

Govt halts recruitment

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Yesterday's handout of the Press Information Department (PID) was issued to clear the confusions, particularly about the fate of the appointments already underway. The PID handout clarified that the recruitment against the vacant posts that already has received 'no objection' and is in the process will continue as usual.

The decision follows repeated warning from the donors to the government about the possible negative impact of the pay hike of its employees on the country's macroeconomic stability, a finance ministry source said. The World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) also advised the government to defer all new recruitment.

In a recent report to the finance ministry titled 'Fiscal Policy in Bangladesh: An Assessment of Trends and Sustainability', the WB expressed its misgivings at the consequences of the new government pay scale. The report said, "[I]t would be a very sizeable increase in budgetary liabilities which would create pressure for reducing discretionary spending drastically or allowing the deficit and debt grow."

The bank also expressed reservations about any new recruitment in a policy note to the government on public administration reform.

The government is scheduled to sit in mid-November with the donor agencies on their participation in implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Sources said it is anticipated that the major donors including the WB would ask the government what steps it has taken to reduce public expenditure, which they consider to be essential for maintaining macroeconomic stability. The recruitment suspension will be one of the answers to that query.

Another factor influencing the decision was the fact that although the government included the Development Support Credit (DSC) of the IMF in its current budget, the third tranche of the DSC has yet not been released. Besides, though the government's expenditure has increased due to introduction of the new pay scale, there has not been any substantial rise in its revenue to offset the extra burden.

The price spiral in petroleum and essential products has put a tremendous pressure on the economy. The government's bank borrowing has also increased in recent times. All these factors have put the government in face of a serious financial crisis, said a senior cabinet member.

A finance ministry source said though the finance minister is often credited with maintaining the macroeconomic stability, any further burden on the public exchequer might destroy that. It may result in a drastic fall in foreign aid, which again would make it extremely difficult for the government to implement its current Tk 64,384 crore jumbo budget.

The instability might also damage the government's public image, which is now most unwelcome with the general election approaching.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman early this month apprised Prime Minister Khaleda Zia of the economic crisis the country is now going through, a cabinet member told The

Govt orders

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take measures to stop harassment of passengers at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) immigration.

"The SB officials mentioned computer illiteracy of many immigration officials as a reason for such harassment. Training will be arranged for these officials to streamline the problem," said the meeting source.

Deputy Inspector General of highway police Sheikh Sajjad Ali assured the meeting of taking all-out measures to stop robbery on highways at night.

Besides, the meeting ordered to submit flawless charge sheet in the Mirpur trader Kazi Shahidullah murder case within a week.

The meeting also instructed the authorities concerned to strengthen operation to stop drug peddling and carlifting.

State Minister Babar will hold a meeting with the inspector general of police to discuss the cases filed for murders of journalists and expediting the investigation.

Morshed

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Safta will come into effect on time," Morshed said while speaking at a talk on the 13th Saarc summit organised by the Diplomatic Correspondents Association Bangladesh (DCAB) at the Jatiya Press Club.

A high official of the Foreign Ministry, however, told reporters on Wednesday that they are hopeful about the implementation of Safta from the scheduled date as the committee of experts are due to meet in Kathmandu on November 29-December 1 to resolve some disagreements.

The official said the member states of Saarc are committed to implement the Safta accord from January 1 by resolving the three unresolved issues.

Daily Star last night. Saifur emphasised scaling down public expenditure and suggested refraining from any attempts leading to an increase in spending. In this context he discussed the issue of new government recruitment with the prime minister.

According to an official source, the suspension of new recruitment for government jobs came as a sequel to that meeting. He said allocations for the projects under the annual development programme will also be reduced.

Under the belt-tightening measure, the Finance Division is closely scrutinising the expenditure proposals of the ministries. The prime minister in a meeting with the secretaries a few days back also asked to cut on expenditure.

Another source said due to the existing pressure on the public coffers, the government has also been faltering in allocating funds for local-level administration regularly, slowing down the economic activities at the grassroots.

But many ruling party leaders are nettled by the decision. A senior minister requesting anonymity said the stoppage of government appointments contradicts the BNP's election pledge to create job opportunities. If there is pressure on the economy or from the donors, he argued, the government could have managed the situation in some other way.

A number of BNP lawmakers from Kushtia and Rajshahi told The Daily Star the decision may harm the government's image. An MP from Kushtia said, "I have promised government jobs to some youths of my constituency. Now if I fail to give them jobs my chance of re-election will be jeopardised."

He regretted that while the government is buying new cars and holding international conferences, it is blocking employment opportunities.

The government in 2004, too, had decided to stop recruitment but could not stick to the decision.

Khulna BNP

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committee and formation of a 12-member convening committee of the city BNP are a violation of the party constitution.

Nurul Islam said, "We were not formally informed of the dissolution from the party high command."

Meanwhile, both factions of the city BNP are in a tense mood.

The faction headed by Ali Asgar Lobi, MP, at a meeting on Wednesday night decided to capture the party office at KD Ghosh Road while leaders of the other faction including Nurul Islam were found in the party office yesterday apparently to resist Asgar loyalists from capturing it.

Four platoons of police have been deployed in and outside the party office to avert any untoward incidents.

The intra-party squabbles intensified when the president of Rupsha upazila BNP unit and president of the dissolved city BNP committee Nurul Islam accused each other of moral turpitude at separate press conferences at Khulna Press Club.

The BNP high command reportedly directed the intelligence of Rapid Action Battalion and police to probe the allegations.

Sources in the BNP high command confirmed that the party chairperson consented to the dissolution of Khulna city BNP committee and formation of a convening committee to put an end to intra-party feuds.

When contacted, Asgar however denied any move to capture the party office. "All leaders and activists of the BNP have equal right to use the party office. So there is no question of capturing it."

Rampant graft

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including Rangpur Medical College Hospital due to corruption, bribery, and indifference of the doctors, nurses and employees.

Patients have to pay bribes at several departments of the government hospitals established to provide medical care at minimum cost, said the speakers at the publishing ceremony of the report at the local Shilpokala Academy.

The report prepared with technical assistance from Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) revealed that the patients are being charged illegal fees for treatment, diagnosis, accommodation, and meals by the doctors and employees.

It also disclosed that the doctors spend an undue amount of time with the representatives of pharmaceutical companies keeping the patients waiting for hours. Doctors on duty in the emergency department sometimes remain absent.

Majority of the doctors coerces the patients to see them in their chambers at their private clinics. Some middlemen help the doctors in collecting patients from the hospitals for their private practices.

The CCC suggested posting at the wards of the duty list of doctors and nurses, diet menu for the patients and the chart of service fees.

The report also suggested cleanliness in the wards, bathrooms and toilets, and recommended keeping the beds clean.

JS limps into fifth year

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parliamentary party forced Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury to step down from the presidency.

But the lawmakers failed to realise their demands of expelling corrupt ministers from the cabinet and of downsizing the jumbo cabinet.

Apathy of the policymakers towards JS

Assuming office through the general election on October 1, 2001, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia also the leader of the House declared to make the parliament the centre point of all activities.

But the policymakers of the ruling alliance comprising the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh Jatiya Party, and Islami Oikya Jote have not initiated any significant step to improve the quality of the parliamentary system of the government.

In the seventh parliament the erstwhile treasury bench in a significant move made the lawmakers chairmen of parliamentary bodies amending the rules of procedure that had imposed a ban on ministers becoming chiefs of parliamentary bodies.

An opposition lawmaker of the Jatiya Party, Dr TIM Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury was even made the chairman of a parliamentary standing committee on agricultural ministry in the seventh parliament.

In the same parliament, the half an hour prime minister's question answer session was introduced that was lauded by all. Besides, Institute of Parliamentary Studies (IPS) was established to strengthen parliamentary democracy.

In the fifth parliament, the much-desired parliamentary system of governance was reintroduced by amending the constitution. The erstwhile treasury bench allowed holding of several general discussions on different important issues in the parliament.

The current parliament cannot claim any such significant move compared to the last two parliaments. The ruling alliance is rather running the House only to meet the constitutional bindings and to pass government bills.

Moreover, the current parliament began its journey on October 28, 2001 amid a boycott by the main opposition Awami League and witnessed absence of their lawmakers in most of the workdays. The fifth and seventh parliaments were lucky enough in this regard that they were able to begin their journey with the presence of the main opposition parties.

Instead of initiating any move to resolve the parliamentary stalemate due to the boycott, the ruling BNP policymakers has been blasting the main opposition for remaining absent from the parliamentary proceedings.

The ruling alliance very often accuses the main opposition of betraying the people by boycotting the parliamentary proceedings.

Ironically, it was also true for the present ruling BNP when it was on the opposition bench in the seventh parliament.

The BNP as the opposition in 1996 joined the maiden session of the seventh parliament and started boycotting the house from the 13th session. Between the 13th and the 23rd session, which was the last session of the seventh parliament, the BNP appeared in the House only enough times to save its membership.

The BNP boycotted 149 working days out of 382 raising concerns over the alleged vitiation of the environment of Jatiya Sangsad by the ruling party and the speaker. It even expelled its own lawmaker Major (ret'd) Akhtaruzzaman from the party for joining the parliament session ignoring the party's decision to boycott the House.

In the last four years, the ruling alliance did not take any significant step to strengthen the parliamentary standing committees, rather it stopped a move initiated by the IPS.

The IPS this year moved for holding a series of dialogues between the committee chiefs and secretaries to different ministries. But the government high ups stopped the dialogue following severe criticisms by the chairmen of the committees against the government high ups for making the committee system dysfunctional at the first dialogue session.

Power rationing

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shipment deadlines if factories remained closed during peak hours.

Buyers will then shift to other countries and the sector will lose in competition on the global market, the BGMEA feared.

Convinced about the consequences, Iqbal instantly backtracked on the Desa decision and assured the exporters that he would ask the authorities concerned to keep the sector out of its load management programme during peak hours.

The BGMEA team assured the minister that the garment factories will not stretch shifts more than two hours beyond normal timing.

As load shedding emerged as a major problem with power shortfalls exceeding 1,000 mw, the government in recent times resorted to power

Even several senior ministers met the prime minister and complained against some of the chairmen who started scrutinising irregularities in the ministries. The prime minister scolded the committee chiefs and asked them to work together with the ministers. The prime minister's directives made some chairmen very cautious about discussing any irregularities in the ministries.

In addition to this Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed issued a letter to the speaker suggesting the BNP lawmakers to consult with the leader of the house before placing any private member's bill in the parliament.

Lawmakers of the ruling BNP blasted the law minister for issuing such an instruction and also blasted the speaker for not rejecting the letter and for not upholding the lawmakers' rights to place bills.

Finally, the BNP lawmakers lost their rights to place private members' bills in the parliament while their party policymakers remained acquiescent.

LAWMAKERS' UNWILLINGNESS TO ATTEND THE HOUSE AND IMPORTANT ISSUES IGNORED

The parliament in last four years witnessed severe quorum crisis, as the lawmakers were indifferent to attending the House regularly.

Though the ruling alliance has more than a two third majority in the parliament, the speaker had to wait half an hour on an average everyday to start the business of the House because sometimes there were not even 60 lawmakers present to make the quorum. On several occasions the speaker was compelled to adjourn the sittings due to severe quorum crisis. Besides, the speaker frequently ran the House without ensuring the quorum.

Irked by the absence of the party lawmakers in the House, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at a meeting of the BNP parliamentary party threatened her party lawmakers with dissolution of the parliament if they do not attend the sessions regularly on time.

The ruling party lawmakers have apparently lost their interest to attend the House, as it does not deal with any on going important issues and because of the boycott by the main opposition lawmakers. Except a few, most of the ministers did not attend the House regularly on time.

In the last four years, different important issues were not discussed in parliament, as the ruling alliance did not feel comfortable to hold discussions.

Only three general discussions were held while the opposition lawmakers submitted several thousand notices demanding discussions on different important issues including the price hike of essentials, rise of militants, law and order situation, and bomb blasts.

The treasury bench did not summon any special session to discuss any issue of national importance in the last four years.

Even after the August 17 country-wide series of bomb blasts, the government did not meet the demands of different political parties and professional bodies to convene a special parliamentary session to hold discussions on the blast.

A parliament session was summoned last September only to meet the constitutional bindings that say the gap between one session to another cannot exceed 60 days. In absence of the main opposition lawmakers, the ruling alliance lawmakers did not dare to raise the issue of serial bomb blasts during the question answer session with the state minister for home affairs.

The question answer session, a vital part of the parliament session, has lost its significance as the lawmakers hardly raise any significant national issue before the House.

The government in the last four years however increased perks to the president, prime minister, speaker, deputy speaker, members of the minister council and the lawmakers twice, which sparked a severe criticism.

The government passed a total of 137 bills including indemnity to the killings in the hands of the joint forces during the Operation Clean Heart that sparked severe criticism for violation of human rights.

However, it was a success of the parliamentary standing committee on law justice and the parliamentary affairs

for disclosing the shady deal of the law ministry in providing a BNP man with the presidential clemency in a hurried fashion.

Meanwhile the parliamentary standing committee on communications ministry that accused the communications minister of irregularities concerning import of CNG three wheeler autorickshaws failed to probe the incident in last one and a half year.

Discriminatory attitude towards opposition parties

In dealing with the opposition parties, the BNP has adopted the 'old strategy' that does not sincerely desire the presence of the main opposition party's deputies, but extends more attention to the second largest opposition party in ensuring their presence in parliament.

The second largest opposition party in the parliament, Jatiya Party (JP), on several occasions declared to boycott the House in protest against the government's moves that included barring of its chairman, HM Ershad, from going abroad, and discrimination in allocation of development funds among the constituencies.

The JP lawmakers started boycotting the parliament with ultimatum to the government to resolve the problems. The LGRD minister who acts as the deputy leader of the House assured the JP lawmakers with promises to resolve the problems in line with their demands.

The LGRD minister expressed his regrets in the parliament over the remarks of the deputy minister for food and disaster management about the JP lawmakers' luxurious living in the capital while the people in the north-western region are starving due to a near famine situation. JP lawmakers protested the remark.

But the government attitude is totally reverse if the opposition party is Awami League (AL). The main opposition AL started boycotting the parliamentary proceedings in 2003 protesting against derogatory remarks made by the state minister for housing and public works about the leader of the opposition. The AL lawmakers demanded an apology from the government as a pre-condition to their joining the House.

But the ruling BNP did not apologise pushing the main opposition lawmakers to boycott the parliamentary proceedings for a long time.

The treasury bench put another glaring example of its attitude towards the AL following the assassination of AL lawmaker and former finance minister SAMS Kibria. The AL demanded adjournment of the sitting after adopting an obituary reference on Kibira, but the treasury bench refused to adjourn the sitting and the AL did not join the obituary reference in last January in the parliament.

Even on holding a discussion on the assassination attempt on AL Chief Shiekh Hasina on August 21 last year that killed 22 persons, the ruling party stuck to its stance and did not hold the discussion adjourning other business of the House. The speaker allowed a general discussion on the issue, but the AL lawmakers did not participate in the discussion and boycotted the House that continued without them.

ROLE OF THE COALITION PARTNERS

As partners in the four party coalition, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) for the first time in Bangladesh's history took their position on the treasury bench of the parliament.

The lawmakers of the JIB and IOJ were seen vocal on several occasions for strengthening madrasa education. They also raised their voices in parliament protesting against crackdown on madrasa students with suspected links with Islamist militants.

The coalition partners' lawmakers on several occasions outside the House blasted the government, but did not do the same inside the parliament.

The IOJ chairman also a lawmaker Fazul Haque Amini resigned from the post of chairman of a parliamentary standing committee in protest against the prime minister's refusal to include him in the cabinet.

Lawmakers of Bangladesh Jatiya Party, another partner of the alliance, could not even show their presence inside the parliament.

Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab), said it is practically not possible for apartment buildings to generate own power for up to six hours.

Generally, the apartment buildings are installed with power generators with capacity of 30 to 60kw and in some cases up to 100kw.

"So it is not technically possible to supply the entire demand for long six hours from standby generators," he explained.

Power connections to shopping malls would be cut off as an ultimate action if the owners do not stop illuminating their establishments in the evening, according to one of a number of decisions the government took on October 10 to tackle a nagging power crisis.

JMB threat

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A police official yesterday told our Sylhet correspondent that Gopal Chakraborty, manager of the bank, got the letter Wednesday, four days after the deputy commissioner, Sylhet, received the similar bomb threat through a letter in the name of the JMB central command.

Gopal Chakraborty informed the authorities concerned of the matter. Police have been deployed at all commercial banks and other installations.

Our staff correspondent from Chittagong reported that the Court of Metropolitan Sessions Judge yesterday ordered reinvestigation into two out of six August 17 bomb blasts cases in the port city.

Judge AKM Anwar Hossain issued the order following an appeal from Public Prosecutor Abdus Sattar. The judge gave 30 days to Panchlaish and Bakalia police stations each for fresh investigation into the cases.

He also ordered for appointing senior-level police officials as investigation officers (IOs) of the two cases, changing the previous IOs.

Eight cases were filed with eight police stations under the Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) after the August 17 serial blasts at the city's 19 key points. Of them, six police stations—Panchlaish, Bakalia, Kotwali, Doublemooring, Pahartali and Halishahar—submitted final reports on Monday with recommendations for release of 15 arrestees.

Although Khulshi Police Station in its charge sheet accused eight, including Bangla Bhai and Shaikh Abdur Rahman, Bandar police submitted charge sheet against only two JMB activists, Abdus Sattar Mollah and Arshadul Alam alias T. Alam.

Sources said the top officials of the home ministry are unhappy over the merits of the charge sheets submitted by the six police stations.

Onion price

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This year onion production in those Indian states was badly affected due to incessant rains and inclement weather, raising its price to Rs 40 to 44 kg.

Bangladesh needs 10 to 12 lakh tonnes of onion a year but it produces seven to nine lakh tonnes. About 90 percent of the shortage is met from import of onion from India and the rest is imported from Myanmar, Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) sources said.

The TCB has sold 100 tonnes of onion in the Ramadan and its present stock of only 10 tonnes will be exhausted in the next two days, the sources said.

But there are allegations that no onion was sold from TCB mobile trucks in the last couple of days.

Against this backdrop, Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury yesterday claimed that the country now has a stock of around two lakh tonnes of onion.

"Law enforcers including police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and intelligence agencies are already on the move to nab the hoarders who illegally stockpiled onion to raise its price," Altaf told reporters.

He also said the government has already taken initiative to import onion from countries like China, Nepal, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Belgium and Thailand.

Meanwhile, prices of vegetables in the city markets have also risen by Tk 2-20 per kg in the last few days. Green chilli was selling at Tk 45 to Tk 55 a kg yesterday against Tk 20 to Tk 24 in the previous week.

Cucumber sold at Tk 36 to Tk 40 per kg yesterday while its price ranged between Tk 22 and Tk 32 only several days ago. Price of papaya however remained unchanged, selling at Tk 8-10 a kg.

Graft case

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The court asked the ACC and the government to show why the ACC chairman's approval of investigation and filing of the charge sheet by an anti-corruption officer should not be considered illegal.

Hasina, also the Awami League (AL) chief, filed a writ petition yesterday challenging the ACC chairman's approval to the investigation. She alleged he did not follow proper procedures.

On March 27, 2002, the former Bureau of Anti Corruption (Bac) filed the three cases accusing Hasina and some of her cabinet members of corruption and irregularities in the Novo Theatre project.

However, there was little progress in these cases afterwards. The Bac was dissolved and the ACC was formed and the three cases were revived from the shelf on August 24 last.

On the same day an anti-corruption officer (ACO) issued a letter saying the ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan ordered Khan Mohammad Mizanul Islam, who was the Bac investigation officer for the three cases, to conduct the investigation.

Mizanul was asked to complete the investigation and file the memorandum of evidence (charge sheet) as soon as possible.

Hasina's lawyers argued yesterday that the commission has to approve the order and the ACC chairman alone can not approve it. They also said the approval was not mentioned in the gazette as dictated by the ACC act.

The respondents of yesterday's court ruling includes the cabinet secretary, ACC chairman, deputy director of task force 3 of ACC and two ACC officials concerned.

On behalf of Hasina, Rokonuddin Mahmud moved the petition with the assistance of barristers Fazle Nur Tapash, Mostafizur Rahman and Sheikh Hasan Arif.

Huda rejects

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standing committee in the constitution of the JAF. How such a committee could oust me?" asked Huda, leader of one faction, at a press conference. "Such ousters do not matter to me."

The latest round of longstanding conflict between the two groups of the JAF flared up Monday when Huda arbitrarily announced dissolution of the existing JAF central committee before forming a convening committee to elect a new central body. Huda also made himself convenor of this body.

Soon after his announcement, the other faction, led by telecoms minister Aminul Haq, held a JAF standing committee meeting to oust Huda and his comrade BNP Law Secretary Joinal Abedin. On Tuesday, Aminul explained to the press why Huda and Joinal were ousted at Supreme Court Bar Building.

In a show of strength, Huda boasted to the press at the same venue yesterday that over 1,000 lawyers made him the convenor and an illegal JAF

standing committee could no way overrule their decision.

"There is only one JAF. It has no second identity," he pointed out. "Its constitution does not have any scope to allow anyone to stay as its president forever. The general members have now taken a position against those who are holding posts for 16-17 years without any election."

"The JAF has become stagnant for quite some time. We are trying to revive it," he added.

He accused Khandker Mahbub Uddin of triggering the internal conflict in the JAF. "After he became JAF member (in recent years), the forum became divided," Huda noted.

Meanwhile, the Sanmilitia Ainjibi Forum, an anti-government lawyers' platform, organised a human chain on the Supreme Court Bar Building premises, expressing concerns at the rise of Islamist militancy.

Saarc Summit

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"As the Saarc leaders will start arriving, the security net will be in place which you have never seen before," he added.

Foreign ministry sources said the government is planning to declare public holiday on November 13 on the occasion of the summit.

Security issues demand constant attention and these are being continuously updated, Moshed Khan said, adding that the government has taken all-out measures to ensure maximum security for the Saarc leaders as well as members of the delegations.

Meanwhile State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar told reporters yesterday that the government finds no security threat concerning the upcoming Dhaka summit.

"We've taken adequate measures... you may term it foolproof security arrangement," he said emerging from the meeting on law and order at the ministry.

Asked about any possible threat to the twice-postponed summit, Babar said, "By the grace of Allah, we've not received anything so far."

As reporters mentioned about a letter of threat by the banned Islamist militant organisation Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) on Wednesday, he said, "Many such letters come every day, we don't consider those any threat."

Babar, however, did not reply when reporters asked about a recent JMB threat to blow up a police station.

Some 20,000 policemen and 1,300

14-party

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November 15 grand rally in Dhaka.

Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil has been elected co-ordinator of the 16-member liaison committee at a meeting of the leaders of the alliance which comprises the AL, 11 left parties, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and National Awami Party (NAP). The meeting was held at the Workers Party office in the capital.

The meeting discussed preparations for the November 15 grand rally at Paltan Maidan from where the leaders will announce the minimum common national programme and fresh agitation programmes against the government.

The liaison committee will also take decision about participation in the next national polls and about formation of the next possible alliance government, said the leaders.

Yesterday's meeting also formed a sub-committee with Rashed Khan Menon as its chief, which will formulate the minimum common national programme. The common minimum national programme will be the base of the opposition's election manifesto in the run up to the next election.

Presided over by Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, the meeting adopted a resolution which blamed the government for its indifference to food scarcity in the country's northern part and said that the people are dying of starvation in the region.

The meeting also criticised the government's recent move to halt all appointments to government posts except the cadre services, and said the decision would increase unemployment in the country.

Dhaka, Delhi

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held at Shangri-la Hotel.

Bangladesh is understood to have expressed its concern over some wanted Bangladeshi criminals' finding shelter in India.

Just before going to attend the talks, Indian Home Secretary VK Duggal told reporters, "We will discuss border management and security issues."

"We have come here with an open mind," said Bangladesh Home Secretary Sarfaraj Hossain, who is leading a ten-member delegation.

Among other issues, which figured prominently during the meeting, were the implementation of 1975 border guidelines to allow border fencing and development works to be undertaken without any hindrance, checking arms smuggling and steps to carry out joint patrolling to check trans-border crimes.

The Bangladesh delegation had a brief meeting with the Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patil at the end of the talks.

The two home secretaries are scheduled to hold a joint news conference today and a joint statement is likely to be issued.

ADB aid

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four gas transmission pipelines totalling 353km to transport about 360 million cubic feet of natural gas per day to the less developed western region of Bangladesh, the bank said in a statement from Manila.

In addition, the project will conduct a survey of five existing gas fields to provide updates on the estimated gas in place and to determine the exact location for possible drilling, the ADB added.

Once completed, the project will allow the western part of Bangladesh to receive large-scale amounts of natural gas for the first time.

"By supporting the use of the much cleaner natural gas as a fuel for power generation and industry and transport, as well as for household use, the project will also contribute to improving air quality in urban centres and in households," ADB project economist Piya Abeygunawardena was quoted as saying.