

BDR chief's comment

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AL itself will take decision whether it will participate in the election or not, Hasina said replying to a query on the comment of ruling party leaders that she went to India to take suggestion about AL's running in the next election.

AL does not take decisions at anyone's dictate, she added.

"Why does the government feel so nervous if I visit India on personal ground?" said Hasina, who offered fetea at Ajmer Sharif and had meetings with Indian PM, Leader of the Opposition, Congress Party chief Sonia Gandhi and senior ministers.

The former prime minister said in the meetings she had discussions on poverty alleviation, establishing lasting peace and strengthening regional cooperation in the sub-continent.

She denied she had any comment on American invasion.

Referring to a Press Trust of India (PTI) story circulated in Bangladesh by BSS and UNB news agencies, she said, "I did not have any comment on America."

"Moreover, there was no reporter of PTI at the place mentioned as the dateline of the report. Their objective

must be looked into," she added.

Referring to a statement of Mufti Hannan, the opposition leader said it has now been proved that the former home minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury had given shelter to the extremists and militants.

"Truth unveils one day and the truth has been unveiled," she said.

The former PM, who was the target of Mufti Hannan's abortive assassination attempt, said, "It has also been proved that the BNP-Jamaat government are the patrons of the militants and extremists.

Hasina said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who is in charge of home and defence ministries, will have to answer as to what she did in protecting the public life.

"It seemed that there is no government in the country. If there is no government, why people will pay tax," she questioned.

Replying to a query, Hasina said the PM and other leaders can say whether Saarc Summit will be held after the abnormal situation created out of the comment of the BDR chief.

Senior AL leaders received her at the airport.

Wage Board

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announcement that came in the third meeting of the board, constituted to re-fix the wages, allowances and other benefits of journalists and newspaper and news agency workers and employees.

Meeting insiders said representatives of journalists and employees demanded 60 percent DA while the owners' representatives suggested 20 percent, prompting the chair to apply his judgement in settling the matter, which was unanimously accepted by both parties.

Officials said the recommendation would now require government approval for its enforcement.

The Sixth Wage Board came nine years after the fifth Wage Board, though the wage boards are supposed to be constituted every five years under the provisions of Newspaper Employees (Condition of Services) Act 1974.

The last Wage Board had announced 35 per cent DA, but this is for the first time that the owners, journalists and employees have reached a unanimous decision on the DA.

KL yet

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from Bangladesh has remained suspended since 1997 while the country sent back thousands of undocumented Bangladeshi workers during this time.

Bangladesh's contesting for the post of OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) secretary general last year and her refusal of a number of investment proposals from Malaysian companies are the main reasons behind not opening the market for Bangladeshis, sources said.

Meanwhile, although Malaysia declared that they would allow re-entry of the workers returning home after expiry of job tenure, only around 2,000 workers out of some 14,000 Bangladeshis who returned home after that declaration went back to Malaysia.

But others declined as the Malaysian authorities asked them to join fresh jobs where they would be treated as beginners, often with very poor salary compared to what they got earlier.

Meanwhile, officials at the expatriates' welfare ministry said several hundred Bangladeshi workers went to Malaysia during the last few months on individual recruitment. Besides, two autonomous provinces of Malaysia recruited a few thousand Bangladeshi workers in last couple of years.

In mid 90s around half a million Bangladeshis went to Malaysia for job. Most of them came back home after expiry of job tenure or in the face of crackdown on undocumented workers there.

9 candidates

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Jote and opposition Jatiya Party (Ershad) has one lawmaker each.

The elected BNP lawmakers are Khodeza Emdad Lata, Newaz Halima Arlee, Fahima Hussain Jublee, Rasheda Begum Hira, Rezina Islam and Saïmun Begum while the elected Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker is Rokeya Begum.

The two other elected female lawmakers are Naïma Sultana of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) and Nur-e-Hasna Lily Chowdhury of Jatiya Party (Ershad).

BNP has 36 out of the 45 reserved seats for women in the JS while Jamaat has four, Jatiya Party (Ershad) has three and Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) and IOJ has one each.

Land transfer

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making the Hebas, Bantan Namas (Partition Deeds) and Baina Namas (Deeds) in the amendment to land registration act-2004 mandatory is against the spirit of the constitution and Muslim law.

He also said the provision of making the latest Khatian for transferring lands in the land transfer (amendment) act-2004 is to cause harassment.

Petrobangla

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giant's proposed \$2.5 billion investment plan in Bangladesh.

The Tata officials gave a detailed presentation on the open-pit mining at the meeting. Tata has proposed to use around 3 million tonnes of coal annually from Barapukuria coal mine for its plants.

Earlier, the Prime Minister's Office in principle decided to award a part of Brapukuria coal mine to Tata on build, own and operate (BOO) basis by bending rules.

The government negotiation committee headed by Secretary of the Ministry of Communications Shafiqul Islam has set a detailed schedule to continue the third round talks for the next three weeks.

After yesterday's meeting, officials of both sides said the negotiation is on the right track to sign the final deal by this year. Both sides are optimistic about the signing of the \$2.5 billion deal in time.

"The government is very much positive towards the investment deal and it is advancing well," said Shafiqul Islam.

The group will again meet with the Petrobangla officials and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) today to discuss issues relating to gas security, tax exemption and fiscal incentives.

Tata, India's largest private sector group, intends to set up a 1,000 MW power plant, a steel mill with an annual capacity of 420,000 tonnes and a one million-tonne capacity fertiliser factory.

Asia Energy submits

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The Bangladesh wing of the British company in its study shows that the mine has 572 million tonnes of high quality coal. The two-year study costing \$18 million involved 300 people to see environment impact of the project.

On September 11, the Department of Environment gave the company environmental clearance for the open pit mine.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Asia Energy (Bangladesh) Gary Lye handed over the feasibility study and scheme of development to the director of the Bureau of Mineral Development of the energy ministry.

"The operating cost of the mine for 30 years will be \$10 billion," Lye told a press conference at Sheraton Hotel yesterday. During this period, the mine will produce coal worth nearly \$24 billion. The average price of coal has been estimated at \$50 per tonne.

Lye's economic projection shows that in 30 years' time, Asia Energy will earn \$7 billion while the government will earn a royalty of \$.2 billion and \$2.8 billion as corporate tax. The Bangladesh Railway, Mongla port authority, income tax division and customs department will earn another \$3 billion.

Replying to a question on the low royalty rate for the government, which is only 6 percent of the mine's revenue, Gary says, "Six percent royalty is a global standard. The government will earn more through corporate tax and other ways. The (regional) infrastructure will be boosted, which will not happen without this project."

If the government approves the plans, the company will start land acquisition next year, mine development in 2007 and start production of 1.5 million tonnes of coal a year from 2008. Production will gradually increase to 15 million tonnes per year by 2013.

"We are now preparing the financing documents. We are also making a land acquisition plan and we intend to

take the land from 2006," Gary said.

Showing an aerial 'gravity map' of a large coal stream, Gary said a part of Phulbari town is situated on the coal stream, requiring relocation of 40,000 people. In any large project, a nation needs to relocate people for greater gains, he added.

"Coal production will trigger jobs and industries. Hopefully there will be a win-win situation for all."

Other than coal, the mine will produce gravel, silica sand and other high-end minerals that will have positive impacts on other types of industries.

The CEO noted that the company aims at exporting 4 million tonnes of coal to India a year through railway via Darshana border post, 8 million tonnes to other countries through Mongla port and supply 3 million tonnes to the Gazipur-based domestic market.

On the question of open pit mining versus underground mining, he said, "Usually underground mining is done when open pit is not possible. Underground mining poses a great risk of land collapse. The coal recovery rate is only 25 percent. Open pit is proven safe and it allows 90 percent coal recovery."

In 30 years' time, the company will dig up an open pit at one point and proceed to another when extraction of coal from that spot is over. The old spot will then be filled up with earth so that people can productively use it.

A total of 67 separate reports were incorporated in the feasibility study and scheme of development, detailing different aspects of the mine ranging from mine design and water management to coal handling, processing and transport.

Asia Energy Bangladesh's head of corporate affairs Brian Mooney, General Manager (GM) Mushfiqur Rahman and GM (environment and community) Anwarul Islam were also present at the press conference.

JS body to probe

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The database report shows that the ministries overseeing forests and environment, the private sector, relief and disaster, and finance belong to a more corrupt grouping.

Meeting sources said in the absence of the opposition lawmakers, all the ruling BNP lawmakers and members of the body echoed Nazmul Huda's view on the TIB findings and blasted the non-governmental organisation committed to countering corruption for tarnishing the image of the alliance government by publishing baseless reports.

"The standing committee system, which is effective enough to ensure accountability of the ministry, has not raised any such allegations against the communications sector," a meeting source quoted Huda as saying while initiating a discussion on the issue.

Criticising the newspapers for running 'false' reports, he said, "It was I, who as the information minister had ensured the freedom of the press."

Hinting at the Bangladesh chapter of TI, he said people in the country are not fit to probe the so-called corruption situation. Rather people from outside should be brought in, if needed, to probe.

Ruling BNP lawmaker Manjur Hossain said the TIB has prepared the report with an ulterior motive. "We want to look into the way TIB had prepared the report," meeting sources quoted Hossain as saying.

If the TIB report is found false, a legal notice can be issued on it, he observed.

Later talking to journalists after the meeting, Manjur denied making any call for framing laws against journalism.

Ruling BNP lawmaker and committee member Fazlul Haque Milon at a meeting said the newspapers do not report on good works of the government. Most of the time while reporting

No breakthrough

last year after they went to the brink of a fourth war in 2002.

Singh's visit follows a meeting between Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New York last month that ended without any major announcement or concrete initiatives, as many had expected.

Even before that meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, the neighbours exchanged barbs on their long-running dispute over the Muslim-majority Himalayan region of Kashmir.

Both countries claim the region but it remains divided by a ceasefire line, the result of the two countries' first war over the territory soon after independence from Britain in 1947.

Tens of thousands have died in Indian Kashmir since 1989, when a Muslim separatist revolt against Indian rule erupted.

India wants Pakistan to do more to stop militants slipping across the ceasefire line into Indian Kashmir. Pakistan says Indian forces should stop rights abuses in the region.

Despite their fundamental differences over Kashmir, a ceasefire has held there since late 2003 and the two sides have launched a so-called composite dialogue, on a whole range of issues including Kashmir.

While little progress has been made towards a resolution of Kashmir, the two sides have reached agreement in several other areas including the restoration of diplomatic, sports and transport links, as well as on some trade and prisoner exchanges.

But frustration is growing in Pakistan with the lack of movement on Kashmir.

"The whole exercise of the peace process and the so-called composite dialogue has, unfortunately, been centred on peripheral matter and gloating over settling them," Pakistan's the Nation newspaper said in a Sunday editorial.

"We must realise that the idea of composite dialogue has come a cropper and rethink our policy," the newspaper said.

India and Pakistan have gone to war three times, twice over Kashmir.

"Now it's high time for both countries, they have to agree to give some relief to Kashmiris," Ayaz said.

"They're continuously talking about people-to-people contacts, which is a good sign, but both countries have to move forward," he said.

In a sign of the progress the old rivals have made, Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said last week the two sides had agreed on the need to withdraw troops from a disputed Himalayan glacier but both sides say there are problems over verifying positions before a pull-back.

Several thousand soldiers have died on the Siachen Glacier, the world's highest battlefield at 18,000 to 22,000 ft in the mountains of northern Kashmir.

But one avenue of cooperation on energy appears in jeopardy since late last month when India joined the United States in voting to refer old friend Iran's nuclear programme to the United Nations Security Council for possible sanctions. India has been planning, along with Pakistan, to build a \$7 billion gas pipeline overland from Iran across Pakistan.

But analysts say that project could be at risk in the wake of India's vote at the international Atomic Energy Agency's governing board meeting.

Hearing cancelled

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Mollik pleading for accepting the Naraji petition and holding trial of the case cancelling the final report that created suspicion.

Their opponents Advocate Hamidul Haque and Nazrul Islam prayed for recording the final report and a hearing on the naraji petition.

Mili's father Mansur Rahman Mollah, the plaintiff, in the Naraji petition alleged that the final report that was made on the basis of a suspicious DNA test, was motivated and influenced.

He claimed that documents that were sent for DNA tests were not the same as those were seized.

During the demonstration on the court premises against the final report, police intercepted the protesters when they tried to reach the court building.

They also held a rally, which was addressed, among others, by Mili's mother Hasina Begum, freedom fighter Zalat Uddin, Mohila Parishad General Secretary Kalpana Roy and women leader Morjina Khatun.

Nine-year old Mill was raped and killed in the city on May 3 this year.

Motijheel OC

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stayed at a hideout and appeared before the HC yesterday with an anticipatory bail petition.

Ordering police not to arrest Rafiq, the HC bench of Justice Sheikh Rezaul Ali and Justice Sheikh Abdul Awal asked him to surrender before a lower court in four weeks.

The government side represented by Deputy Attorney General Abdul Baset did not oppose his prayer.

Former law minister Advocate Habibul Islam Bhuiyan and ruling BNP law Secretary Jaiul Abedin moved for the petitioner.

Gunmen killed Momin, a student of Dhaka Commerce College, on September 13 in front of his Ibrahimpur house. His family had a dispute with the OC over a piece of land near their house.

Police authorities did not take a move to arrest the OC and merely closed him to Rajbarh Police Lines on September 15 as his name was on top of the 26 accused in the FIR (first information report) filed with Kafil Police Station.

Police have so far arrested 13 of the FIR-listed accused.

Momin's family alleged Rafiq was threatening them from his hideout.

They expressed apprehension at a press conference in Dhaka that OC Rafiq's going free poses a threat to their lives.

Earlier on Thursday, unidentified gunmen opened fire on the house of the victim, but no-one was hurt.

Unknown callers also threatened the victim's family to withdraw the case, the family alleged.

Another police officer is now behind bars for a similar incident.

Moon moves

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Once again, though, astronomers are urging those without the proper viewing equipment not to look directly at the Sun with the naked eye; blindness could result.

In the UK, only a partial eclipse will be visible; the Moon will be seen to take a large chunk out of the Sun.

Depending on where one is standing, between 44 percent (Aberdeen) and 64 percent (Plymouth) of the Sun will be covered, according to the Society for Popular Astronomy.

In London, this partial eclipse starts at 08:48BST and ends at 11:18BST.

Not every eclipse can be total. The Moon's orbit around the Earth is not perfectly round; the satellite's distance from the planet varies from about 356,000 to 407,000km (221,000 to 253,000 miles).

This difference makes the Moon's apparent size in our sky fluctuate by about 13 percent.

If the Moon happens to eclipse the Sun on the near side of its orbit, it totally blocks out the star (a total eclipse).

But if the Moon eclipses the Sun on the far side of its orbit, the satellite will not completely obscure the star's disc - and a ring or annulus of sunlight is seen.

The effect is to throw an 'antumbra' or 'negative shadow' on the Earth's surface as the Moon moves across the face of the Sun. It is the track of this antumbra that is referred to as the 'path of annularity'.

And although the daylight will significantly dim for those in this path, a substantial portion of sunlight will still be visible and potentially highly dangerous to anyone tempted to squint at the eclipse.

Unless you have access to a telescope or binoculars equipped with proper solar filters, or approved eclipse glasses, the advice is to use a pin-hole camera technique to project the eclips-

ing Moon and Sun on to a piece of paper.

A good option will be to watch the event on one of several websites geared up to stream it.

The path of annularity across the Earth's surface begins out in the North Atlantic at 08:41GMT. Its snake-like route then takes it across the Iberian Peninsula, passing Madrid at 08:56 GMT; crossing the western Mediterranean and moving on to the African continent, and arriving at Algiers a 09:05GMT.

From there, the path follows a south-eastern route, through southern Tunisia and central Libya.

After briefly skirting northern Chad, the antumbra sweeps across central Sudan where the period of greatest eclipse will be experienced at 10:31GMT.

The annular duration here will last four minutes and 31 seconds, according to the US space agency's 'Mr Eclipse', Fred Espenak, who has become an oracle for eclipse calculations.

The path then heads along the southern Sudanese-Ethiopian border before entering Kenya and Somalia. It leaves land at 11:30GMT and only a ship in the Indian Ocean could experience the end of the eclipse at 12:22GMT.

Those lucky enough to be in the path of annularity and with clear skies should look for the 'beads' or 'gems' that skirt the fiery ring.

These are caused by sunlight streaming through valleys and past mountains on the Moon's surface.

This is the fourth annular eclipse of the 21st century. The next total solar eclipse is on 29 March, 2006. It will traverse equatorial West Africa, the Sahara, the western Mediterranean, Turkey and Russia.

Bali bombers

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Video footage of one of the blasts showed groups of tourists, many of them apparently Westerners, seated at candlelit tables talking and sipping drinks in the seconds before the explosion. The footage, obtained by Associated Press Television News, then shows a bright flash accompanied by a loud bang and gusts of black smoke.

It was not immediately clear whether the three suicide bombers were included in the death toll, which climbed to 26 on Sunday, according to Sanglah Hospital spokesman Putu Putra Wisada. Six Americans were among the injured.

Long lines formed at checkout counters at Bali's international airport with a steady stream of taxis dropping off passengers.

"We were up all night trying to change our ticket," said Veli-Matti Enqvist, 51, who had been scheduled to leave Bali with his wife on Wednesday.

The couple was walking on the beach when they heard the blasts. "We finally found something ... we're going." After the 2002 bombings, there was an immediate and massive evacuation of foreign visitors which devastated the island's tourist industry.

The latest bombings struck two seafood cafes in the Jimbaran beach resort and a three-story noodle and steakhouse in downtown Kuta. Kuta is the bustling tourist centre of Bali where the two nightclubs were bombed three years ago.

The latest attacks came a month after Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono warned of possible terrorist attacks. On Saturday, he blamed terrorists and warned that more attacks were possible. The president was in Bali on Sunday to see the devastation firsthand.

Interrogators had tried to know about how and where the bomb was manufactured, which types of explosives and materials were used in it, and from where the materials were collected. But Hannan kept mum about all those questions.

"He has also been quizzed about other blasts that took place in the country, but nothing could be elicited," an investigator said seeking anonymity.

In the forwarding report placed before the court yesterday, police did not mention that Hannan has already been sentenced to life imprisonment in an arms case. According to the law, if a person is given any punishment in absentia, it must be mentioned in the forwarding report.

A Dhaka court sentenced Mufti Hannan to life in prison on December 30, 2003 in an arms case in absentia. In the verdict, the court said that the punishment of the convict would take from the day of his arrest or surrender.

But his punishment did not begin to apply from Saturday, as there was no custody warrant against him in connection with the arms case.

Hannan told Metropolitan Magistrate Kamrunnahr that he went to Pakistan for study in 1979 and later he visited some other countries also for study. He said he returned home in 1981. He went to Afghanistan in 1984 for military training.

On his return, he had set up 'Al Hamdullah Hafezia Madrasa' at Kotlipara.

He claimed that he had not been involved in planting the bomb in Kotlipara nor had he taken part in staging the August 17 blasts.

A student of Sarsina Madrasa in Barisal, Hannan studied in Deoband madrasa in India. After graduating from a madrasa in Karachi, he later joined the Afghan war against the Soviet occupation. He was even wounded by bullet in a battle there. Returning home at 1995, he started organising the Harkatul Jihad.

Altaf denies links

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erased from the charge of attempt to assassinate Sheikh Hasina, the then prime minister and President of the main opposition Awami League.

The commerce minister's office yesterday tried to contact monthly Madina Editor and Islami Oikya Jote leader Moulana Muhiuddin, who, according to Hannan, played mediator between the Hujji leader and Altaf.

"Muhiuddin's office assured the commerce ministry officials that Muhiuddin will arrange a press conference to protest Hannan's version," said a commerce ministry source.

Muhiuddin later told a press conference that he had never lobbied with Altaf for Hannan.

Altaf's office also tried to verify whether Hannan at all linked Altaf to him and, if he did, what exactly he had told journalists.

Talking to reporters at Rab-1 office on Saturday, the Hujji leader said he had contacted Altaf (the then home minister) through the editor of monthly Madina to get his name erased from the Hasina murder attempt case.

"The minister advised me to submit a mercy petition and asked me not to move openly until situation normalises," Hannan said. "Although I submitted a mercy petition, the home minister (Altaf) was made commerce minister before he could do anything for mercy to me," Hannan said, adding that he did not flee the country on the minister's assurance.

ALTAFS'DENIAL

A message faxed to The Daily Star office yesterday afternoon from the commerce ministry said Altaf Hossain yesterday protested reports on Mufti Abdul Hannan that involved him.

Signed by public relations officer Ali Hossain, the rejoinder said: "The minister mentioned that he never met Mufti Hannan, he does not know him. So, there is no possibility of suggesting him (Hannan) to submit mercy petition."

The Press Information Department also sent a letter to The Daily Star office last night for publishing the rejoinder with due importance.

HUNT FOR ALTAFS' NEPHEW

Law enforcers have started a massive hunt for Shakil, who has reportedly been possessing deadly arms and also used to supply money to Mufti Hannan.

Shakil, who used to identify himself as Altaf's nephew, possesses a cache of grenades and deadly arms, Rab sources claimed.

Shakil and Hannan's younger brother Anis are jointly running readymade garments business at Basundhara super market at Panthapath in the capital. Besides, he was involved with a Manikganj-based NGO, and used to supply money to the militants, sources said.