

Govt halts recruitment

JS limps into fifth year

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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, "[It] 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 Daily Star.

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.

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 Agar 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.

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 (retd) 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 amending 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 chairman of the committees against the government high-ups for making the committee system dysfunctional at the first dialogue session.

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.

Convinced about the consequences, Iqbal instantly backedtracked 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 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.

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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 chairman 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 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 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.

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.

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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

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.

Meanwhile the parliamentary standing committee on communications ministry that accused the communications minister of irregularities concerning import of CNG three wheeler auto rickshaws 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 regret 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.

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

Meanwhile State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman 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 received any threat 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

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

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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 arrested.

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.