

Rajshahi cops seek

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against the militants," said a police official expecting the order in few weeks.

"But the sedition case will not be strong enough as we did not find any firm evidence against them," said another investigator.

He explained that police judged their anti-state activities only through a diary and a few notes that carry 'restricted training lessons on arms, ammunitions and detonators'.

"Actually we had no right to arrest if there was no such diary with them. Discussing religion inside a house is virtually no offence. And gathering people from around the country just helps us doubt them," said the senior investigator.

The sedition case will finally keep the militants behind bars for a time and in course of time they will be released on easier punishment, said sources.

The JIC, however, also asked local police to continue investigation of the arrested militants.

But local police have no time to deal with such cases as they remain busy with other daily incidents, said several police officials.

The JIC on Monday sent back the militants after a seven day quizzing in remand, terming them to be men of militant linchpin and Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh chief Galib.

The JIC commented in forwarding

that the militants did not belong to Bangla Bhai's Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB).

They also said that they could not gather any more important information, but the militants should be charged with sedition for bearing exclusive combat training lessons.

They suggested two of the arrestees — Enamul and Golam Mustafa — should be put into detention.

Enamul was the principal accused in the case for murdering Yasin Ali of Kunapara Maria in Bagmara.

Bangla Bhai's men allegedly kidnapped Yasin and beat him to death, hanging him upside down from a tree in front of Kodapara Madrassa on June 29, 2004.

Police later withdrew Enamul's name, submitting a charge sheet for the case.

He used to lead a JMJB unit covering Jhargram, Jhinka, Bihanal, Kuliman, Modakhal and Kaliganj of Bagmara under Bangla Bhai's nephew Shahiduzzaman till his arrest with 10 others on July 19.

He along with Biplob and Golam Mustafa organised the training at one Mozammel's house.

Enamul, one of the arrestees, was found with JMJB leaders during their anti-outlaw operations, they said.

NBR agrees

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NBR and ACC to find out the number of tables a file has to go through and slash the number. It also proposed examining the laws governing income tax, VAT and customs with a view to simplify them where they are complex.

NBR Chairman in principle agreed to the ACC proposals. He said that six NBR officials have already been to ACC and the commission can take their help in carrying out the programme.

Mian told reporters after the meeting that NBR has claimed to have already brought down the number of stages in export-import. In response to the claim, he said he has proposed finding out ways to minimise the hassle exporters and importers still have to face.

Citing example of Singapore where papers relating to unloading of a ship are processed in just 20 minutes, he urged the NBR to think of speeding up the procedure.

After the meeting, Mian said one must admit the existence of corruption, and the way it is spreading must be contained for greater interest of the nation.

Meeting sources said NBR officials were reluctant to admit corruption within in the NBR organs, but some of the NBR officials said that computerisation can reduce the corruption in some cases.

Khairuzaman told the press that he have explained to the ACC about the functions of NBR and also discussed about the scope of irregularities in the organisation.

He said it is not possible to get rid of the trend of irregularities overnight. But discussion about devising a joint strategy to combat corruption will continue.

Tuesday Group

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conference room jointly organised by two poll observer groups—Brotee and Fema.

Beemsterboer said the foreign minister as well as the government is well aware about the foreign envoys' move to hold an international conference on free and fair elections. "We have already met the government, the opposition, Election Commission and NGOs and offered our wish to help the electoral system of Bangladesh to make it more credible and fair," he said.

After the seminar, the Dutch ambassador confirmed that they are going to arrange an international conference in Dhaka likely in November or December. "Preparation of the conference is going on with the supervision of the Canadian High Commissioner," he told The Daily Star.

On the purpose of the conference, he said, "We will review situation in Bangladesh and discuss international elections principles and standards."

On Tuesday, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan lashed out at the reported move by the Tuesday Group to hold an election seminar in Dhaka and categorically said the constitution of Bangladesh cannot be changed following demand of any other country.

"Foreign diplomats cannot bargain with a government like trade unions. Diplomacy is not a CBA job. No diplomatic norms allow a country to change the constitution of another country," he told reporters.

In that press briefing, Morshed also said, "I don't know about the Tuesday Group and its terms of reference, and don't know about the contents of their discussion. I've seen in newspapers that they are planning a seminar here."

However, it was learnt from a reliable source that in December 2004 the foreign ministry was first officially informed about the conference. Later in the first week of March this year, one of the envoys associated with the conference met the foreign minister and Law Minister Moudud Ahmed a few days later and informed both about the conference. The matter was also discussed with Foreign Secretary Hameyetuddin.

The Tuesday Group's move The Tuesday Group comprising Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States as well as the European Commission ambassador and the United Nations resident co-ordinator is going to organise the high level election conference in Dhaka likely in November or December.

The initiative has been taken with a view to facilitating a free and fair outcome at the next parliamentary elections in Bangladesh. The conference is expected to include more than 400 guests, both domestic and international, representing parliament, government, political party, civil society, business community and the media.

The conference, primarily technical in nature, will deal with the issues that include development of a reliable and transparent voters' list, listing and standards of conducts for election candidates, and management of polling centres.

Recently, a similar conference on holding fair election, monitoring and role of the election commission was held in Islamabad, Pakistan. The European Commission, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and delegates from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh attended the conference sponsored by the British High Commission.

British cops

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arrested during a search of a home in England's second largest city of Birmingham at 4:30 a.m. The man was shot with a stun gun during the search and police said they uncovered a package that was being examined by explosives experts.

Three other men were arrested shortly afterward at another home in the city, about 120 miles northwest of London.

Meanwhile, a group of 40 Afghans have been deported on a flight organised jointly by the French and British authorities, the interior ministry in Paris said yesterday.

The flight took off from Charles de Gaulle airport outside Paris on Tuesday evening carrying 25 Afghans detained in France and 15 in Britain.

The two countries announced recently that they would collaborate in returning failed asylum-seekers to their countries of origin.

Attacks change face

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finding fewer and fewer customers by the day - well to be exact by the night. That used to be a good time to ferry Londoners visiting Brick Lane to taste its unique characteristics of fun and intellectuality. But now many avoid those nightly sorties. In Salam's language, Brick Lane turns into a 'completely dead' place at night.

"The English and the Europeans, many of them young artists and would-be intellectuals, would hang around the restaurants at night and they would need cabs to go back home," said Salam. "Now they have almost disappeared. My drivers don't get calls to drop them."

Shane has a different version of the events that followed 7/7. "The English people want to take a ride in my cab because they think it is safer," he said. "I give them a reliable face."

But Salam seems to have lost that reliable face to many and wants to wait for a few weeks before taking a final decision about his business.

"Things are turning out difficult by the day," says Koyes Chowdhury, his driver. "I get more calls during the day from my customers. But that has not increased my business because I get delayed on the road because of the traffic jam caused by frequent road blocks put up by the police." And for cabbies like Salam who do not ply on metres but on a rate fixed by the public carriage office, there is no waiting charge for traffic jams.

Koyes still hoped for the night commuters, but that is also not materialising.

Like Salam and Koyes, 15 other

taxi companies owned by Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlet and around 1,000 cabbies are facing the same hazy future. One of them closed the shop a week ago.

Not only the lack of passengers, but the Bangladeshi cabbies also face a host of embarrassing questions from the English commuters. They will obviously first ask them if they are Pakis, as the Pakistanis are often referred to here. And getting a negative reply, they will want to know if they are Muslims and then the discussion will dangerously veer to the London attacks.

"Although I don't like to discuss all this I still have to respond to such queries," says Koyes. "Because keeping silent is even more dangerous."

Madhu, another Bangladeshi cabby working for Hoxton Car at Hoxton Square of North London, says he faces even more trouble from the police at night. He thinks his escorting a beard and fair complexion might make the cops curious.

"Last Wednesday, police stopped me at London Bridge at night and asked what I am doing there," he said. "They knew I am a taxi driver and still they did it."

Madhu too wants to sell off his car if business does not pick up soon. Because though business remains dull, he will still have to pay the usual fees and taxes 170 pounds a year in road tax, 80 pounds a week in insurance, 80 pounds a week to the cab company, 100 pounds a year to the public carriage office and 300 pounds a year in fitness charge.

Future of a fresh

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Asked, Justice Abdur Rouf, who served as CEC during 1990-95, said they made the voter list in 1995 in accordance with law. Talking to The Daily Star, he said the ordinance clearly says that a fresh list must be prepared before any election.

The EC Secretariat was ready a few months ago to start work on a fresh voter list. But the immediate past CEC MA Syed did not take a final decision about it and preferred to wait for takeover by his successor, MA Aziz.

But Aziz, who is a judge of the Appellate Division, pointed out the legal matter and said there is no provision for preparing a fresh voter list in the 1982 ordinance that suggests revision of the existing one.

Aziz said this on July 20 after an EC meeting that took the decision to arrange dialogues with political parties on voter list. After the meeting, the CEC and two election commissioners examined the ordinance and expressed similar views.

"The laws will have to be amended to prepare a fresh voter list. We will ask the government to amend the law if majority of the political parties wants a fresh list," the CEC said on Tuesday at a dialogue with the political parties.

But at the same dialogue the CEC referred to section 19 of the Electoral Rolls Rules, 1982 and said there is no legal bar to preparing a voter list afresh. The comment contradicts his own and his two colleagues' views that the ordinance should be amended for making a fresh list.

Amid such a discord, the EC sit in dialogues with the political parties to seek their opinion on the issue, though it has turned into a farce amid boycott of most of the political parties including the main opposition Awami League.

WHAT THE LAWS SAY

On preparation of voter list, the Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 1982 says: for the purpose of elections to different elective bodies, there shall be prepared electoral rolls for each electoral area or constituency, as the case may be, upon registration of voters.

Senior officials of the EC Secretariat said the EC decisions to prepare the last four voter lists were made on the basis of this provision.

Four out of the five CECs served during 1982-2000 were justices but no question had been raised against the decision of preparing fresh lists.

"It is the constitutional duty of the election commission to prepare voter list for elections," a senior EC official said on condition of anonymity.

Officials said there is a provision in the ordinance for updating the voter list but it is not mandatory. "It depends on the EC's directives," said an official.

The provision says: the electoral roll shall, unless otherwise directed by the commission for reasons to be recorded in writing, be revised in the prescribed manner by reference to the qualifying date before each election to (an elected body).

WAITING FOR DECISION
The EC Secretariat is still waiting for a decision whether a fresh voter list will be prepared or the existing one will be revised. The secretariat has, however, prepared a budget of over Tk 200 crore for a fresh list.

He said it will need at least six months to prepare a voter list for the next parliamentary election, which is slated for early 2007.

B Chy, Kamal unveil

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commissioners under one chief election commissioner (CEC), which they considered necessary, although the constitution does not specify the number of commissioners, and for enhancing the performance of the EC under huge workload.

They suggested appointing impartial and competent persons as the CEC and the commissioners for the tenure between two caretaker governments after a discussion with the political parties and alliances.

The reform proposal said the EC will have full financial and administrative freedom from the control of the executive. Budgets for the commission should be approved according to its requisition and the commission should be able to spend independently.

The CEC should have complete independence to appoint and terminate its human resources.

The proposal said the new voter list should have to be completed three months before the election. Photographs attached to voter list, thumb impressions and passports should be considered as proof of identity of the voters. The voter identity card and casting of vote through electronic voting machine should be ensured in the future.

It proposed to raise the existing election cost limit in the light of reality.

The leaders said the mobile phone network should not be switched off during the election for the sake of countering vote rigging, preventing violence and to facilitate the members of the media and law enforcement agencies.

The reform proposals also include increasing parliament seats to 400 from the existing 300 and electing those 100 candidates through indirect election, conducting direct elections to women seats and making compulsory for each party to nominate 20 per cent women candidates.

To make the post of the speaker more non-partisan, the parties proposed that the speaker will have

to resign from his party after being elected to the post. He will be considered elected unopposed if he wants to take part in the next national elections and then he will be considered a neutral member of parliament.

On the eligibility of Justice KM Hassan as the next head of caretaker government, Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury said he had involvement with a political party.

On the resignation of Kader Siddiqui, president of Krishak Sramik Janata League, from the Jatiya Oikya Mancha, Dr Kamal Hossain said, "In democracy everybody has the right to join in and quit. Our Mancha is open for all."

He appreciated the gesture of Kader Siddiqui that he made no complaint against the Mancha after leaving it.

Firoze M Hassan, acting general secretary of Bikalpadhra, presented the written statement at the press conference. Oikya Mancha leader and Gono Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Member Secretary Commander (ret'd) Abdur Rauf were present among others.

Sajna's rejoinder

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"Needless to mention, the solid reputation and goodwill of Sajna build over more than a decade has been severely tarnished by such erroneous reporting by such established newspapers. This will definitely have a severe and detrimental impact on our future business. Sajna would request the respected media to rectify such erroneous reporting," said Sajna.

Sajna also welcomed an impartial investigation by the news media and publish its results. In this process, it said, Sajna would welcome any customer, specialist or interested party to visit its kitchen. "In fact, in the past, Sajna offered this privilege to visit its kitchen to distinguished customers from both home and abroad, embassies and firms."

Bravery

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Sayadabad Bus Terminal, kidnapped Rajib from just outside their house at WASA colony in Demra Tuesday evening. Rajib's father Abdur Rashid, who lives by washing buses at the terminal, alleged Palash's motive was to punish him for refusing to pay up Tk 4,000 in tolls four months ago.

Rajib, now under treatment at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH), said Palash approached him when he was playing with some other boys near their house at around 6:30pm.

Palash took the boy out of the sight of his friends, pointed a knife at him and asked him to put off his shirt, with which he blindfolded him. As Palash also gagged him with a handkerchief, he faints.

"When I regained my sense, I found myself lying on the sand," Rajib went with the dreadful tale, "Soon he sat on my chest and started cutting my throat."

"I tried to fight, but failed. Nobody responded to my cries. I thought he will kill me and instantly I decided to pretend to be a corpse," he told the press in a weak voice lying on a DMCH bed.

Next morning, a rickshaw-puller passing by the place saw the boy trying desperately to get out of the sand and informed police.

Police sent him to Mitford Hospital, from where doctors shifted him to the DMCH.

A DMCH doctor said there are numerous four-inch by half-inch cuts in Rajib's throat. He said the knife used probably was blunt.

Rajib's father filed an attempt to murder case against Palash with Keraniganj Police Station.

2 Myanmar

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through the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, said locals.

BDR recovered the M-16 rifle and its 26 bullets, a G-3 rifle (usually used by Nato soldiers) and 25 bullets, a mobile phone set and documents of the guerrilla organisation.

Different guerrilla groups have been living in Bangladesh territory since the 1980s and operating their activities from the country.

A total of 51 foreign nationals alone were arrested from the Bangladesh-Myanmar border areas this year.

But it is not only foreigners who use the area as a safe haven. BDR raided the same spot on July 16 and recovered five AK-47 rifles and 1,600 bullets from a Bangladeshi national after a battle.

Along this year, 220 sophisticated arms, 40 anti-personal mines, four rocket launchers, a huge quantity of explosives, and more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition were seized from the region.

Describing limitations to cover the 288-kilometre border areas with only five border-observation-posts (BOP), the BDR authorities asked the government to extend the number of BOPs in the region. The regional commander of BDR, the deputy commissioner of the district and the sector commander (Chittagong) inspected the area in a helicopter on July 21.

Banks to fix

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journalists that a special mechanism will be adopted so that taka cannot depreciate further. But he did not disclose the mechanism.

However, sources said the ABB will fix certain rates of dollar exchange collectively.

Treasury managers of all banks will sit together today or tomorrow and fix the buying and selling rates of dollar," managing director of a private bank said.

Yesterday's meeting of the ABB also discussed the problem of some banks who are unable to pay against letters of credit (LC) because of dollar crisis.

It decided that the banks who have enough dollars will sell the greenback to the bank facing dollar crisis so that the image of banks with countries abroad does not suffer.

In the case of opening new LCs, the banks will first examine their dollar reserve and inform the central bank about it to ensure smooth monitoring of dollar market.

Tripartite

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the smooth growth of the primary textile industries," BTMA Chairman MA Awal told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said fabrics worth around \$1.5 billion has illegally entered the country in the last nine months, while annual local consumption of fabrics is worth around \$3 billion.

President Anisul Huq said, "We'll join the tripartite meeting at the ministry. We hope it'll help mitigate the dissension among the trade bodies."

"System loss is there, more or less, in every sector across the world. If any one is found guilty of wrong doings, he should be punished," Huq added.

"We want to work together to face the challenges of open competition in the globalised market," BKMEA President Fazlul Haque said.

Trade experts said, if the volatile situation caused by the wrangling among the BGMEA, BTMA and BKMEA continues, it will hit the potential of the country's garment industry real hard.

At a press conference on July 16, MA Awal alleged the trend of smuggling through the porous border, import on fake declaration and under-invoicing has posed a serious threat to the local textile industry.

Both the BMGEA and BKMEA, whose members import fabrics as raw material, sharply reacted to the allegation.

On July 20, the BGMEA gave a seven-day ultimatum, saying they would go for legal action unless the BTMA makes an unconditional apology for its comments.

Following the BGMEA move, BKMEA leaders on July 21 also came down heavily on the BTMA for the remarks.

Study shows voter

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politicians, economists, diplomats, foreign envoys and development activists.

Professor Wahiuddin Mahmud, also a noted economist, said, "There's no point in engaging over 100 political parties to decide whether to go for a fresh voter roll or revise the existing one. It rather should be a matter of ways to correct the voter list. And it all rests with the Election Commission to rectify the roll," he said.

Prof Mahmud referring to a Brotee study that says up to 65 percent of the existing electoral roll is flawed, said, "The voting is meaningless if this is the situation."

M Hafizuddin Khan, adviser to the 2001 caretaker government, said the CEC for nothing has involved the political parties in discussion on the voter list. He suggested the EC should update the voter list every year as part of its constitutional responsibilities.

The former adviser said, "We should focus on ways to strengthen the Election Commission as it is the constitutional body to conduct elections."

Describing the RPO (Representation of the People Order) as one of the finest laws, he said, "Unfortunately, in our country the election commission has never discharged its duties properly. It never made sincere efforts to execute the RPO to ensure free and fair polls."

He also criticised long delay in resolving the electoral disputes.

Prof Khan Sarwat Murshid said, "The caretaker government system will be irrelevant if we can have a powerful Election Commission."

Lack of trust among the political parties has contributed to developing the system of caretaker government, he added.

Adviser to the ruling BNP MM Rezaul Karim also stressed the importance of a strong EC in holding elections in a free and fair manner. He said, "The Election Commission has to be reformed. It must have the authority to recruit staff and prepare budget on its own."

All major political parties should sit down to discuss ways to make elections credible," said Karim, the ambassador-designate to Egypt.

Kees Beemsterboer, the Dutch ambassador to Bangladesh, referring to a recent comment by Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, said foreign envoys have no intention to interfere in internal affairs here. "We all are working to help Bangladesh make its electoral process more credible," he said.

Opposition Awami League leader AMA Muhiht in his speech questioned competence of some of the election observation groups. The former finance minister said he favours introducing electronic voting and Voters' Identity Cards to check false voting.

Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam said goals of elections have changed over the years. Now the aspirant lawmakers want to make profit, not serve the people.

The cost of losing elections has also risen drastically. Now to lose an election may mean losing personal liberty and wealth. It may also mean being subjected to political repression by the new ruling parties, he said.

The Daily Star editor made a strong recommendation for an independent secretariat for the EC and said that all returning officers should be loyal to EC's own cadre, not the deputy commissioners as it is done today.

Dr Atiur Rahman called on the poll observers to start working immediately under a long-term project for the next general election to be held in 2007.

AL lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor said honest people should come out to contest the elections to 'kick the black money holders and criminals out of the race'.

"Political parties have a great role to play in this regard by nominating honest people for the elections," he said.

Dr Badrul Alam Majumder echoed the opposition lawmaker's view and said even the most neutral caretaker government and the strongest EC will not suffice to hold elections freely and fairly if the political parties do not practise fair politics.

Shameen Murshid, chief executive of Brotee, and Muhammad Abdul

Matin, secretary general of Fema, tabled two separate reports on pourashava and parliamentary by-elections held in 2004.

India discloses

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to the people of bordering areas. He was speaking in Lok Sabha intervening in a discussion on an adjournment motion moved by Leader of the Opposition LK Advani on illegal migration from Bangladesh.

Patil said fencing the long and porous border with Bangladesh will be complete by next year and the government is in the process of setting up floating border outposts in riverine areas.

India is also considering a proposal of having a battalion of Border Security Force (BSF) from the existing 70km radius to 30km to enhance border vigil, he said.

He accused the opposition of unnecessarily seeking to create a "fear psychosis on the issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh". He also warned adopting "divisive tendencies" on the issue in the name of religion or language cannot help the country be united.

The tendency to use this issue as a vote bank politics is harmful, Patil added.

High-profile

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group, the government and the real estate firm.

The High Court rarely sees so many elite lawyers involved in a single case, with two former attorneys general (AGs), the sitting AG, two former law ministers and many a senior bar leader moving against each other.

Some of them with well-known political affiliation with the country's two major rival parties rubbed their shoulders in moving for one side or the other.

Former AGs Mahmudul Islam and AF Hassan Arif moved the petition on behalf of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela), with assistance from Bela Director S Rizwana Hasan, Iqbal Kabir and Tanjib-ul Alam from Dr Kamal Hossain's chamber.

AG AJ Mohammad Ali and DAG Adilur Rahman Shubbro represented the government, while Sigma Huda moved on behalf of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk).

Former law ministers Justice TH Khan and Abdul Matin Khasru, Bangladesh Bar Council Vice Chairman Rokanuddin Mahmud, Supreme Court Bar Association President Mahbubey Alam, Sirajul Haq, Azmamul Hossain and Barrister Tania Amir from Barrister Amir-Ul Islam's law firm represented Metro Makers and the plot buyers (added respondents).