

Speaker's PS

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opts out of the high-level meet, sources said.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar will not attend the CPA conference slated to be held between September 1 and 10 as the Jatiya Sangsad goes into session on September 8. But his personal secretary was included in the 10-member team, being shown as an officer to assist the delegation.

"The Fiji parliament and CPA secretariat will bear all expenses for four members of the delegation while Bangladesh parliament will pay those of the rest of the team," said a circular issued by parliament secretariat.

Besides, the parliament secretariat will have to count \$ 2,500 in observer fees for the three lawmakers joining the conference as observers, the circular read.

Mohammad Khalequzzaman, personal secretary (PS) to the speaker, is scheduled to leave Dhaka on September 2 along with the other members of the delegation. His wife and daughter will accompany him in the trip.

The PS and his family will also make a 15-day visit to Sydney, said the circular.

Talking to The Daily Star yes-

terday, Khalequzzaman, however, said he has yet to be sure whether to go to Fiji. "I have been included in the delegation because the speaker was earlier supposed to join the conference," he said.

Asked about taking his wife and daughter on the trip, he said they would not go with him.

The wife and son of Whip Zahed Ali Chowdhury, a member of the delegation, will accompany him on the trip to Fiji and Sydney, said a circular issued by the parliament secretariat.

The wife of ruling BNP lawmaker Mozahar Hossain too will travel with her husband to Fiji and the southeastern Australian city.

Regarding the costs of the trip, the circular said Zahed Ali Chowdhury will pay the travel and other expenses for his wife and son, but it did not mention how the expenses for the families of Mozahar and the speaker's PS will be met.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui yesterday left Dhaka for Fiji, taking along with him a senior assistant secretary of the parliament secretariat as a supporting staff.

Moudud says verdict

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present its views from constitutional point in the Supreme Court during the full hearing.

Ziaur Rahman never established any military law, rather came to power through "sepyo-people's revolution" on November 7, 1975, he said, adding that senior Awami League (AL) leader Khandker Mustaque Ahmed established military rule in the country on August 15, 1975 and the then parliament was also of the AL majority.

The members of Mustaque's cabinet were also of the AL, he noted.

Asked if the military rule is illegal, he said the argument should be on the constitutional protection, there should not be any question on the legality or illegality.

"Whatever there is in the constitution is legal," he said.

From March 25, 1971 to July 16, 1972, the activities that the then government in exile conducted were ratified and shown in the schedule of the 1972 constitution.

He cited the example of the 11th amendment when the chief of the caretaker government was Shahabuddin Ahmed, who was also the then chief justice of the country.

"We had to pass the 11th amendment to give validity of the activities of Shahabuddin Ahmed during the caretaker government," he said.

"We had to do it for continuity of

the state, government and the constitution. If it were not done, there would remain a vacuum. To run a country, there should be continuity of these elements."

"For this, the 5th, 7th, and 11th amendments were made."

On the instant stay of the verdict, he said, "We have done it so that no confusion among the people is created."

There are many examples that the petition was done overnight, he said.

There is also no legal problem in staying the verdict instantly, he noted.

The petitioner of the case on which the High Court gave the verdict went to the court to get back his cinema hall that he thought was abandoned during the military rule, but he did not want the declaration of the 5th amendment as illegal, the minister said.

"The court gave the verdict that the complainant did not ask for," Moudud said, adding that he received the information of the verdict at 5:45pm and no law officer neglected in informing the government of the matter.

The government's answer in details on the verdict will be given as soon as it receives the full copy of the verdict, he noted.

WB tags oil price

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direct condition of the WB. But the bank has been insisting on this point "not as a condition, more as a general concern," Ahmed explained, for the sake of what a WB document said a "satisfactory implementation of agreed macroeconomic framework under PRGF", one of the 14 conditions.

The WB believes unless the domestic oil prices are adjusted to the international ones, the macro-economic stability will be hampered, as Ahmed said, "it [the price gap] has a macro effect."

"Unless the macroeconomic framework is put right, the progress that the government has made in the last two-three years in a variety of areas - banking, public expenditure - will be jeopardised. That is our concern," he elaborated.

While the oil price in the international market has shot up beyond \$70 a barrel, in Bangladesh it remains at the level of the time when global price was around \$25 to \$26, Ahmed pointed out to the press.

As diesel and kerosene constitute 75 percent of the country's total petroleum consumption, he emphasised the need for increasing their prices, which in Bangladesh were less than that in the other regional countries.

The WB executive did admit that a price hike in the two petroleum products will affect the poor negatively and said the government can provide some subsidies in deserving cases but well within a limit.

On the other hand, if the government does not adjust the domestic oil price regime with the global price range, Ahmed said, it will have to bear at least \$200 million subsidy a year. Such a huge amount will not come from tax, he observed, adding, in which case the government will be forced to go for "inflationary finance".

The WB regional sector chief was of the opinion that if monetary and fiscal policies continue in the right direction, an oil price increment would not aggravate inflation. In support of his view, he cited the example of the USA, where petroleum prices have been increased by \$2 a gallon over the last two years, without suffering any inflation hike.

On bettering power revenue, Sadiq Ahmed said presently many a public and private organisation has unpaid electricity bills for some five to six months and added the WB wants to make sure the bills do not

remain outstanding for more than three months.

Under the conditions, the government will have to draft a financial reporting act, making the corporate bodies accountable to parliament. Another condition to get the DSC-3 is to enact a procurement law.

Sources said, though the finance minister is willing to carry out the reform programmes in full, he faces myriad difficulties including opposition from his colleagues in cabinet and parliament in doing that. The opposition comes, as some of the issues, like oil price hike, are politically sensitive, especially ahead of the upcoming general elections.

Saifur Rahman is in a great dilemma, a finance ministry official observed, as on the one hand he has to get money from the donors by complying with their conditions and on the other has to convince his cabinet colleagues to take unpopular decisions.

Ahmed also seemed to understand the minister's predicament, as he observed the finance minister is trying hard, but he alone cannot do everything; he has to convince the cabinet.

Blasts, oil price

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threaten the country's macro-economic stability, Metropolitan Chamber president said yesterday.

"The country's economy is going through a critical phase. In spite of the steady GDP growth of over 5 percent in the recent years and the macro-economic stability, the country's economy is suddenly faced with serious challenges," said Kutubuddin Ahmed, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) chief.

He was speaking at a meeting with Commerce Minister Altfar Hossain Choudhury in Dhaka.

"Disconcerting developments both on political and the foreign trade fronts in the recent weeks mount challenges to our development and in fact to the image of the country," observed Ahmed.

He, however, said he hopes the steps taken by the government in response to the latest developments will soon improve the situation.

"Our chamber is fully committed to extending co-operation to the efforts being made at the direction of the prime minister to restore the law and order," he added.

Shaikul Hadith

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Monday acquitted Mohammad Mahfuzul Haq, son of Shaikul Hadith Moulana Azizul Haq and 34 others as the prosecution failed to prove the charges.

Police constable Badsha Miah, 50, was beaten to death by Islamist zealots in the Noor Masjid in the city's Mohammadpur area during the hartal called by Ulema Mashaekh (Islamic scholars) on February 3, 2001.

The prosecution did not take necessary steps to record statements of three constables as prosecution witnesses, the court order said.

There were no eyewitnesses in the case and the prosecution did not file any petition to exhibit the victim's autopsy report prepared by Dr Mizanur Rahman though the prosecution knew about his (Dr Rahman's) staying abroad, it added.

As the prosecution did not produce any documents to prove the charges in the case, all the accused were acquitted of charges, the court added.

During the investigation of the case, four accused—Abu Bakkar Siddique, Hijibullah, Akram Hossain and Humayun Kabir—gave confessional statements to magistrates saying that they along with others beat the victim to death inside the mosque.

Meanwhile, the government had withdrawn the charges against Azizul Haq and another on March 10, 2003 saying that the charges brought against them were politically motivated.

Following Badsha's murder, Sub-Inspector Delwar Hossain filed a case accusing Azizul Haq, his son and 35 others with the Mohammadpur Police Station the same day.

The Criminal Investigation Department pressed charges against Azizul Haq and 36 others on July 15 the same year.

Meanwhile, Assistant Public Prosecutor (APP) Ali Haider Kiron, who conducted the case, told The Daily Star that he had tried his best to produce the prosecution witnesses before the court but the court had completed cross-examination of witnesses though he (APP) did not file any petition for closing of the case.

Bomb threat

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spread after the letters reached the institutions -- Gangni Degree College, Gangni Pilot High School, Anyesha Bidyaniketan and Jorjukuria High School -- students stopped going there and the authorities closed the institutions.

The institutions' authorities have called a meeting of the guardians to discuss the matter today. Meherpur police superintendent said they were investigating the matter.

Tigers

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months ago.
But Bangladesh will be without their key bowler Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza at least for the first game after the Narail quick was sidelined due to back pain.

His injury however paved way for young left-arm paceman Syed Rasel to make his international debut. The 21-year-old will share the new ball with experienced Tapash Baisya, who reached Colombo on Tuesday as a last-minute replacement for Mashrafe.

There will be however no change in the batting line up with all-rounder Khaled Mahmud coming in place of paceman Nazmul Hossain.

The opening match is also significant for wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud since it will be his 100th ODI appearance.

Bangladesh's build-up did not go well as they suffered an embarrassing 10-wicket defeat in the lone practice match against the Sri Lanka Board President's Eleven on Sunday.

But the Bangladesh captain was not worried by the result.

"It was disappointing but we are not thinking about that game. It was a big setback and we have to make sure it does not happen tomorrow," said the premier Bangladesh batsman.

"In that game, we tried something new to adapt with the new rules. The good thing is that we can play an extra bowler and strengthen the batting but the powerplay in the middle becomes difficult if we can't take wickets," said Bashir.

Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka will get the first taste of the new one-day playing rules where a supersub can be employed apart from an additional five overs of fielding restrictions.

It was expected that left-spinner Manjarul Islam will be Bangladesh's first supersub.

Rejoinder

Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB) has protested The Daily Star story headlined "Inside the militant groups-7: Profiles show them inter-linked" published on August 28 and denied their involvement in militant activities. HTB is not a militant organisation and it does not support any terrorist activities, it said.

Our reply
Our report was based on the intelligence reports that alerted the government stating that the organisation could turn into a militant one.

34 Islamic NGOs

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Jamaat-e-Islami leader became social welfare minister, the sources mentioned.

These local NGOs also get foreign donation but they do not give any report on it to the government as they work as affiliates of the foreign funded ones. The NGOs registered with the NGO bureau implement various projects themselves or provide funds to local NGOs for implementing projects.

Besides, a section of Islamic scholars, leaders of religion-based political parties including Jamaat-e-Islami and heads of madrasa go to Middle Eastern (ME) countries every year for fund-raising from zakat, fitra and individual donations in the name of religious education, charitable organisations and orphanages.

This money has no official records as it does not come through official channels. The persons concerned themselves carry the money or send it through unofficial channels like hundi.

Some exporters and importers in Dhaka and Chittagong also help transferring the money. The foreign funds that are channelled through businessmen mainly come via Bangkok and Singapore, the sources pointed out.

This is one of the major sources of funds for the local Islamic NGOs and Qawmi madrasas which do not have government recognition. The income and expenditure of these madrasas are not accounted for properly as they are not accountable to any government body.

Earlier, these Qwami madrasas were fully dependent on donations of local religious elite but since 1980s money started coming in from the oil-rich ME countries. As a result, such madrasas sprang up across the country with their number rising to over 10,000.

A large portion of the funds collected for the Qwami madrasas is allegedly used for arms training as part of preparations for jihad.

An Islamic scholar, who runs a religious cultural organisation, told this correspondent that a retired army person met him once and proposed to donate funds regularly for an Islamic revolution in the country. The army man asked him to recruit young people and give them training for jihad. He however rejected the offer fearing its dangerous consequences, he added.

Seeking anonymity, he said,

JMB regrouping

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abroad will train them in "open and free frontier areas" of Salkhira, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, the source said.

Among the 200, 50 students are from Rajshahi, Natore, Naogaon, Chapainawabganj and Bogra districts. Five experts from Chapainawabganj, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Salkhira and Cox's Bazar selected them at secret training camps, the JMB source said seeking anonymity.

The guerrilla warfare training will lead to picking up 50 "smart students" who are likely to be trained abroad in five groups later.

The Daily Star source, a 32-year old hafez (one who has memorised the Holy Qur'an), claimed to have been staying with JMB chief Moulana Abdur Rahman since the latter went into hiding from Rajshahi region in June last year along with Bangla Bhai.

The source said both Rahman and Bangla Bhai are inside the country, but did not give further details about the militant kingpins.

"We have support from an influential quarter and the relation developed between us when Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman enjoyed state support during the vigilante action against outlaws in Rajshahi region last year," the JMB source said.

Our correspondent Rafiq Sarker from Rangpur informs that due to local people's watch on the mosques and madrasas run by the Ahle Hadith communities, the militants changed

"Many others accepted this lucrative offer because they always look for money."

A number of Bangladeshi returnees from Afghan war also operate such madrasas and charitable organisations with foreign funds, the Islamic mentioned.

One such returnee formed an Islamic NGO and has also become a legislator as the nominee of a religion-based party, which is a component of the ruling alliance.

The number of Islamic NGOs in the country rose after the 1991 devastating cyclone in Chittagong and other coastal areas of the country. Since then, more than a dozen leading international Islamic NGOs started operation in Bangladesh.

They took part in relief operation and other charitable activities like building houses, providing pure drinking water, setting up hospitals, improving sanitation, mother and child healthcare and establishing religious educational institutions, said a high official of the NGO bureau.

They also built several hundred mosques in villages with funds from the ME countries, he mentioned.

The bureau however has no data on the activities of these NGOs and their operations.

56 killed

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border," the security source told AFP.

The US military said it had no exact numbers of casualties.

"There was a total of three strikes targeting terrorist safe houses... Abu Islam (a reported al-Qaeda operative) and several associates are believed killed," a US military spokesman in Baghdad said.

EU parliament

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Hecke, also vice chairman of the human rights committee of the European Parliament, criticised Bangladesh government for its 'failure' to properly investigate the bomb and grenade attacks in recent years.

Another member, sent by Prof Dr Winfried Pinger, member of the German parliament, was also read out at the convention.

their course of action and shifted their meeting places to remote char areas.

The JMB militants have formed a strong network in Gangachara upazila taking its geographical advantage: the upazila is connected with the bordering districts Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari and linked with the vast land area arising in the river Teesta. This has made it easy for the group to maintain the network from there.

The police listed 45 Islamist militants under Gangachara upazila but they could not arrest any.

Locals said the militants are still in the areas, clean shaved now to deceive the police.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested two suspected militants—Samiul Islam Siju and Fazlu—four months back from Paikan and Kuribishwa under Nohali union after police recovered grenades from a Rangpur Brac office. They also seized a huge number of books on jihad (Islamist revolution), receipts for monthly money collection and some letters.

On August 18, the police nabbed wanted Islamist militants Abdull Haque of Boro Rupai Kagzipara under Morna union, but he escaped from the police custody handcuffed.

The police later negotiated with a Upazila Parishad chairman and a BNP leader of the union, who sent the handcuff back.

Hasina vows

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and former prime minister, addressed the convention as a victim of terrorism. She narrowly survived the August 21 grenade blasts at her party rally in the city that killed at least 22 and wounded around 200.

Leaders and workers of the AL, who were injured and crippled in different bomb and grenade attacks including that on August 21, were present on the dais with Hasina. Families of the victims, leaders of different opposition parties and professionals were present.

Making a fresh call for unity of people against the BNP-Jamaat ruling alliance, the AL chief said, "Unite and come forward to save the country. All must raise their voice against terrorism, corruption and misuse of the alliance government and their conspiracy to manipulate people's verdict."

She identified illegal capture of power as the root of all evils and said, "People must build up strong resistance against corruption, violence and vote rigging, which have originated from illegal grabbing of state power."

Hasina went on, "Grabbing power illegally at gun point, Ziaur Rahman not only gave indemnity to the killers of Bangabandhu and four national leaders but also rewarded them with jobs in our missions abroad. Killings will continue in a country like ours where killers are rewarded instead of being punished."

She blasted the government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for what she said was sharing power with communal forces and taking the country on the brink of ruin. Under the alliance rule, the country has become a place of panic to its people as well as foreigners, she added.

Dhabi Group

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stating (MoU) with the Board of Investment (BoI) for going ahead with a \$ 1 billion investment in the country.

The Middle Eastern corporate giant is likely to invest the amount in tourism, telecommunication and pharmaceutical sectors. Nahyan will sign the MoU with the BoI at state guesthouse Meghna tomorrow.

The Dhabi Group chairman, also a federal minister, will call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and President Iajuddin Ahmed Thursday.

He is also scheduled to inaugurate the first branch of Dubai based Bank Al-Fallah at Motijheel in the capital this evening.

Sources said the company is intending to set up a five star hotel, a mobile phone company and a pharmaceutical industry in the country as part of its overseas business expansion programme and to earn speedy return from the fast growing sectors.

Earlier an advanced team of technical experts and executives headed by the chief executive officer of the Dhabi Group Bashir A Tahir arrived in the city on Saturday to do the spadework for the negotiations to be conducted by their chairman.

The adviser to the Ministry of Energy and the BoI Executive Chairman Mahmud Rahman is expected to receive the high profile industrialist who will be accompanied by a high-level trade delegation.

Sources said the government has already examined 'Fairly House', a shipping ministry guest house in the capital, for developing into a five star hotel with the possible investment of the Dhabi Group.

While asked Mahmud Rahman expressed his optimism about the investment and said if the Middle Eastern giant comes to Bangladesh, it will be the pathway for other renowned foreign companies to come here for investment.

Hurricane

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months before electricity is restored to everyone. Ten major hospitals in New Orleans were running on emergency backup power.

"It will be unsafe to return to the coastal area for several days," Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour told evacuees Monday. "Be patient. Don't be in a hurry to go back."

According to preliminary assessments by AIR Worldwide Corp., a risk modelling firm, the property and casualty insurance industry faces as much as \$26 billion in claims from Katrina.

That would make Katrina more expensive than the previous record-setting storm, Hurricane Andrew, which caused some \$21 billion in insured losses in 1992 to property in Florida and along the Gulf Coast.

Mississippi's economy was also dealt a blow that could run into the millions, as the storm shattered the flashy casinos that dot its coast. The gambling houses are built on barges anchored just off the beach, and Barbour said emergency officials had received reports of water reaching the third floors of some casinos.

After striking the Gulf Coast as a Category 4 hurricane, Katrina was later downgraded to a tropical storm as it passed through eastern Mississippi, moving north at 21 mph. Winds early Tuesday were still a dangerous 60 mph.

Forecasters said that as the storm moves north over the next few days, it may spawn tornadoes over the Southeast and swamp the Tennessee and Ohio valleys with a potentially ruinous 8 inches or more of rain.

Dhaka urges

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track down those responsible. The two countries share a 4,000-km river and porous land border.

Along the heavily forested 320-km long border with Myanmar, Bangladeshi forces in recent months have launched operations to flush out ethnic Myanmar rebels.

Bangladeshi police have blamed the Islamist group Jama'at ul Mujahideen for the blasts, detaining dozens of members, but say that they are looking for about 500 more militants believed to be involved in planning and carrying out the attacks.

Our staff correspondent adds: When contacted, an authoritative source at the foreign ministry yesterday said the ministry has not made any such requests to any country.

BSF kills 3

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now undergoing treatment at Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital and Kosba Upazila Health Complex.

Commanding Officer of 11th Rifles Battalion Colonel AK Nesar and Police Superintendent ATM Tareq visited the spot.

The commanding officer said the BDR personnel have been put on "red alert" on the border following the incident.

The BDR protested the attack and also called for a flag meeting. The Indian side did not respond as of 6:00pm yesterday.

In Thakurgaon, the BSF men opened fire targeting a Bangladeshi farmer while he was working in his cropland near Ranisangkail border in the morning.

The victim was identified as Afsaruddin, 40, of Mujahidabad-Chakmapar village in Ranisangkail upazila.

Confirming the BSF action, local BDR commander said the body of the victim was taken away by the Indian border guards.

The BDR asked its Indian counterpart to hold a flag meeting on the zero line and return the body of Afsar.

Govt embarrassed

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Meanwhile, the government has started checking the backgrounds of the two High Court Judges ABM Khairul Haque and ATM Fazole Kabir, whose bench pronounced the verdict, sources said.

"The government is looking into their backgrounds," said a source requesting anonymity.

The two judges started passing the verdict at 10:30am and with a little lunch break went on till the end of day's business.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday described the verdict as "valueless" and said it only had stirred some "temporary sensation".

On the other hand, lawyers and experts in the constitution yesterday blasted the government's acting too quickly to have granted the stay on the High Court ruling late at midnight Monday.

Besides, they hailed the verdict, saying it has proved that martial law cannot pervert the constitution.

"A number of issues have come up with this verdict. There will be opinions in favour [of the verdict] and against. But it's significant that it has showed that martial law cannot alter the constitution," observed noted jurist Dr Kamal Hossain.

Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud observed that the verdict has restored the public confidence in the Supreme Court.

Referring to the Appellate Division's midnight stay order, he said the Supreme Court seems very sensitive to some cases while it sleeps on cases like Bangabandhu Murder Case. The discriminatory attitude of the Supreme Court has been exposed by its not placing equal importance on all the cases, he pointed out.

Dr M Zahir termed the verdict a good one but said the government need not have gone to the Appellate Division at midnight to obtain a stay order.

Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Mahbubey Alam said, "The High Court ruling has rekindled some precious values, but

Militant forces