move to eliminate polythene failed due to lack of proper initiative of the government.

Organisations and individuals engaged in devising alternatives to polythene bags alleged they were not getting support from the authorities for marketing their products and that government policies greatly discourage them to go on with their job.

At the meeting, Principal Scientific Officer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission Dr Mubarak Ahmad Khan displayed some alternatives to polythene shopping bags, which were made from urea fertiliser, potato peel, scale of fishes and sea lichen.

He said these environment-friendly shopping bags could be produced using the same

machines which produced polythene bags, and there is no chance of unemployment of workers to polythene factories.

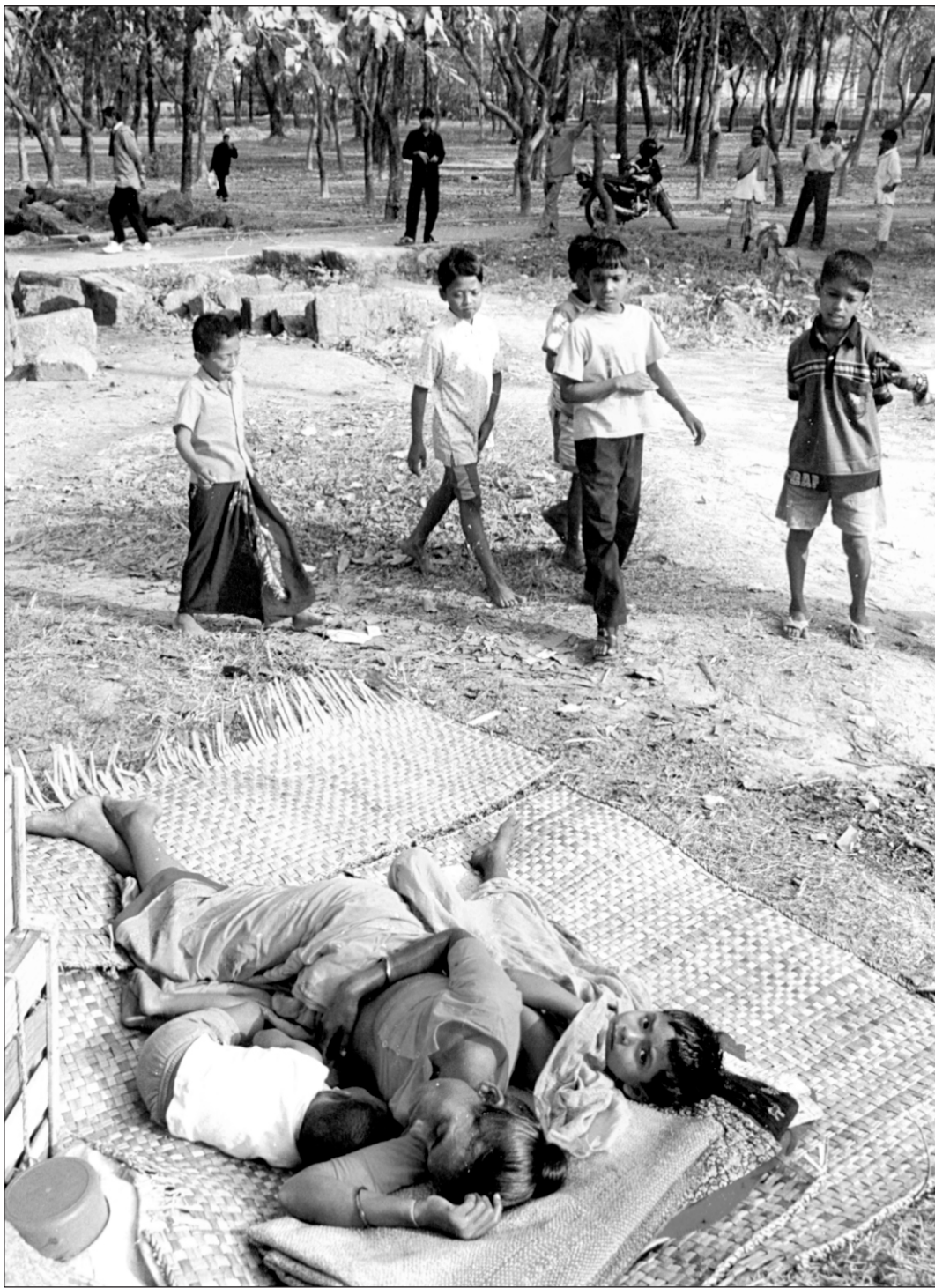
He urged the meeting to take up the technology the commission innovated to eliminate polythene bags.

The participants agreed to hold a scientific presentation of the products where representatives of the government and private entrepreneurs will be present, sources said.

Jute and Textile Minister Shajahan Siraj said the BJMC mills and factories are ready to produce alternatives to polythene shopping bags if they find a viable technology for that.

Environment Minister Tariqul Islam stressed alternatives to polythene must be cost effective, environment friendly and long lasting.

President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) Saiful Islam reiterated the business community's support for the ban on polythene bags and said their producers must opt for alternatives if they are cost effective and economically viable.



Living under the open sky.....A destitute woman along with her two children lies on the ground in Suhrawardi Udyan in Dhaka yesterday.

JS body

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colleagues which one is true and why is the Independence Day observed on March 26? He said the fact is that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed independence of Bangladesh on March 26.

He presented a 1971 intelligence report of US Embassy titled Civil War in Pakistan sent by John J Pavele, Jr, Captain USN and Major John B Hunt in support of his contention.

The report says, "Pakistan was thrust into civil war today when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed the East wing of the two parts of the country to be 'the sovereign independent people's republic of Bangladesh'. Fighting is reported heavily in Dhaka and other Eastern cities where the 10,000-man paramilitary East Pakistan Rifles has joined police and private citizens in conflict with an estimated 23,000 West Pakistani regular army troops."

Khan also presented a book 'Witness to Surrender' written by Siddiq Salik, a Pakistani and public relations officer of Pakistan Army. Salik in his book wrote "when the first shot had been fired the voice of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came faintly through on a wave length close to that of the official Pakistan Radio. In what must have been and sounded like a pre-recorded message, the Sheikh proclaimed East Pakistan to be the People's Republic of Bangladesh".

The full text of the proclamation was published in Bangladesh documents released by the Indian foreign ministry, he said. "This may be my last message. From today Bangladesh is independent. I call upon the people of Bangladesh wherever you are and with whatever you have to resist the army of occupation to the last. Your fight must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is expelled from the soil of Bangladesh and final victory is achieved," the text says.

Committee Chairman Md Helauzzaman Talukdar Lalu told the opposition legislators that officials of the NCIB as well as the education ministry will be asked to appear before the committee in its next meeting and clarify the issue.

The four-party alliance led by the BNP is alleged to have changed historical facts in some textbooks after it came to office in 2001.

Bhomra port

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continued for the third day yesterday. Hundreds of trucks with goods including perishable ones have been stranded at Benapole and Petrapole in India.

Five trade union organisations enforced an indefinite strike at Benapole land port to protest a five-fold hike in godown tariff.

16 DCC

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re-tendered on January 9 as no-one had submitted a tender.

It has however been alleged that, in connivance with ward commissioners, only ruling party men could buy the tender documents.

In response, DCC Chief Estate Officer Abu Taleb said the markets were allocated through tenders and DCC is expecting to earn around Tk one crore and twenty lakh from the 16 cattle markets.

The cattle markets will be open for three days before Eid.

BTTB mobile puzzle

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will also find the call charges higher, according to Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the telecom watchdog.

One local operator offers a rate of as low as Tk 0.75 per minute during off-peak hours for calling a customer-chosen phone of the same company.

The BTTB has offered a one-time subscription fee of Tk 4,500 for a SIM card without a phone, while at least two private operators offer connections with handset at Tk 4,000.

When asked about the high call tariff, senior officials of the telecoms ministry said the BTTB has been given the mandate to run the mobile phone project only as a 'commercially viable enterprise' and the government would not allocate more funds to run the company. The BTTB would not be commercially viable if it offered a lower rate, they believe.

The ministry has already established Teletalk Bangladesh Limited, a fully government owned company, to run the cellphone service.

Talking to The Daily Star, senior officials of the private operators said the cost of business especially in telecommunications service sector is higher in Bangladesh because of what they consider to be 'exorbitant' taxes on telecoms equipment. But telecoms experts believe the private operators are doing brisk business despite the high cost of business.

Private operators usually refrain from disclosing their financial statements to the press as those are not listed with the stock exchanges. But sources told The Daily Star that one private operator's net profit jumped

more than 52 percent during 2003 while another company contributes 35 percent to the total revenue of its parent company abroad.

Inspired by the booming cellphone market, global telecommunications companies are considering buying stakes in Bangladesh companies because of the potential huge profitability. Egyptian Orascom, Nowregian Telenor increased its stake in GrameenPhone while SingTel is looking for stake in a company.

The parliamentary standing committee on the telecommunications ministry had recommended a lower call tariff for BTTB's mobile phone in order to create a competitive environment in the country's telecom sector.

Many believe that lower call rates of BTTB could force the private operators to be competitive. Conversely, fixing a high call tariff for the state-owned mobile phone service would compel people to pay more in comparison to regional operators despite our low per capita income. Indian private operator Reliance, for example, offers a rate of Rs0.40 per minute.

The World Bank, which had provided funds for the development of the country's telecommunications sector, did not favour the launching of a cellular phone by a public operator. It criticised BTTB for its non-corporate structure and substandard service and suggested restructuring.

The telecoms minister has however said that BTTB would revise the call tariff after a market study before its commercial launch in February.

Kuakata Rakhains

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affected the community. The local land office claimed that all the land documents belonging to the Rakhain were damaged then, and it is alleged that this made it very easy for land to be stolen by people using fake documents.

However, now, the Rakhain community is loosing their para land.

"The Rakhain community has a practice that they don't sell para land which is considered common land - until the last family leaves the para," said Emong Talukder. "But now, once a family is forced to leave the para due to harassment, people make fake documents and occupy even this land," he added.

The new land survey, currently taking place, backs up what Talukder and the local people are saying. This shows that the quantity of land possessed by the Rakhain community in Monjo para has reduced in a period of about 10 years from seven acres to one acre.

The survey also shows that the number of Rakhain families in this para has reduced from forty families to just five.

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Patuakhali district Prashanta Bhushan Barua acknowledged that land-grabbing does take place but told The Daily Star that it happened equally to the Bengali majority community and the Rakhains.

"We do get complaints from the Rakhain community about harassment. But we also get it from the Bengali community as well," he said. "If any person comes to us, whether he is Rakhain or Bengali, and raises questions about land-grabbing we address it very seriously."

Some Rakhains allege that the level of harassment greatly increased after the present government came into power. "Situation has never been quite so bad," one young man told The Daily Star.

The increased value of the land may be led to the recent land-grabbing spree. "In the last two or three years the price of land has increased many fold and this is what has lured some vested quarters to grab their land," one local Bengali hotelier said.

The Rakhain community first settled in the Kuakata coast in the 1780s when 50 families crossed the sea by boat from Arakan coast now part of present Myanmar. The ancestors of present Rakhain community came from Then dou, Menang and Choufru area of Arakan.

In 1784 settlement, the British government gave each family 22 acres of land.

In mid 1960s, the number of Rakhains in Patuakhali and Barguna districts totalled nearly two lakhs and this has reduced to about 32,000 today.

Tsunami death

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In Sri Lanka, 29,729 were confirmed killed by the tidal waves, while more than 16,000 people were injured, the president's office said. A further 5,240 are listed as missing.

In Thailand interior ministry figures on Sunday put the death toll at 4,993 -- 2,461 foreigners, 2,232 Thais and 300 whose race could not be determined. The number listed as missing had fallen sharply to 3,810 compared with 6,424 previously.

In Myanmar at least 90 people were killed, according to the UN, but the real toll was expected to be far higher.

At least 75 people were killed and another 42 were confirmed missing in the tourist paradise of the Maldives, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom said.

Sixty-eight people were dead in Malaysia, most of them in Penang, police said.

In Bangladesh a father and child were killed after a tourist boat capsized in large waves, officials said.

Fatalities also occurred on the east coast of Africa where 176 people were declared dead in Somalia, 10 in Tanzania and one in Kenya.

Transport fares

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buses and 75 paise for mini buses.

Saiful Alam, president, Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity yesterday told The Daily Star that buses were "currently taking far less than the BRTA fare rate."

He said that they will sit with the Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association, another government recognised national body in the transport sector.

Khaza Golam Morshed Pintu, assistant general secretary of Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association said they will have an internal meeting today on this issue and will decide from when they will start taking the increased fare from the passengers.

The river transport leaders told The Daily Star they have put forward a proposal to the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) for increasing the fare.

For journeys less than 100 kilometers, they have proposed a fare rise of often paise from 75 to 85 paise. Journeys over 100 kilometers would increase from 64 to 75 paise.

M Kollimullah, president of the Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger vessels) Association told The Daily Star that the authority is yet to respond.

"We will start taking higher fares within the next couple of days. We hope that our proposal will be approved by the BIWTA authority tomorrow. But we will not wait for that approval as we are now carrying passengers whilst having to pay the higher fuel prices," Kollimullah said.

Syed Monwar Hossain, director, port and traffic, BIWTA said that the Authority was looking over the proposal.

However, he said although the owners proposed to increase fare by 30 percent they would not allow more than a 10 percent increase.

JN Dixit dead

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The pipe-smoking former diplomat, born in 1936, was a central figure in the Congress-led coalition government that took power last May and had an illustrious diplomatic career.

Paying tribute to Dixit, seen as a main architect of India's foreign policy in the era after the Cold War, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described him as a "close friend" and a "wise strategist."

"The nation has lost a true patriot, a great diplomat and a wise strategist," the prime minister said.

Dixit was pulled out of retirement after Congress won election to serve as national security advisor.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia also yesterday expressed her deep shock and grief at the sudden demise of Dixit.

"I am deeply saddened to know about the passing away of Mr. JN Dixit, National Security Adviser to your Excellency," Khaleda said in a message of condolence to her Indian counterpart.

She said Bangladesh recalls the immense contributions of Dixit to strengthening the Bangladesh-India bilateral relations during his assignment in Dhaka in the 1970s, and more recently in his capacity as the National Security Adviser.

Dixit, who wrote a number of books, was a prime mover in pushing forward a nascent peace process with longtime rival Pakistan where he earlier served as India's high commissioner.

He was also involved in ongoing border negotiations with China.

Before his retirement as foreign secretary a decade ago, he had also served as ambassador or high commissioner to Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Former colleagues G. Parthasarthy and Muchkund Dubey described him as a brilliant diplomat.

One of India's top nuclear scientists, Anil Kakodkar, called Dixit's death a "big loss to the country."

"Dixit had been a strong support to our nuclear programmes. He was very knowledgeable and knew all the nuances of foreign affairs," Kakodkar, chairman of India's Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, said.

Dixit played a vital role in steering India's foreign policy in the early 1990s soon after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, New Delhi's longstanding friend and Cold War ally. (AFP/BSS)

PWD staff

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Leaders of Bangladesh Public Works Employees Union (BPWEU), PWD Diploma Engineers Association (PDEA) and Public Workers Engineers Association (PWEA) urged the prime minister to intervene and take necessary steps to find out those conspiring against the PWD.

They held that creation of such cells would taper the scope of work of the PWD, throwing into uncertainty the future of 18,000 employees and another one and a half crore people who are indirectly involved with the department.

They also threatened tough movement including rally, strike and sit-in demonstration if the decision of cabinet committee is not immediately withdrawn.

The PWD is responsible for all construction, repair and maintenance under different ministries and directorates except for Bangladesh Railway, Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board and the postal department, Abdul Mannan, president of the BPWEU, told the rally.

But different ministries including the education ministry and directorates have been creating engineering cells or "mini PWDs" in violation of the rules of business, he added.

"Some problems may be there in the department but it should not be closed down...." said Azizur Rahman, president of the PDEA.

Omar Faruque Chowdhury, president of the BCS-PWEA, urged the policymakers to take effective steps to address the grievance of the PWD staff.

"The PWDs of all countries including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and China are responsible for all government construction, repair and maintenance works, but

BDR foils

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the BDR, however, questioned the BSF version, saying had they been Bangladeshis, the Indian border guards should have legally handed them over through immigration check post.

BDR Captain Kazi Zahir confirmed the incident and said they have beefed up security on the border to resist any further push-in attempt.

1,500 ADP

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1,600 such projects which will be drafted into the next year's ADP for a three-year term.

The ministry has informed other ministries of the decision and how it will be complied.

In the first year, the TIYP will specifically cite the budget, both development and revenue, required for its projects and indicate how many more budgets will be required in the next two years.

The finance ministry also plans to have a combined budget for at least four ministries from the next fiscal year, which will outline both revenue and development spending. The four ministries are education, social welfare, women and children affairs, and agriculture.

The government is mulling over the move to fulfil a World Bank condition for releasing third tranche of the Development Support Credit.

17 Iraq security men

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American-backed government and scare voters away from the polls. Iraqi leaders say the insurgency also seeks to provoke sectarian civil war.

The al-Qaeda Organization of Holy War in Iraq led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, behind most of the attacks since a US-led invasion in 2003, has vowed to "slaughter" Iraqis it brands collaborators with foreign occupiers.

And Osama bin Laden and Islamist groups have pledged to wreck the vote as part of a holy war.

Despite that, Allawi promised Iraqis in a New Year's Eve broadcast that new security forces backed by US-led troops would be capable of doing the job.

Yesterday's first explosion in Baghdad hit a roadblock about a kilometer (half a mile) from the main offices of Allawi's Iraqi National Accord bloc just minutes before the party had been due to hold a news conference to announce its slate of candidates.

Aides said Allawi, a secular Shia who heads the interim administration, was safe and had been nowhere near the scene.

"Most of the casualties have been among the security forces manning the checkpoint. No one senior from the Iraqi National Accord was hurt," a senior Iraqi official told the news agency.

Police commanders said the bomber had been driving a taxi, a method used before by insurgents to avoid raising suspicion.

After a loud explosion that rocked the capital, ambulances rushed to the scene, where wounded lay on the ground as police fired warning shots in the air to clear the area.

the cabinet committee decision here is the first of its kind in the world," said Syed Mahfuz Ahmed, secretary general of the PWEA.

"Delay in fund allocation and legal complexities over land are the main causes for the PWD's failure to complete tasks in time, but the cabinet committee did not consider these aspects," Abdus Samad, administrative officer of the PWD, told The Daily Star.

The staff took out a procession after the rally was over.

Judge expresses

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cause of her embarrassment.

On June 27 last year, three candidates of the July 1 by-polls in the Dhaka-10 constituency, including Abdul Mannan of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, filed a writ petition seeking a government directive to deploy troops at all polling centres.

The HC then asked the government to deploy army personnel at all centres, and issued a rule on the government to explain why it should not be directed to deploy members of the armed forces in line with the Election Commission decision.

After the by-polls, defeated candidate Mannan brought contempt charges against four civil and military high-officials for violating the court directive on army deployment and filed a petition with the bench of Justice Wahab and Justice Zinnat.

The four officials are Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamal Siddiqui, Home Secretary Omar Farooq, Defence Secretary KM Ehsanul Haque, and acting Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Brig Gen Ilyas Iftikhar Rasul.

Counsel for the petitioner advocate MK Rahman and Additional Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali were present in the court yesterday.

BNP begins confce

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and 405 from ward level, of three districts-Thakurgaon, Dinajpur and Panchagarh--have been invited to the first conference.

All the representatives will be given an audio cassette and five books each containing speeches of late president Ziaur Rahman, founder of the BNP, information about Bangladesh politics, country's agricultural development and prospect, government's role in alleviating poverty, and opposition's "negative programmes blocking government activities".

Meanwhile, letters containing the 18-point agenda have been sent to 49,823 participants of the conferences for their