

Putting party before parliament

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lawmakers instead of protecting their rights.

The lawmakers have long been demanding that the right be restored to them, but Sircar rejected the appeal and advised them to consult the prime minister and the law minister about the matter.

"It is humiliating for parliament. Himself being the head of parliament, [the speaker] has allowed the executive to interfere in the parliamentary affairs," ruling BNP lawmaker Abu Hena said at a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on private members' bills and resolutions on April 9 this year.

On the law ministry decision, the speaker on March 12 this year told The Daily Star, "Due to the lack of consultation, the lawmakers often move to place bills that cause embarrassment to the government."

Infringing media rights, Sircar stuck to his position by not allowing the private television channels inside the parliament building for coverage of parliamentary proceedings or any briefing of the main opposition party.

The speaker has repeatedly defended this stand on security grounds, a lame excuse that has become a laughing stock as he allows the same private TV channels to cover his own media briefing at his office inside the JS.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed at a discussion this month said he, however, is in favour of allowing the TV channels to cover the parliamentary proceedings.

Sircar himself presided over the House during the last four years, not letting the deputy speaker or any member of the panel of chairmen nominated at the beginning of each session to do the job.

However, once in 2003, the speaker allowed a member from the panel of chairmen to preside over the House, bypassing the deputy speaker although he was present in the parliament at that time.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui accused the speaker of violating the constitution and the JS rules of procedure, according to which, members of the panel of chairman are entitled to preside over the House only in absence of both the speaker and the deputy speaker.

Sircar, also a lawmaker of the ruling BNP, issued over one hundred rulings on different issues during the last four years although some of the issues were not related to parliament. The speaker declared illegal a parliamentary team formed by the main

opposition Awami League (AL), comprising lawmakers, to probe one such incident.

The speaker in a ruling this year also declared illegal the lawyers' movement on the Supreme Court premises, prompting the agitating lawyers to cancel his membership from the Supreme Court Bar Association last May.

Sircar has set a record by running the House without ensuring the quorum and presenting a "novel" explanation on formation of quorum.

Entering the House, Sircar never waits for ensuring the presence of 60 lawmakers to form the quorum. The scene, however, was different in the seventh parliament. The then deputy speaker, who presided over most sessions, used to sit in silence, giving scopes for the formation of the quorum.

Contradicting the experts' views on quorum, Jamiruddin Sircar's explanation maintains that it is "not necessary" to ensure the quorum at the beginning of the session.

The law minister disagreed with the explanation.

Sircar could have claimed himself successful as a host in holding 49 conferences of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Dhaka in 2003 only if he could avoid some controversies.

At the beginning of the preparatory works for the conferences, the speaker included two political secretaries to the prime minister in the steering committee of the conference. This sparked severe criticism as the two secretaries were not lawmakers. The main opposition repeatedly demanded exclusion of the two, but the speaker paid no heed.

The secretaries were, however, finally excluded from the committee following a PM directive.

The speaker has not also disclosed the probe report on the national anthem scandal of the inaugural function of the conference.

The speaker also did not waste chances to appreciate the initiatives of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government. On several occasions, he referred to his past association with the BNP, reminding the PM that he was education minister of the BNP government during 1991-1996. Moreover, he often addressed Khaleda Zia "madam" in the House instead of an official term.

Sircar's indifference towards the main opposition lawmakers was always noticeable during these four years.

He did not take any step when AL

lawmaker Ahsanullah Master was gunned down at Gazipur.

His remark, following the assassination of former finance minister and AL lawmaker Shah AMS Kibria, that he did not know the incident on the day of killing and learnt it from newspapers the next morning generated huge criticism.

The speaker did not initiate any significant step to bring the main opposition back to the House. His calls remained limited only to asking the AL lawmakers to join the House in his welcome and winding up speeches in every session.

In the seventh parliament, on the other hand, the then speaker had taken steps to bring the then main opposition in parliament and sent letter to the then opposition leader in this regard.

Jamiruddin Sircar gave the same reasons for rejecting over one thousand notices on different vital issues submitted for discussion by the opposition lawmakers as the treasury bench did not agree to hold the discussions.

His decision was questioned when he allowed a general discussion on the August 21 grenade attack on an AL rally last year on the ground that the matter is sub judice, rejecting the main opposition's demand for discussion adjourning other businesses of the House.

On strengthening the parliamentary standing committee system, the speaker can claim some success for taking a significant step to hold a series of dialogues with the committee chiefs and secretaries of different ministries.

The speaker, however, failed to continue with the initiative as the government high-ups reacted sharply over the dialogues, where the committee chiefs accused the ministers and government senior officials of making the committee system dysfunctional by not providing required documents.

The speaker had to stop the move after holding one discussion on March 1 this year.

During the last four years, the speaker along with his deputy rushed to the Prime Minister's Office on several occasions, ignoring the norms of the parliamentary system of governance.

Jamiruddin Sircar, however, is lucky enough as the speaker of the House as he became the acting president for 73 days following the removal of Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury from presidency in 2002.

Sayed

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politics for the greater interest of the nation and its sovereignty.

He demanded implementation of the unanimous resolution of banning the politics of Jamaat and Shibir adopted in the Jatiya Sangsad in 1993.

The AL leader said the demand for banning the politics of Jamaat-Shibir is not a new issue. It is the basic demand of the freedom-loving people.

Thirty-three lawmakers including Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, then deputy leader of the House, BNP leaders Major (ret) Hafiz Uddin, Ashraf Hossain, Shahjahan Siraj and Sirajul Islam of Islami Oikya Jote took part in the discussion in the Jatiya Sangsad from September 19 to 23 in 1993 in support of banning the politics of Jamaat-Shibir.

He said Jamaat is still practising the politics of killing in the guise of religion. The patronisation and support of Jamaat to the Islamist militants has resulted in the rise of extremism in the country.

Considering the prevailing situation in the country, it is necessary to ban the politics of Jamaat-Shibir, he added.

Cong, Natwar

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Congress and Foreign Minister Natwar Singh were among those in this list.

"I am deeply shocked and outraged by these allegations which are baseless and untrue," Singh said in a statement from Frankfurt, where he was in transit on his way back from a visit to Russia.

"My record in public life for the past 50 years and more has been an open book. My personal integrity has never been questioned," he said.

"This is obviously part of the continuing campaign to malign the Congress party and its senior leaders and functionaries."

A Congress spokesman issued a strong denial and said legal experts were examining options before the party over there.

"Indian National Congress has been incorrectly and unfairly named. We reject this," Congress spokesman Anand Sharma told a news conference.

"We do not have anything to hide. We will face it squarely. I am questioning the authenticity of the reference made to the Congress party," Sharma said.

The oil-for-food programme, which began in 1996 and ended in 2003, was designed to ease the impact on ordinary Iraqis of UN sanctions, imposed when Baghdad's troops invaded Kuwait in 1990.

PM, Saudi king

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assumed office as Saudi monarch.

The prime minister appreciated the initiative of King Abdullah for holding an extraordinary OIC summit at the end of the current year in Makkah and termed the initiative timely.

She hoped that the ensuing OIC summit likely to be held in December would provide new guidelines to counter the challenges faced by Muslim Ummah.

She wished the king good health and long life, and hoped that under his dynamic and able leadership, the people of Saudi Arabia and also the Muslim Ummah would achieve continued progress and prosperity.

The prime minister said Bangladesh gives great importance to the fraternal relationship with Saudi Arabia and hoped that the relations would reach a new height in the context of emerging global development.

She briefed the Saudi king about the successes achieved by her government in different sectors, including education, health and poverty alleviation.

The king appreciated the successes made by Bangladesh under the leadership of prime minister Khaleda Zia and assured all-out Saudi cooperation in maintaining this trend of development.

Apprising her government's various investment-friendly packages for the foreign investors, the prime minister hoped that the Saudi investors would come forward to invest in a bigger way in Bangladesh.

In response, King Abdullah said he would advise the Saudi business leaders and investors to visit

Bangladesh to explore the business potentials.

Khaleda thanked the Saudi government for providing jobs for a large number of Bangladeshis in Saudi Arabia and said they are contributing to the economic progress of the two countries.

She hoped that Saudi Arabia would recruit more manpower from Bangladesh.

Khaleda invited King Abdullah to visit Bangladesh and the king accepted the invitation, saying the visit would take place at a mutually convenient time.

During the meeting, King Abdullah recalled the contributions of late president Ziaur Rahman towards the unity, solidarity and prosperity of the Muslim Ummah. He also mentioned Zia's role as a member of the Al-Quds committee to end the Iraq-Iran war.

The prime minister conveyed her personal condolence to the Saudi monarch at the death of King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz.

She also conveyed sympathy to the Saudi royal family and the people of Saudi Arabia, terming late King Fahd a true friend of Bangladesh and said the people of Bangladesh were deeply shocked at King Fahd's death.

Prime Minister's youngest son Arafat Rahman, State Minister for Civil Aviation Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin, Mohammad Mosaddek Ali MP and Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia SM Ikramul Haque were present.

The prime minister is scheduled to return home tomorrow.

Hajj flights uncertain

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by carrying only 4,000 pilgrims as jet fuel price rose sharply over the last one year.

Biman is not happy at the cabinet decision of not increasing the fare for Hajj flights while other traditional Hajj flight operators have declined to accept the proposed low fare, and quoted fares as high as \$1,360, sources pointed out.

"I am now offering them (foreign scheduled airlines) Biman's slots for carrying pilgrims from Bangladesh at as low fare as they can," Mir Nasir said.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, now in Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah, would be apprised of the latest stalemate over Hajj flights on her return home, officials said.

At his first meeting with the foreign and private airlines on October 23, the state minister asked them to submit their Hajj flight fare quotations to the civil aviation ministry by October 27. But the very next day, he had another round of talks with 10 foreign airlines and extended the time limit by three days.

Both the religious affairs ministry and the civil aviation ministry now wait to see the lowest fare offers and flight capacities of these foreign airlines -- Gulf Air, Qatar Airways,

Kuwait Airways, Pakistan International Airlines, Yemen Air, Singapore Airlines, Malaysian Airlines, British Airways, Saudi Arabian Airlines and Thai Airways.

Officials hope a few of the 10 airlines will submit their fare quotations by today and an eight-member committee headed by the civil aviation secretary will then scrutinise the quotations and prepare a report.

The state minister for civil aviation and tourism is scheduled to meet the representatives of the foreign airlines at his office tomorrow (Monday) to decide next steps.

If the quoted fare rates are higher than that of Biman (\$ 950 per pilgrim), a cabinet decision would be required to allow the civil aviation ministry give a 'go-ahead' to the foreign airlines.

Meanwhile, various platforms of intending Hajj pilgrims have urged the government not to enhance airfare of non-ballotee pilgrims.

Some of them also alleged that although the government has fixed airfare of all pilgrims at \$ 950, a vested quarter in the national airlines is trying to increase fare by \$ 410 on the plea of aircraft shortage and price hike of jet fuel just for their personal gains.

Sirajganj power plant

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applicant is a number of separate companies acting as a consortium, to submit different types of agreements.

The power cell at a meeting on October 20 argued that these issues should be relaxed to encourage "wider participation".

But industry insiders say competent bidders have stopped participating in recent power bids because of wholesale allegations of bid tampering, manipulation and favouring companies which have a strong footing in the ruling BNP. "Relaxing the bid criteria will bring in incompetent companies only," observed a source.

The BNP government has so far implemented one 80 mw simple cycle power project in Tongi, built by the Chinese company Harbin. Since it started test operations early this year, more than a year behind schedule, the plant keeps on tripping due to technical glitches.

Some PMO officials are also hammering a secretive third phase 450 mw Meghnaghat power project with an Irish American joint venture, Cadogan-Manning, on an unsolicited negotiation basis. This company is also represented by the brother of the senior BNP minister who had previously bagged Tk 3,000 crore worth of a Chinese supplier's credit deals in the energy sector which are now stumbling in every aspect.

The brother of the minister had the Power Cell DGG fired in March and the technical director transferred through the PMO amid opposition from the state minister for power. These changes were made as these officials declined to violate rules and regulations to award the Meghnaghat 3 project to Cadogan-Manning.

30 injured

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district AL committee at the district AL office.

The rival groups attacked each other with knives, hockey sticks and iron rods, sources said. The district AL office was also ransacked during the clash.

Shamsur Rahman Sharif Dilu, president of Pabna district AL, told reporters that the clash started when a group of unruly AL activists attacked the committee meeting.

Former member of parliament Advocate Amzad Hossen, 70, district AL Vice-president Abul Kalam Azad Babu, 45, and district AL leader Azizur Rahman Tinku, 42, Habibur Rahman Habib, 46, are among the senior leaders who were seriously injured in the clash.

They were all admitted to Pabna Sadar Hospital while doctors referred Tinku to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) last night.

Sources said the clash was a reflection of an ongoing rivalry between the loyalist of the newly formed Pabna district AL President Shamsur Rahman Sharif Dilu MP, General Secretary Samsul Haque Tuku and the former MP Waziuddin Khan and Mosharraf Hossain.

Dilu and Tuku were declared persona non-grata in Pabna by their rival group a few days ago, sources said.

Pabna district AL in an urgent meeting last night issued show cause notices to four senior leaders of the district committee and asked them to explain why disciplinary measures should not be taken against them for violating party discipline.

Biman

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confession, Ramna police then nabbed Parvez from his house in the same area.

After quizzing the two, police raided a garage, owned by Abdus Quddus, at Teigoan Industrial Area and recovered a stolen car.

The police team then raided two more garages at Dhanmondi and in Gazipur and seized two more stolen vehicles with Dhaka Metro number plates.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Abdullalhel Baki of Ramna Police Station told The Daily Star that police were confirmed about Parvez's being a Biman official after checking his visiting card and talking to his family members.

"We are convinced he is involved in carjacking as we recovered three stolen vehicles following his statement," he said.

"Parvez said he had link with a garage owner whom he sold the cars," said Baki adding, "But we are cross-checking some information he gave us, which we believe to be false."

When contacted, Ahsan Quadir, director of administration, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, told The Daily Star that he was not aware of the incident. "If any Biman official is arrested for any reason, we usually take departmental action against him," he said.

Criminals

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making at his residence went off. Bulu is now the organising secretary of Bangladesh Shechchha-shebak Dal Khulna city unit.

"I do not know them at all nor did I call them in the party office," said Lobi while reiterating his firm determination to make Khulna a city free from criminals and extortionists. "Why do the police remain silent if Hathkata Bulu and Jubo Dal leader Boering Molla are really wanted as terrorists," Lobi questioned.

The lawmaker while addressing the Iftar party at Hotel Western Inn International yesterday asserted that he would not disgrace any senior and dedicated leader, no matter which faction he belonged to.

A full-fledged committee of the city BNP will be formed properly with dedicated and deserving leaders, Lobi said. There were no ill motives behind the formation of the convening committee as it was done with the approval of party high command, he added.

Minister hails

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general education and madrasa education. Changes were brought only in the syllabus of secondary education, he said.

Zafar mentioned that there was no demand for these changes anywhere in the country. Introduction of such a system would be a major betrayal to the nation, he said.

Telenor slams

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Eventually Banglalink, an Orascom company, sued the BTRC, accusing it of unlawfully favouring Teletalk by exempting it from such payment.

The case remains pending with court but Telenor has launched an attack on the BTRC on the same issue. "The legitimacy and amount of the request for payment has not yet been clarified," the Norwegian operator says in its report.

Rezaul Karim

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BNP chairperson, Karim died with his wife Salma Karim at the bedside, a family source said, adding that his body will soon be brought to Dhaka and buried in Banani graveyard. His son Shahed Karim and daughter Sima Karim already left for Egypt last night.

Karim was appointed the Bangladeshi ambassador to Egypt in June this year and joined his workplace in August.

Born in 1935 in Kushtia, he got his BA (Hons) in Economics from Dhaka University and MA in Public Administration from Karachi University. He received another MA from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, the oldest graduate school of international relations in the US.

He served as a Bangladeshi high commissioner to the UK and Sri Lanka and ambassador to China, Soviet Union, Iran, and Iraq and was concurrently accredited to Finland, Lebanon, North Korea, Mongolia and the Maldives.

Throughout his career, he attended a number of UN and international conferences including UN General Assembly sessions, Commonwealth Head of the Government meetings, Non-aligned summits, Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meetings, Saarc summits and others.

He worked as an international

observer during the parliamentary election in Sri Lanka in 1994, in Cameroon 1997 and in Pakistan 2002. He lectured at universities of Oxford and Cambridge and other prestigious schools across the globe.

A polyglot, Karim used to write regularly for The Daily Star and has penned a number of books on contemporary political developments.

He was the chairman of Pali Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), the apex micro-credit provider in the country, and president of the Rotary Club of Gulshan.

He was also the vice-chairman of Swanivar (self-help) Bangladesh, president of the Commonwealth Society of Bangladesh and honorary advisor to the UNHCR Bangladesh, the Bangladesh-China People's Friendship Society, the Russia-Bangladesh Federation of Chamber of Commerce, the Democracy Watch and the South Asian Forum of Bangladesh.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia have expressed condolences to the bereaved family. Besides, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, IGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam, Advisor to Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman and officials of the foreign ministry have condoled with the family over Karim's death.

14-party shifts rally

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Paltan Maidan rally to bring down the BNP-Jamaat led alliance government.

They will also announce their minimum national programme including their economic and political resolutions from there.

Jalli said many district and upazila level leaders requested to defer the rally for a week. He also said the people will need some time to return to Dhaka after the Eid.

"Therefore, after reviewing the overall situation we had to reschedule the date for the rally," he said.

"We, the 14 opposition parties, are moving jointly not only to oust the BNP-Jamaat led alliance government but to bring a qualitative change in running the country," said Jalli, also the co-ordinator of the opposition's liaison committee.

He said senior opposition leaders will visit five districts adjacent to the capital on November 16, 17 and 18 to mobilise the people for joining the grand rally.

"We are expecting that people in their thousands will throng the Paltan Maidan on November 22 demanding an end to the BNP-Jamaat led alliance's misrule," he said.

Yesterday's meeting also decided that a team comprising high-ranking opposition leaders will visit Monga hit north districts. It criticised the government's 'indifference' despite a famine like situation in the northern districts where thousands of people are facing acute food crisis.

Jalli said the meeting rejected the chief election commissioner's move to prepare a fresh voter list and smelt an ill motive behind it. He however said the opposition is in favour of updating the existing voters' roll.

Senior opposition leaders including Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta and Maimuddin Khan Badal were present at the meeting.

Over 100 die

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burst and low-lying areas have been inundated in Andhra Pradesh after a storm hit the coastal state on Friday afternoon.

"Seventy-seven bodies have been recovered and some more are expected to be retrieved," said Brigadier Jyoti Prasad, an army officer at the accident site.

Krishnaiah had earlier told Reuters he feared up to 150 people could have died in the accident.

Indian Air Force helicopters lifted several bodies from the deluge, which completely or partially submerged some of the train's coaches. Navy divers were also hunting for bodies, which when found were dragged out of the water using ropes.

One of the train coaches was completely smashed while at least four were submerged in water. The coaches came up after the tank breach was plugged.

Railway officials were searching for bodies washed away downstream. Naval boats were being used and rescue workers were also searching bushes for entangled bodies.

Elsewhere in the storm-ravaged state, 35 people died in incidents of house collapses, drowning and electrocutions in Nellore, Chittoor and Prakasham districts, the state's disaster management commissioner, D.C. Rosaiah, said.

"Twenty-five of them died in wall collapses and drowning in Nellore district alone," he said.

The official said nearly 150 people, including 55 fishermen, were missing as swollen streams swept away several cars, autorickshaws and a bus in the affected districts.

The storm was triggered by a depression over the Bay of Bengal, according to weather officials.

Power supply in six Andhra districts including Kadapa was also cut.

Dhaka, Delhi agree

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Both the home secretaries told the press

yesterday that the talks were constructive with a positive frame of mind. There is goodwill on both sides and they will have to find ways to exploit it. Relations between the neighbours should be at their best always, they added.

The neighbouring countries also stressed the need for early signing of the agreement for co-operation in combating the menace of drugs and narcotics, particularly Phensidyle, said a joint statement issued yesterday after the talks held on October 27-28.

During the discussion, all issues were approached on the basis of mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's position and sensitivities. Both sides noted that the relations between India and Bangladesh are multifaceted and rich in its content and scope.

They recognised that further strengthening of these relations will not only be in the larger interests of the two friendly countries, but will also make an important contribution to the peace, progress and prosperity of all their peoples.

The two countries, they agreed, had a shared stake in enhancing understanding and promoting co-operation with specific initiatives in all key areas of their bilateral relations.

They agreed to work on security related issues closely. They also agreed that all possible measures will be taken to prevent smuggling of arms and explosives. The Bangladesh side clarified that media reports about India's involvement in the August 17 blasts do not reflect the official position of the Government of Bangladesh. The

Bangladesh side also mentioned that the investigation was on.

The issue of fencing at the border was also discussed. Bangladesh requested the Indian side to provide specific details of the places where fencing is proposed to be erected within 150 yards of the international border.

On trans-border crimes, the two countries agreed to the need for enhanced vigilance and action to contain trans-border crimes. They stated that neither of the governments encourages any type of smuggling and both are determined to effectively curb smuggling.

The Indian side proposed a high-level meeting to discuss the problem of 'illegal cross-border movement from Bangladesh' and to come up with a suitable mechanism or protocol. Both sides agreed to provide consular access to their arrested nationals on a reciprocal basis.

On resumption of the meetings of Joint Boundary Working Groups, Bangladesh has agreed to convey the dates for the early meetings of the JBWGs after Saarc Summit.

Regarding an extradition treaty and agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Bangladesh said it would expedite its response to the Indian proposals.

On review of Revised Travel Arrangements (RTA) signed in 2001, the Bangladesh side noted the Indian suggestion to set up a Joint Committee to review the RTA, which is due for revision in May, 2006.

Various other issues of mutual interest were also discussed in a spirit of friendliness and co-operation.

Blasts rock Delhi