

Dhaka fails to probe

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"An entrenched climate of impunity, hampered by police corruption and torture occurred on a regular basis," it added.

The report said violence is a pervasive element in the country's political environment and continues to undermine democratic concepts and practices. The judicial system was hampered by lengthy pre-trial detention, corruption and a large judicial case backlog, mentioned the report.

"The government restricted freedom of speech, movement, assembly, political association and religious freedom. In June, the main opposition party, the Awami League, ended its boycott of Parliament, though it alleged that it is prevented from exercising parliamentary prerogatives," it said.

The US report said violence against women and discrimination against indigenous people and religious minorities was ongoing.

Referring to Ahmadiyya sect, the report said the government succumbed to pressure by some politically-affiliated religious parties and banned the publications of the members of the Ahmadiyya sect. "But by year's end, there was some improvement in government efforts to protect the Ahmadiyyas," it observed.

It said child labour and abuse of child workers was widespread. Appreciating Bangladesh's government, the report said the government renewed its focus on trafficking in women and children for the purpose of prostitution and forced labour, and moved aggressively and successfully to arrest, prosecute and convict traffickers.

"The US human rights and democracy strategy in Bangladesh aims to strengthen democratic institutions, transparency and accountability to citizens, and respect for the rule of law and human rights," the report said.

"To do this, the United States seeks to reform political parties, increase informed citizen political participation, strengthen local government, improve police and military professionalism."

The United States encourages better governance, a reduction in corruption, promotion of religious tolerance, and reduction in violence against women and trafficking, as well as improve women, children and workers rights, the report added.

After release of the report in Washington DC, Secretary Condoleezza Rice said, "This congressionally mandated report details the many ways the United States is working to advance the cause of freedom worldwide.

"As this year's report describes in detail, we are working tirelessly to support democracy and human rights in every country where these principles are not completely fulfilled," she said.

Rice said, "America's belief in human dignity and human rights will guide our policy... Working together with our friends and allies in the community of democracies, we can indeed forge a path toward freedom for all persons around the globe."

On the South Asia region, the report said, "Throughout the region, torture and illegal detention by security forces remained widespread, eroding public trust in government authorities. Sectarian tensions exploited by home-grown and foreign terrorist groups, extremism and ineffective legal systems threatened peace and stability."

Rampant corruption in South Asia perpetuated inefficiency and often blocked the administration of justice, leading to further abuses against members of the most vulnerable communities, such as women and minority religious and ethnic groups. Trafficking in persons remained a significant problem in the region.

Millions of people were recruited through force, fraud or coercion into servitude or the sex trade. While there were differing levels of commitments from the governments of South Asia, many took encouraging steps to address these issues, particularly in trafficking in persons.

Zahiruddin Khan

FROM PAGE 1
He left behind his wife, two sons, two daughters and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan is one of his cousins.

Zahiruddin Khan was born in Chittagong in 1936.

He was managing director and chairman of AK Khan Group of Industries, chairman of AKTEL, Bengal Fisheries Ltd and Coats Bangladesh Ltd.

He was also founder chairman of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association and founder director of Investment Corporation of Bangladesh. He served as a Chairman of Sonali Bank and IFIC Bank.

He held the position of the president of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry for two consecutive terms from 1975 to 1978.

Khan also played an active role in the liberation war in 1971.

He joined the BNP and was elected member of parliament in 1979.

Zahiruddin Khan became a member of Khaleda Zia's cabinet as the planning minister from 1991 to 1993 and industries minister from 1993 to 1995.

As industries minister, he promoted the innovation of green jute pulp for producing paper and fabric.

His Namaz-e-Jansza will be held at Gulshan Azad Mosque after the Asr prayers today.

Qatar emir

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will be accompanied by Qatar Foreign Minister Shaikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al-Thani.

Al-Thani will hold talks with Khaleda and meet President. Iajuddin Ahmed before his departure on April 14.

Officials here told the news agency that the Al-Thani-Khaleda talks would focus mainly on investment in potential sectors in Bangladesh and recruitment of more Bangladeshi doctors, nurses and workers.

Earthquake

FROM PAGE 1
At least two fires were still smouldering in Gunung Sitoli. From the air it was possible to see about 1,000 people who had gathered in a large field in the town.

The epicenter of the quake measuring 8.7 on the Richter scale was just 320km from that of the December 26 quake which sent giant waves crashing into 12 nations, killing over 273,000 people.

Indonesian officials said at least 430 people had been confirmed dead on Nias and Simelue islands off Sumatra. But Vice President Yusuf Kalla told the BBC that reports from Nias indicated 1,000 to 2,000 people had died.

Other officials said the dead numbered in the hundreds, not thousands.

Indonesian Red Cross said yesterday more than 1,000 people are estimated to have died in Indonesia's Nias island following a massive earthquake there.

"About a third of Gunung Sitoli, the main town in Nias, is reported to have undergone the heaviest damage. It is estimated that more than 1,000 people in Nias island died," the Red Cross said in a statement.

Sweden's foreign ministry said two of its nationals were missing on Nias.

Rokanuddin for nonpartisan president in caretaker rule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) yesterday proposed that a neutral person acceptable to all parties should be the president during the three-month period of the caretaker government to hold general elections.

"The incumbent president will have to resign along with the prime minister and other ministers with the dissolution of parliament, because he is elected on a political party ticket," Rokanuddin Mahmud said while addressing a discussion in the city.

"A person having no links to any political party should be made president for the three months during the caretaker administration," he proposed.

Awami Jubo League, youth wing of the main opposition Awami League, organised the discussion, which was also addressed by a number of senior AL leaders.

AL leaders addressing the discussion said that reforms in the caretaker government system are a must to ensure neutrality of the interim government as well as the president.

The opposition leaders mainly pointed at the president's power to control the defence ministry during the caretaker government's three-month period. The armed forces usually maintain the law and order during the polls and the president controls their deployment.

AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu said a neutral caretaker government alone cannot ensure a free and fair election as long as a partisan president heads the interim body with adequate power and room to manoeuvre the polls.

Awami League leaders Tofail Ahmed, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Jubo League General Secretary Mirza Azam also addressed the discussion chaired by Jubo League President Jahangir Kabir Nanok.

AL leader

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Babu, Alam, Shameem, Faruk, Santu, Abdur Rashid, Sujon, Aynal and Aslam.

Of the accused, Babar was arrested while Abdur Rashid was killed in violence, Alam was absconding, and others were on bail.

Mamta Uddin, a freedom fighter and former AL lawmaker and district vice president, was murdered at Darapara in Lalpur upazila on June 6 last year.

Accused Babar Ali Babu confessed under Section 164 that he along with several others killed Mamta at the dictat of AL leader Anis, it was said in the charge framed under Sections 302 and 34.

AL leader Anisur Rahman, a Dhaka-based industrialist, hired a group of seven men at Tk 2 lakh to murder Mamta. Rahman had developed an enmity toward Mamta after he had failed to receive a nomination for the Lalpur-Bagatipara constituency during the last parliamentary polls.

The police and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) investigated the case twice and pressed charges against the AL leader and the seven BNP workers.

Following a no-confidence petition on the charge sheet by the plaintiff of the case Abdul Kalam Azad, the victim's brother, a judicial probe found the 13 men involved in the murder. The case was then shifted to the tribunal as it was considered sensational by the home ministry.

Special PP Ketabuddin moved the case for the state while advocate Shakhawat Hossain Shawkat and Parvez Zahedy pleaded for the accused.

The tribunal will hear the witnesses in eight consecutive days starting May 10.

EC objects

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holding a free and fair election. It then asked Mohiuddin, a mayoral candidate of the main opposition Awami League-backed Nagorik Committee, to refrain from launching fresh development projects and publicising those in the run-up to the mayor election of May 9.

The press release said that in a meeting preparatory to the upcoming election, the EC yesterday discussed this among other issues.

The release, however, did not say anything about EC decisions regarding allegations of unusual increase in voter number, relocation of polling centres and transfer of government officials by the ruling coalition after the publication of the election schedule.

A meeting source said that the EC has asked the Returning Officer (RO) to probe all the allegations filed by the Nagorik Committee, and report back to the EC in three or four days.

The CCC in a notice published in local daily Danik Pubokon of March 26 said the corporation has approved 169 development projects for eight wards in the Double-mooring Thana. Primarily, a project worth Tk 5 lakh will be implemented at each of the wards. The rest of the projects will be implemented in phases. The corporation has already invited tenders for the development projects, the notice said.

Following the notice by CCC, ruling coalition's candidate State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin filed a complaint against Mohiuddin accusing him of breaching the election code of conduct.

CTG MAYORAL POLL

Mohiuddin vows city govt

Declares 40-pt programme

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong City Mayor and Nagorik Committee candidate ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury yesterday pledged to establish a 'City Government' to live up to the expectations of the city residents without 'taking a single penny from the government.'

Mohiuddin, also general secretary of main opposition Awami League's Chittagong City North unit, declared a 40-point set of programmes for the next five years as he eyes reelection to office and asked for help to implement the programmes to make Chittagong one of the modern cities of the world.

"If you subscribe to my 40 points and believe I can live up to your expectations... then I ask for your valuable vote to implement them and present a beautiful city in the next five years," Mohiuddin told the rally at Laidighi Maidan, organised by Nagorik Committee in what was his first major showdown ahead of the May 9 Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) elections.

He said he would extend the city area to 120 square kilometres from the existing 60 square kilometres, set up mini power plants to relieve the citizens of erratic power supply and outage, ensure supply of drinking water to all wards, establish a 'Centre for Aids Treatment and Research' and rehabilitate sex workers.

He also promised to set up a modern 'pharmaceutical factory' on city's Sagarika Road, develop the Tk 500-crore 'Satellite Town' project on 11-acre land with assistance from South Korea, construct a 'Garment Village' on 1,000-acre land in Fateyabad area for promotion of the ready-made garment industry, launch a 'City Circular Train Service' from Faujdahat to export processing zones and the city to ease traffic congestion, build a two-way road network from Patenga to Kalurghat along the banks of the river Karnaphuli and expand railway communications from Dhohazari to Cox's Bazar.

The programmes also include setting up of a Tk 500-crore tourism centre at Patenga, modernisation and expansion of Chittagong port, construction of a five-star hotel at Tiger Pass Hill and a deep seaport at Moheshkhali and Kutubdia and inclusion of 10,000 more madrasas and schools under the MPO.

Industrial growth

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"I think the government should not be in any kind of commercial business since it believes in market economy," Nizami told journalists.

About a recent decision of the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC) increasing the price of its sugar by Tk 200 per ton, he said this will not influence the market as, despite the rise, the price set by the sugar mills is still below that of imported sugar.

He said the BSFIC mills might not reach the production target because of last year's floods that seriously affected sugarcane production in the country.

Despite this adversity, he told the newsmen, the annual loss incurred by the state-owned sugar mills tremendously came down to Tk 10 crore in 2005 from Tk 147 in 2001.

He claimed that seven industrial units out of nine under Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) made a profit of Tk 6.65 crore in the last seven months (from July to February) of the current fiscal.

In the last four years since 2001 till February 2005, the minister said, the BSEC-owned enterprises had made a profit of Tk 75.25 crore and

also paid Tk 308 crore to the national exchequer under different heads.

This year, he said, production of salt under the supervision of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation might cross the target of 11.50 lakh tons as, until March 24, the production was 6.35 lakh tons.

Nizami said the Bscic is developing the proposed leather city at Saver at a cost of Tk 175.75 crore that will house 195 industrial units. These units will have modern waste-treatment facilities.

Claiming that the country has passed the peak seasons of fertiliser smoothly, the minister said the BCIC produced 13.50 lakh tons of urea fertiliser until February which met 95 per cent of the production target.

"The government has given utmost priority to developing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as part of its key strategy for the industrial sector," the minister told the press.

He mentioned that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) would provide \$ 50 million in technical assistance for the development of SMEs.

Bangladesh sleeps

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centres in Alaska and Hawaii in the US started sending wake-up calls to South and South East Asia.

The countries that received tsunami warning included Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Malaysia and Mauritius.

As the news of the 8.7 magnitude tremor and warning of a tsunami hogged the international media headlines, BDNEWS correspondents from Dhaka and in the districts tried to reach the deputy commissioners (DCs) and superintendents of police (SPs) between 11:00pm and midnight to know about their preparations.

But none of the DCs and SPs in the coastal districts could be contacted as their staff or families said the top district officials had gone to bed.

"We do not know anything about earthquake or tsunami. Sir is asleep," a man who identified him as Monir Hossain, a staff at the residence of the DC of Patakhali, Prasanta Bhushan Barua, told BDNEWS when reached by phone from Dhaka.

The wife of the DC of Khulna hung up the phone only saying that the deputy commissioner was asleep.

Explaining why the SP of Khulna, Mahbubur Rahman, was not attending to a phone call at his house, a staff at his office said the police super was sick. The staff said he did not know of any step to evacuate people living on the coastal fringe.

No one picked up the phone at the houses or offices of the DCs and SPs in the coastal districts, including Noakhali, Feni, Bholia, Bagerhat, Satkhira and Cox's Bazar.

"Just think how vulnerable we

Dead chickens
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"First the government should enact a law setting the standard for restaurant food," he added.

Different restaurant owners from Mirpur and Pallabi yesterday said that they had long been selling chickens, and hardly anyone from DCC comes to check the quality of their foods.

"They don't come here often. They last came here a few months ago and went away after we gave them some money," said a restaurateur from Pallabi yesterday.

Mipur police said that they plan to start an operation today to nab the crooked restaurant owners and Azad's associates.

The police sources also said that a syndicate of poultry farm and depot employees and restaurants are involved in the dishonest trade.

4 die in road crash in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Four passengers of a Rangpur-bound bus from Kurigram were killed and 25 others injured in a road accident at Borail under Kaounia upazila yesterday morning on Rangpur-Kurigram highway.

Eyewitnesses and police said the bus (Rangpur Ja-13) fell into a roadside ditch trying to avoid collision with a van.

Of the four dead, three were identified as Moshlem, 46, Bimol Chandra, 43, and Azizul, 45.

The injured were rushed to Rangpur Medical College Hospital. The condition of four passengers was stated to be critical.

The driver and conductor of the bus fled the scene. A case was registered with Kounia Police Station.

Train drivers avert head-on collision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Two passenger trains were saved from a disaster on the western side of the Brahmanbaria Railway Station at about 1:50pm yesterday.

According to sources, the Titas Commuter Train left the Brahmanbaria Rail Way Station for Dhaka through the Down Line. At the same time, another train, the Nasirabad Express bound for Chittagong, was rushing to Brahmanbaria on the same line from the opposite direction.

Luckily this was noticed by both train drivers, who at once braked and stopped the trains at head-on positions on the down line near the Brahmanbaria Poyrtala Rail Gate here.

At least 10 panic stricken passengers were injured when they jumped out from the train onto the ground.

The staff of Brahmanbaria Poyrtala Level Crossing said the incident was the result of negligence on the part of the Station Master of the Brahmanbaria Rail Way Station.

Due to the incident, road communication on the Comilla Sylhet Highway stopped for half an hour through Brahmanbaria.

Rights group

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termed as alarming the government's move to give Rab a military mould.

"According to the law, Rab is only a part of the armed police force and is tasked with recovering arms and ammunition, nabbing criminals and assisting the general police force," said the statement signed by Sultana Kamal, executive director of ASK.

"Rab was not formed to perform war and we should not forget the basic difference between the tasks of the police and the armed forces," the statement added.

Creating an environment of indemnity for the Rab, the government has been investing in it since its formation with a view to giving the elite squad a military shape, whereas the reform of the police force has been overlooked over the years, ASK observed.

"The way Rab has been safely killing people in 'crossfire' does not indicate that their life is under threat while on such operations," ASK statement added.

Giving Rab a military shape would create imbalance among different other forces rather than serving to improve the country's law and order, ASK statement said.

Wasa

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others protested the drive, Wasa officials said.

A Wasa survey with the assistance of the district administration earlier detected 23 illegal structures that also include multi-storied buildings.

Wasa sources said the drive aims to demolish illegal structures on eight canals, including the Kalyanpur canal, on a priority basis this year. The rest are Begunbari canal, Mohakhali canal, Zirani canal in Rampura, Katasur canal in Mohammadpur, Ramchandrapur canal in Mohammadpur, Ibrahimpur canal and Gulshan-Banani Lake.

An inter-ministerial meeting at the LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry in February decided to remove all sorts of encroachment on the canals in and around the capital for smooth functioning of the drainage system. The Wasa drive is in pursuance of that decision.

Joynal Abedin, who owns a plot beside Kalyanpur canal, said, "We also want an end to illegal encroachment but the canal should be properly demarcated".

The drive began without any prior notice following 'hefty payment' by some interested people, alleged Altaf Hossain, general secretary of Janata Housing.

Of the 43 canals in the capital, 26 are recognisable. But only 19 of them still have lean flow due to encroachment. Wasa officials said.

The Wasa has 65-km canals, 225-km pipelines and nine-km box culverts for drainage. Its drainage system covers about 140 square kilometres inside the city flood protection embankment.

Pro-govt panel

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grounds that the voter list was 'illegal'.

Pro-Awami League Sammilita Ainjibi Samonny Parishad has regretted the boycott.

As many as 551 of the 1,550 voters cast votes on the first day to form a 14-member executive committee of lawyers of the highest court.

The seven-hour voting began at Supreme Court Bar building at 10:00am amid uncertainty over participation of the pro-BNP panel.

Bikalpadhara Bangladesh O Swadhin Samomana Ainjibi Parishad is also contesting the polls.

The pro-government panel decided at an emergency meeting at 10:30 Monday night to boycott the election protesting participation of 493 SCBA members in the voting.

They continued campaigning until Monday evening, however.

The announcement of their boycott came from a press conference at SCBA South Hall at around 10:30am yesterday. But they are yet to officially inform the election commission of the decision.

Ruling BNP's Secretary for Law and Member Secretary of Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Oikya Parishad Joynal Abedin read out a written statement at the press conference where the panel's presidential candidate and former Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali and some other candidates were present.

Asked about their not informing the election commission about the boycott, Razzak told reporters later: "We don't need to inform the election commission about it."

"Although we continued the campaign until the evening, we unanimously decided at 10:30pm (at Monday's meeting) to boycott the election," he said.

After the start of the election, the Panel submitted an application to the election commission for stopping the election and said the election will be illegal if it is held with an illegal voter list.

The High Court granted two weeks' time to the Bangladesh Bar Council chairman to scrutinise the voter list and the election will be illegal if it is held during this time, the application contends.

Members of the Panel said they submitted the application at 9:40am but Chief Election Commissioner Amzad Hossain told reporters: "I got

Dead man

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to the hospital and was given an 'injection' only to be declared dead again, they added.

A mob then ransacked the hospital and assaulted four doctors, disrupting its activities for about six hours.

At least 20 people, two of them journalists, were injured when police charged batons to disperse the mob.

According to police, Wali Ullah Oli, 45, president of the district unit of Tempo Owners Association, was admitted to the hospital at about 10:45am for chest pain. About 40 minutes later, three attending doctors declared him dead and the hospital authorities issued a release order.

At about 1:00am, relatives of the 'dead' giving him a funeral bath found that he was moving his limbs. The stunned relatives immediately took him to a local clinic and then to the general hospital.

Wali was admitted to the hospital for the second time. Four doctors examined him, gave an 'injection' and again declared him dead at about 2:00pm, locals said.

A mob including Wali's relatives, members of the association and workers then attacked the hospital, ransacked at least 14 doctor's rooms and assaulted four doctors including the resident medical officer.

Police rushed to the spot and charged batons on the mob to bring the situation under control. Later they arrested two brothers and one sister of Wali.

When contacted, Civil Surgeon Dr SM Abu Tahir said an autopsy of the dead body would be conducted tonight (Tuesday night). No case was filed late into the evening.

Rupali Bank

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bank will be handed over to the private sector, with the government retaining a few shares," the commission chairman said. He however refrained from elaborating the details.

Chowdhury said the government currently holds about 96 percent shares of the bank, with four percent stakes already been offered to the public.

On what would happen to the present human resources of the bank once it is privatised, Chowdhury said the new private-sector management would decide the issue.

An official said, in a bid to bring in parity, the commission might also ask the current public shareholders to offer their stakes to the public.

At yesterday's meeting, the working group informed the privatisation commission about the various steps it has taken so far and will take in the future to privatise the bank, working group convener Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor Nazrul Huda told reporters.

He said the commission will carry out the necessary tasks for privatising the bank with the technical assistance from the working group.

The government earlier appointed British consultant firm GBRW Ltd as a financial adviser to Rupali Bank to ensure a smooth privatisation.

GBRW to date has submitted 15 reports to the government including a human resources review, a report on fair value of all freehold and leasehold property, a financial report on recruitment benefit schemes and a privatisation option report.

The firm has also submitted an information memorandum on the bank.

the application after the casting had begun."

On the boycott, he said, "It is not my job to see who are taking part or who are not. I am here to ensure a fair election and see how the voters can cast their ballots properly."

Member-candidates of pro-government panel Abu Shams Khaliquzzaman and Nasrin Aktar filed a writ petition with the High Court (HC) on March 22 and an HC division bench issued a rule on Bangladesh Bar Council and the SCBA to show cause why the voter list should not be declared void and why they should not be directed to amend the list.