

# Stop crossfire killings, now

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Most disadvantaged individual. The modern state, through the organ of the judiciary, has been given the power to put someone to death. We underscore the fact that the judiciary is the only organ of the state, not the executive or the legislative, that enjoys this exceptional power. The judiciary has been allowed this power under very special circumstances and that also after a thorough and lengthy process of law has been completed. Why has so much pre-condition been imposed on the judiciary before it can exercise its power of sentencing someone to death? Simply because life is the Creator's greatest gift to Humankind and the "Right to Life" is the most fundamental of Universally recognised human rights, and once taken it can never be restored.

The "crossfire" phenomenon has demolished our claim to be a society under law. Today we have a special force that has been surreptitiously empowered to kill. Not only can it kill at will, it can literally pick up anybody with significant, insignificant or no criminal record and put him (so far there has not been any woman) to the so-called crossfire and kill him. We have also learnt that people who have been otherwise killed in custody is shown to have died in a 'crossfire', as if that legitimises a murder. Please keep in mind that this is not a section of the law enforcement machinery that has gone astray and is on a killing spree on its own without the knowledge of the authority. No, this is a specially constituted and trained body that has been given the 'go ahead'E by a democratically elected government to kill people with a high record of criminal activity. If this is not a declaration of no-confidence in the judiciary by the government then what is? This method of killing criminals has been consciously, deliberately and willfully chosen to bypass the judicial process. Can we still claim to believe in our constitution?

Private explanation of the policymakers is that a combination of inadequate investigative capacity, lack of forensic and related infrastructure, corrupt police and public prosecutors, lack of protection of the witnesses, and malpractice by a section of the lower judiciary have made it impossible for criminals to be tried, punished and jailed through the ordinary court of law. Endless lists of criminals caught by the police, on occasions after extremely difficult operations who have got bail and resumed their criminal activities, are presented to argue that through the normal process criminality cannot be contained. Any suggestion for police and judicial reforms is seen as a prolonged and cumbersome process to reduce crime rate in the short run.

We in the media know the reality and to an extent sympathise with the authorities. We have also acknowledged from time to time that serious crimes actually came down to an extent after the launching of Rab. That is perhaps why the media in general has been rather muted in their protest at these extra-judicial killings -- for a time. But things have gone too far and time has come to put an end to the denigration of our judicial system.

# New pay scale may

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candidates to the civil service, in competition with the private sector," observed WB Country Director Christine I Wallich in a letter to the government. It will also affect the motivation of the existing senior government officers, she added.

The letter also accompanied a WB policy note on public administration and governance policy to Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui sent at the end of June. Wallich wrote, "More efficient and transparent forms of compensation, including monetizing in-kind benefits and aligning pay more closely with comparators in the rest of the job market could enhance 'incentives and motivation'."

The policy note pointed out that although the increase in compensation awarded by the government is somewhat less than that recommended by the pay commission it will provide some increase in real terms, particularly at the employees level.

This is because nominal increases in monetary compensation for most existing employees through annual increment in basic pay and allowances since FY98 appear to have almost offset the 43 percent cumulative inflation in the intervening period. But, excluding pay progression due to time scale, selection grade or promotion, the real pay of officers has significantly eroded, by 2 to 25 percent, since the last pay revision in FY98. In comparison, the real pay of most categories of employees has increased modestly, by 1 to 6 percent, and declined but marginally for others, the note elaborated.

Again, the ratio of basic pay at the highest to the lowest levels declined from 40:1 in the early 1970s to 10:1 in the first half of FY05 and 9.6:1 under the new pay scale. While the ratio of monetary compensation declined from 25.5 in FY72 to 6.4 in the first half of FY05, and this could come down to around 6 with the full implementation of the pay scale and allowances, the note elaborated.

Therefore, it said, "The compressed compensation structure provides inadequate pay differentials to reflect differences in skill and substantive job challenges, and will need to be addressed to enhance the government's ability to attract the 'brightest and the best' candidates to the civil service, in competition with the private sector."

In this context, the WB advised to restore the gap between the mone-

Since June 2004, 378 persons' lives have been taken illegally. In other words they all have been killed in the so-called crossfire. As explained in routine and repeated police handouts, a crossfire death occurs when police or Rab, after interrogation of a suspected criminal, take(s) him to a given address to recover arms, and the waiting fellow criminals of the person in custody open fire in which the 'criminal' in custody dies. This story has been repeated 378 times.

Believing the police version means that we have to accept that on each occasion they foolishly stepped into a trap that was laid down by the associates of the criminal in custody. We are also to believe that our criminals are far better informed about the movements of Rab than Rab about the criminals. Otherwise how can they ambush Rab and the police all the time? We are also to believe that Rab and police made the same mistake 378 times? If yes, then what sort of professional force Rab and police are that they habitually step into traps of the criminals? Are they so foolish, so incompetent, so incapable of learning from experience? And how come in the ensuing exchange of fire nobody else dies except the criminal in custody?

To go straight to the point, the crossfire stories are lies and everybody involved knows it. The authorities are so brazen about telling these lies that they don't even bother to change any version of it knowing fully well that they sound increasingly unbelievable as they recycle the same story over and over again. When official government bodies, such as the police or Rab, brazenly lie(s) in full public glare, and repeatedly so, it reveals a level of disrespect for the public intelligence that can only be compared to a Goebbelsian mindset which subscribed to the view that repeating a lie many times makes the public accept it as true.

Allowing an official entity to circumvent the legal system, especially giving it power to carry out extra-judicial killings, is the most unthinkable act any government, especially one that has been elected by the people, can commit. It is only a matter of time that such power will lead to its most gross and vile use. Tragically we have already seen dangerous signs of that. According to our own investigation, 14 people, among the 378 so far killed, have had no or only minor criminal records. Of the others, there are many who are criminals but not deserving the death penalty. We have also seen examples of fabrication of facts to cover up killings of the innocent.

The case of the college student, Masum, is most tragic and illustrative. He had no criminal records of any sort and his name appeared in no complaint with any of the police stations of the city. Yet, on July 8th, at about 9:00pm he was picked up by a plainclothes policeman from a family function from a community centre in Mohammaddpur. His parents waited till 11:00pm at the centre and after that spent the whole night searching for him. In the morning, the parents heard on the TV news that Masum died in a "crossfire". We

judicial system.

tary compensations given by the government and the private sector to a reasonable level. It should be such that the best candidates would accept a trade off between higher income in private sector and higher job security, prestige, authority and post-retirement benefits in public service.

The policy note also noted that the improvement in compensation must be accompanied by more scrupulous attention to merit in recruitment and job performance in promotion, as otherwise the incentives will have little effect on performance outcomes and the resources devoted for this purpose will be wasted.

It suggested revising and updating the existing system of evaluation and promotion based largely on the ACR system.

In her forwarding letter, Wallich said structural improvements are also needed in employee composition and skill mix, performance evaluation and the link between pay and performance. She supported initiating a service commission as proposed by the pay commission to resolve the issues of job grading and inter-cadre career advancement.

## Bodies

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body as extra fine, Shamsuddin told The Daily Star last night.

The full compensation will be given on the basis of court verdict, he said.

The Bangladesh mission in Saudi Arabia filed a case with the Saudi court for compensation to the fire victims.

The families of each victim may get Tk 3-5 lakh as compensation after the court verdict and it may take two to three months, sources said, adding that Saudi police is keeping watch on the owner.

The expatriates' ministry sent the bodies to the respective village homes on microbuses and made arrangement for their burial at its expenditure.

The dead are: Rafiqul Islam, son of Saidur Rahman, Narail, Mohammad Nurun Nabi, son of late Shafiullah, Sonagazi, Feni, Mohammad Nizam Uddin, son of Abu Saleh, Laksham, Comilla, Abdur Rob, son of Waziullah Ramganj, Laxmipur, Abu Naser, son of Abdus Sattar, Senbagh, Noakhali, Khurshid Alam, son of Belayet Hossain Chatkhil, Noakhali, and Mohammad Nasir, son of Habib Mian, Brahmanbaria.

had heard of such killings by the so-called 'Death Squads' of Argentina, the SAVAK under the late Shah of Iran, the Mosad of Israel, the KGB during the Soviet era, etc. But seldom, if ever, under a democratic government.

We have heard views that to oppose killings by Rab and the police is to indirectly support the continuation of the reign of terror by the criminals. This is the worst and most unthinking argument that there is. Nothing can harm a democratically elected government more than a policy that condones illegal killings, subverting the judicial process. Whatever gains there is in the short run, it comes at the cost of demolishing the legal edifice, vital institutions, long-established norms and public trust in the system. What we need to do is to reform and modernise the police and the judicial system. We need to invest resources in providing logistics, training and increase manpower to the police and the lower judiciary. But we see very little sign of these being done.

In conclusion we want to say, as unambiguously as we are capable of, that extra-judicial killings as a means of uprooting crime is not a sustainable option, even if we set aside the issue of subverting the judiciary and moral repugnance. Stop this crossfire killings immediately before it crosses all limits and puts the government on a head on clash with all legal norms and the civilised world. Bangladesh still enjoys significant goodwill and respect internationally as a democratic country. Continued extra-judicial killings will destroy that.

## Mobile court

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Authority and the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, started checking the vehicles at around 10:00am and within three hours seized 30 vehicles under the Environment Conservation Rules 1997.

The fine for this offence is Tk 5,000 for the first time and if committed second time it is Tk 10,000, said Mohammad Jahangir Alam, a magistrate present at the site.

Traffic sergeants flagged down the speeding buses and other vehicles on the Manik Mia Avenue and instantly checked the computer findings. They compared it with the chart that contains Bangladesh standards and sent it to the magistrate for legal action.

The court found that the buses, covered vans and maxis they stopped were emitting black smokes several times higher than the permissible limit of 65 points, polluting the air.

The magistrate said that they were puzzled to see plenty of false documents that were produced by the drivers. He said, "Most of these buses are totally unfit for plying the street. I think we should also think of writing them off after on-the-spot fitness check".

The joint drive will soon resume.

## 11 militants

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The diaries carry a number of "scary lessons" including details on arms, ammunition and detonators.

Golam Mustafa, a 4th year student of Arabic at Rajshahi University, took the pseudonym for the training programme, said the investigators.

Hailing from Shekherbitha in Jamalpur district, Mustafa, 25, was a resident of Madar Bus Hall of RU and was engaged with the Ahle Hadith Jubo Shanga, the youth front of militant linchpin Asadullah Al Galib's Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab).

An investigator said, "No other except Mustafa among the 11 has shown so much similarity with the handwriting of the diary. Yet it would be too early to declare him definitely as Aslam."

The police sent his handwritings to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for expert examination whether he is the writer of the diary.

### A NEW DANGEROUS ISLAMIC OUTFIT

Studying the recovered diaries, the investigators reached the primary conclusion that the "group is more dangerous than any other Islamic outfits in the country."

The militant group has members from Bangla Bhai's Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and his spiritual leader Abdur Rahman's Jamatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB), and Asadullah Al Galib's Ahab.

Enamul, the team leader, had been involved with the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) before he joined the JMJB nearly a year ago. Golam Mustafa and Ibrahim Hossain, both RU students, claimed themselves as ICS activists.

### FOREIGN TECHNIQUES

The sources said the militants have learnt 12 types of 'field crafts' (combative term of physical exercise) while the police and army are taught only 10 types.

The militants are trained on movements in war fields, ways of passing nights, how they should behave in unwanted situations, what they should do if shot or faced with police interrogations etc.

"They are even skilled to sense presence of others while sleeping and they have instructions not to possess unnecessary information about colleagues so they can avoid disclosure of facts under pressure. These techniques are used in foreign countries that are facing wars," said a highly placed source.

"They surely gathered at the house for a combat training. A few of them are newly recruits," said Rajshahi SP Abdullah Al Mahmood.

He, however, refused to make further comments, saying, "Let our investigation complete. We are paying most sincere attention to the matter."

# Five souls in dowry

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But the in-laws did not welcome Nupur, as they found she came from a poor family without any dowry. Her mother-in-law Aina Bibi and her daughter started to press her incessantly to get Tk 1 lakh and, as she failed, started to torture her with her husband playing the comfortable role of a silent spectator.

Aina forced Nupur to send her son Rabbi to Nupur's mother, while she was carrying another baby. After the second child was born, Aina gave it away to taxi driver Keherman of the same village.

Nupur and her mother sought help from the local union parishad chairman and other influential neighbours, who rescued her child after 17 days.

As a pretext to force her to leave the family, Aina then spread a cooked story that Nupur had stolen a gold chain. But Nupur resolved to stay on.

While Nupur was lying on a bed after a round of quarrel on June 27, her husband poured kerosene on her body and set fire to. As a burning Nupur started to cry for help, Hanif closed the door from outside.

Nupur found a pitcher in the room, poured the water on her body and extinguished the fire. But it had already burnt her upper body from the waist.

As neighbours rushed in, Hanif opened the door and started scolding her for attempting to commit suicide and put him in trouble. "Why don't you just return the gold chain you stole and leave the house?" he shouted. They confined Nupur to that room without any treatment.

Somehow, she managed to escape two days later and went to her mother's house at Vatpara village. A neighbour took her to Savar Upazilla Health Complex, from where she was transferred to the DMCH on June 30.

A case was filed against Hanif, who, though on the run, threatened Nupur's sister Shanta of dire consequences, saying he would kill Nupur if she returns to his house.

The dire poverty even forced Nupur to leave the hospital on Monday, letting go the only treatment available to her. Her mother, sister and son had been attending her at the DMCH. But as Mariani had not a penny in savings and could not earn any, being at her daughter's side in the hospital, the four of them had been going without adequate food, accommodation and other amenities.

So, though Nupur's burns were on the mend, she could no longer bear the troubles her family members had been going through for her sake and left the DMCH on Monday. Survival of her family seemed to be more important to her than the remedy of her painful burns.

### ASTORY THAT NEVER ENDS

Nupur's story is not a unique one. Sufia Begum, 25, Shilpi Akhtar Mariam, 25, Aleya Begum, 33, and Shamima Aktar, 20, all coming from the lower echelon of the society, fell prey to their husbands' and in-laws' greed and cruelty in the same way.

Assisted by his brothers and sister, Selim Sheikh poured kerosene on and set fire to his wife Sufia while she was sleeping with her two sons -- 2-month-old Imon and three-year-old Sumon -- at their house at Dinanathpara village in Lohagara, Narail in October last.

They tortured her throughout the next day, asking her to bring Tk 50,000 from her uncle's house. As she failed, they kicked her out.

Some neighbours rescued her. She was treated at Narail Health Complex for seven months and then transferred to the DMCH in the first week of May. Doctors had to cut off all the fingers of her left hand and two of the right hand, as those were beyond cure. The remaining three fingers have become stiff.

With serious burns on most of her

body, her skin has shrunk and the legs and hands have become rigid. Doctors said she needs plastic surgery and a long time for a full cure.

Another dowry victim, Shilpi Akhtar of East Zura in the capital, woke up in the early morning of May 29 to find her husband Abdur Rashid standing near with a knife. "As I opened my eyes, he started to stab me indiscriminately," she told The Daily Star.

She was admitted to the One Stop Crisis Centre of the DMCH and was released after treatment in the last week of June.

Shilpi met Rashid in 1997 and married him in secret. Rashid then started to press her father Hannan Majhi, a poor security guard, for Tk 1 lakh in dowry. Shilpi also came to know that Rashid had married and divorced three women earlier, who had filed cases against him.

She said, "He started torturing me for the money and my father gave him Tk 90,000 until last year, but nothing could satisfy him."

Rashid demanded Tk 1 lakh more, as a court fined him the amount in a case filed by his third ex-wife. "As we failed, the torture became more intense," Shilpi recalled.

Zafar, husband of the fourth victim Shamima, demanded a large sum to secure a job abroad. But her father Noor Hossain failed to pay up the money. In the first week of June, Zafar locked Shamima in a room, poured kerosene on her and set fire to, burning the most of her body. She succumbed to her injury on June 10.

Aleya was burnt in the same way. Her husband, medicine trader Delwar Hossain of Kadamtala in Siddhirganj set fire to her when she was sleeping at around 2:00am on May 21 for her failure to pay him Tk 1 lakh in dowry.

With a 70 percent burnt body, Aleya is undergoing treatment at the DMCH. There is no one to whom she can turn for a shelter.

## Octane price

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resources," he said.

Mahmudur also said fuel consumption in the border areas is higher than in other areas because of smuggling. To stop smuggling, the energy ministry has formed a committee to measure the district-wise oil consumption, he added.

"If we find abnormal consumption in any border area, we will take action against the dealers concerned," the adviser warned.

The government on Tuesday raised the prices of octane to Tk 38 a litre from Tk 35 and petrol to Tk 36 a litre from Tk 35.

## EC

**FROM PAGE 1**  
EC's central database system.

The issue of preparing a fresh voter list has got much attention after the expiry of the tenure of CEC MA Syed in May. His successor MAAziz is now in favour of preparing a fresh voter list for the next general election.

Election to Women's Reserved Seats.

The EC also discussed the election to women's reserved seats in parliament following Tuesday's Supreme Court judgement on the matter.

The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs yesterday in a letter referring to the judgement requested the EC to take necessary steps for holding the election in time.

The EC Secretariat yesterday tried to collect the certified copy of the judgment that cleared the way for holding the election.

The EC will take the decision about holding the polls in a couple of days, sources said.

# Law ministry sits

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"But we hope the issue will be resolved immediately," he said. "Otherwise, we'll call a general meeting to decide our next course of action."

"As the president has already said steps need to be taken, it will not be wise to engage Faizee in judicial works," he said.

The SCBA also sent a letter to the prime minister, chief justice and the law minister urging them to take immediate steps to put an end to the controversy and thrash out the problems arising out of the issue.

"An uneasy and delicate situation has been prevailing in the judiciary due to the controversy over Faizee's certificate and age," reads the SCBA letter.

Faizee did not have the original LLB certificate when he took oath as judge, the SCBA said in its letter, adding that although the Chittagong University issued a provisional LLB certificate, its syndicate later decided against issuing the original certificate because of flaw in the marks-sheet. The letter maintains that that decision is still valid.

The judge's year of birth in his SSC certificate is 1963, but he mentioned it to be 1965 when he applied for Bangladesh Bar Council certificate for legal practice, the SCBA letter points out.

In October last year, national dailies Prothom Alo and Bhoror ran reports that results of law graduation examinations of Faizee were tampered with, prompting the SCBA to boycott Faizee's court.

The justice temporarily withdrew Faizee from his bench and the controversy-ridden judge did not sit in any bench for more than five months.

Faizee's father filed a contempt case against the newspapers and the High Court convicted the media. The newspapers have appealed against the High Court verdict and the case is now pending.

The SCBA members continued boycotting Faizee's court on the ground that the genuineness of Faizee's certificate has not been proven. Bangladesh Bar Council then cancelled Faizee's certificate of enrolment, a basic prerequisite for anyone to practise law.

The SCBA stepped up its move-

ment and staged demonstrations at Faizee's court and at the entryway of the chief justice demanding Faizee's removal. Pro-government lawyers and government law officials, meanwhile, threw their weight behind Faizee and took a stand against the SCBA.

On May 23, the High Court in an unprecedented ruling banned agitation on the Supreme Court or any other court premises as well as boycott of the courts.

## 700 Bangladeshis

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"They entered Bolivia in an irregular, illegal manner," Soliz said without providing details. "We believe Bolivia has become an open door for the entry of people who may pose a security risk for our country or others," he said.

Authorities are investigating whether Bolivia is being used by a network of human traffickers organised by Bangladeshis, according to a report.

The prosecutor's office can hold the Bangladeshi nationals detained for 48 hours without filing charges, but Soliz said they will almost certainly be expelled.

In the afternoon, when a group of journalists drew attention to the news of arrest of 27 Bangladeshis in Bolivia, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said, "we are losing track of it."

"Capitalising the simplicity of our people, some unscrupulous manpower agents are depriving them. But, things are to be worked out soon."

"A specific policy in this regard is needed," the foreign minister said, adding that the cabinet committee on expatriates' Welfare Ministry will sit by next 15 days.

He said a secretary-level inter-ministerial committee, headed by Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, will submit recommendations in the meeting to fight against the problem.

"We are expecting a solution soon so that our people will not get into trouble," Morshed said.

## World Bank

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During his visit, Patel will call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and hold talks with Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and other senior government officials on matters of mutual interest.

He will also exchange views with local government representatives, private sector and business leaders, representatives from civil society and NGOs, and the development partners on the country's development agenda and how the World Bank group can best assist Bangladesh in achieving its poverty reduction strategy goals.

## 7 journos

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Choudhury, editor of the Shikol, and Samsul Alam of the Grameer Kagoj.

The GD filed with Kotwali Police Station says BNP men on July 13 attacked Abdul Khaleque and his followers when they took out a rally in Mirpur upazila. Khaleque is likely to contest the next general elections from Kushtia-2 constituency as an independent candidate.

The attackers injured at least 50 people and set fire to 14 vehicles without any instigation.

Several local and national dailies had covered the matter, which angered the lawmaker and his men.

## Latifur Rahman

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necessary to ensure free and fair elections.

He said strengthening the EC is essential as it plays the principal role in holding the general elections, while the caretaker government just assists it in doing that.

He suggested for the government and the opposition line-up to discuss the reform issues in parliament to settle their disputes.

## 200 agitating

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Sujon, Julekha Akter Jahan, Shaiful Islam Shamim, Liaquat Ali, Rashedul Islam and Maqbul Hossain addressed the meeting.

The garments leaders condemned the police attack and demanded withdrawal of cases filed against the workers. They urged the management to meet the 'legitimate demands' of the workers.

A tense situation was prevailing in the area. Additional police have been deployed.

## Ex-cabinet

**FROM PAGE 16**  
that requires working with impartiality, transparency and fastness, finance ministry sources said.

Zakir Ahmed Khan, whose tenure as the finance secretary ends on July 31, will join as the alternative executive director of the World Bank.

The finance ministry has chosen Commerce Secretary Siddiqur Rahman to replace Zakir Ahmed who has shown his competence as the finance secretary by helping to build up a satisfactory foreign exchange reserve and maintain macro economic stability.

## Rab nabs 2

**FROM PAGE 1**  
During interrogation at Rab-7 headquarters in Patenga, Salam admitted their leader Mahmudul Chowdhury has an AK47.

The Rab raided Life Care Centre in Panchlaish Residential Area in the city and nabbed Mahmudul at 10:30am yesterday. Both the arrestee have claimed they are Shibir cadres of notorious Shipon-Babul Bahini in Fatikchhari.

The elite force took the Shibir men to the house of Waiz Mohammad Chowdhury in Fatikchhari and seized the arms and ammunition.

Rab sources expressed surprise at how 17 bullets manufactured at the BOF could reach the hands of criminals. They suggested immediate probe into the 'leak' at the ordinance factory.

Meantime, the Rab in another raid yesterday morning found an arms manufacturing factory and seized one LG, 17 bullets and equipment at Ramu upazila in Cox's Bazar.

## Bepza, BJMC

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Bepza executive chairman said they did it to clear the place immediately just by shifting the machinery from one shed to another.

Besides, other jute mills can use the machinery if they find those still useful, he added.

But BJMC Chairman AFM Solaiman Chowdhury differed on this point, saying, "It was not prudent from Bepza's part to float tender for a job that BJMC had already awarded to other parties."

BJMC now fears facing suits by the awarded parties who have their huge bid-money stuck for a long time, Chowdhury told this correspondent yesterday.

Adamjee EPZ Project Director Shamsul Haq told The Daily Star that as they are getting very good responses from foreign investors in terms of setting up industries at the new EPZ, now their priority is to vacate the mill zones and prepare the industrial plots.

Adamjee EPZ is being set up on the large compound of the Adamjee Jute Mills that was set up in 1957 and closed down in June, 2002, after the nationalised industrial unit had incurred loss of Tk 13 billion since independence.

The EPZ on 295 acres of land will accommodate 200 industrial plots for 70 proposed industrial units with an investment of about 250 million US dollars. The annual estimated export target from this EPZ is 500 million US dollars.

Employment opportunities for about one lakh people will be created when the EPZ comes up, officials said.

# BNP moves to rid

**FROM PAGE 16**

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, however, declined to make any comment on the meeting and referred to LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan for the decision of the meeting. But Mannan Bhuiyan could not be reached despite repeated attempts.

Syed Moazzem Hossain, also Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal general secretary, said there is a provision in section 494 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) that the government can withdraw cases if they are found baseless after proper investigation.

The decision to accept the applications or withdraw the cases is absolutely up to the court, he added. "Hearings of many cases against the BNP men have begun, and these will be surely settled through legal battle in the courts," he said.

On the BNP move, eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said it is possible to withdraw cases in an independent judiciary if they have strong grounds, but that should be dealt case by case, "not in a wholesale manner".

"The BNP move to withdraw the cases just one year ahead of the general elections is surely questionable and a political motive can easily be sensed," he said. "Why didn't the BNP take initiatives to relieve its leaders and activists in the last four years?"