

AL MPs oppose pay increase of PSC members

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) lawmakers yesterday opposed the proposed increase in salaries of the chairman and members of Public Service Commission (PSC) as, they said, the constitutional body has lost its integrity for irregular practices by its top brass.

AL lawmakers Abdus Shahid and AKM Jahangir Hossain gave a joint note of dissent to this effect at a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the establishment ministry.

Hold the Jatiya Sangsad, the meeting however approved for passage the Members of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (Terms and Conditions of Service) Act, 1974 that include among others the proposals for salary hike.

Meanwhile, despite being on the agenda, the promotion policy in the government services was not discussed.

Committee Chairman Sardar Sakha Hossain Bakul ended the meeting hurriedly, citing lack of quorum as the reason. But the AL lawmakers said there were three members when the chairman adjourned the meeting and three members (of a 10-member committee) are enough to make a quorum.

In the note of dissent the opposition lawmakers said the chairman of the PSC and its members are not fulfilling their constitutional obligations with honesty and neutrality. "They have even been involved in leaking question paper so that the candidates favoured by the ruling alliance pass the competitive tests for the government jobs," it said.

That is how the genuine and competent candidates have been deprived of the government service, the AL lawmakers observed.

The note says, "Prof Mafuzur Rahman, a member of the PSC, has

Greens protest

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Dhanmondi Paribesh Unnayan Jote (DPUJ) held a protest rally in front of the house on Road No. 11-A in Dhanmondi.

"The anti-people government is destroying nature," said Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, who chaired the rally. "The people have to unite to resist government plans to hand public land to commercial developers instead of using it for the nation."

The government had earlier leased the abandoned house No. 90 to the Development of Biotechnology and Environmental Conservation Centre (Debtco) for conducting research work.

As the government failed to build quarters for the staff of Public Works Department (PWD) on the land, it asked the Debtco to vacate the house in 24 hours.

After filing a writ petition, the Debtco got a three-month extension, but government workers have already cut down two trees on the land.

Dr Ferdousi Begum, plant bio-

Hili land port

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political parties to find a solution", said Champa in a wabganj; Superintendent of Police Rezaul Karim.

Indian exporters and C&F agents recently imposed new export rule restricting goods carrying in a truck to 10 metric tons, resulting in losses for Bangladeshi importers.

Bangladeshi importers are counting an additional cost of over Tk 10,000 per truck due to the new rule, Shahinur Rahman, general secretary of Bangladeshi Hill Importers and C&F Agents Association said.

"Traders who bring in goods by nearly 150 trucks daily through the Hili land port from India are counting loss as they used to bring up to 20 tonnes of goods in a truck earlier," he added.

The traders had been following the previous rule since 1987, but a section of truck-owning traders at Indian Hill arbitrarily changed the rule for their own benefit, said sources at Hili.

Several meetings between the traders of both sides to settle the issue failed in recent weeks.

Government will lose some Tk 80 lakh daily revenue at Hili port for the closure.

The situation at Sonamajid land port remained unchanged as Kansat villagers on the port road are observing indefinite strike demanding immediate release of arrested leaders.

The government is deprived of around Tk 50 lakh as daily revenue from the port while onions, fruits and other perishable goods in 15 go-downs are being damaged.

Police kept their movement limited within the Palli Bidyut Samity office, and refrained from removing the road barricades.

"We don't want any more violence, we are talking to leaders of all

Beximco case

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shareholders of QC Container Lines Limited, filed the case with the High Court, accusing three brothers of Salauddin Qader Chowdhury, Giyasuddin Qader Chowdhury, Saifuddin Qader Chowdhury and Jamaluddin Qader Chowdhury.

It was stated in the case that Jamaluddin Qader Chowdhury, managing director of the QC Container Lines Limited and its directors Giyasuddin Qader Chowdhury had misappropriated Tk 95 crore of QC Container Lines Limited by showing additional fares from its four ships and siphoning off the money abroad.

Jamaluddin Qader Chowdhury submitted his reply to the High Court stating that Sohel F Rahman and Salman Rahman have filed the case by providing false information to the court.

Earlier, the High Court bench fixed January 30 for hearing the matter.

Barrister Rafique ul Haq will argue for Beximco Holdings while TH Khan for three brothers of Salauddin Qader Chowdhury.

Cabinet okays

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allowed the intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to tap telephone conversations of any individual.

Later, the ordinance was placed in parliament on the first day of its 20th session on January 23.

But the government later found flaws in the ordinance and felt the urgency of further amendment, as there was no punishable clause in it.

In yesterday's meeting, the cabinet also endorsed the draft of the Court Reform Implementation (complementary provisions) (Amendment) Act 2006 for extending the timeframe for execution of the Court Reform Implementation Act 2004.

Furthermore, the cabinet approved the draft of the Chittagong Veterinary University Act 2006 upgrading Chittagong Government Veterinary College to a university for "creating and extending opportunities of higher education and research in veterinary science", said an official announcement.

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Knut Oberhagemann found river erosion as major threats to the country's two major irrigation projects -- Pabna Irrigation and Rural Development Project (PIRDP) and Meghna-Dholaigaon Irrigation Project (MDIP) -- which helped Bangladesh grow more crops on less land.

"Now we're trying to save these infrastructures by protecting river banks from erosion using low-cost

technology of stacking sand-full geo-bags," he said.

Erosion has also a strong bearing on the livelihood of thousands of people in the districts along the porous 4,000-plus km Indo-Bangladesh border, experts said.

They also pointed to the ground reality that erosion on both banks of the transboundary rivers quite often creates tension.

In the most recent case, Bangladesh's border force the BDR in an amicable settlement with the Border Security Force (BSF) of India on Sunday reclaimed the country's stake on 50 acres of land at Ramgarh in Khagrachari. The land was under disputed possession for long due to erosion of the Feni river's bank inside Bangladesh.

Tauhidul Anwar Khan, a long-time Member of the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), said it is very much within the mandate of the JRC to protect vulnerable cross-boundary river banks both within Bangladesh and India.

Fuel crisis continues

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in the rivers along the coastal belt areas and Teknaf, asked the Bangladesh Navy and Coastguard to submit a list of new water routes of smugglers and an action plan by today.

The smugglers are now using small dhingies and engine boats instead of ships so that they can sail across the narrow channels with fertiliser and oil, the National Committee to Prevent Smuggling was told yesterday.

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), meanwhile, hoped that the fuel crisis in the north would be solved within 24 hours after the commissioning of the temporary depot at Kazirhat. But it could supply fuel to meet the huge demand.

The government should look for alternative ways to manage funds from foreign banks or Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

Otherwise, dollar-crisis would not ease, he observed.

A large number of tank lorries from eight petroleum-hungry northern districts rushed to Kazirhat yesterday to procure fuel but the BPC failed to deliver fuel to the most of them, said the owner of Balaka Filling Station in Rangpur.

Meanwhile, a number of filling stations, which could reserve fuel, are selling diesel at higher rate. Petrol is selling at Tk 48 to 50 per litre while the diesel at Tk 38 to 40.

The farmers, who need diesel for irrigation, are in great anxiety for the fuel crisis.

Energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman last night told BBC Bangla Service that he was suspecting the current situation as an effect of fuel smuggling.

"In our estimate 50,000 tonnes of diesel has been withdrawn in the last four days," he said. "I simply don't understand where in Bangladesh such a huge quantity of diesel has been used," he added.

Meandering tragedy

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hectares of land during 1973-2004 and 12,490 hectares were accreted during the period.

"A total of 1,115 hectares of land was eroded along the right bank and 1,490 hectares on the left bank of the river in 2004," Maminul said. Moreover, 1,442 metres of district roads and 5,104 metres of embankments were eroded during the year.

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Fuel station owners

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including petrol pump owners, dealers, distributors, and agents, among whom 1506 are petrol pump owners.

Referring to the finance minister's recent statement on increase of fuel price, the association president said the pump owners did not keep more than the approved quantity of fuel.

Nipu said the accused SI Alam was present near the spot along with his force but did nothing to stop the robbers. Moreover, they assisted the robbers commit the crime and made arrangements for the robbers' escape with the loot.

Nipu alleged that the accused even picked him up from the spot and forwarded him to the court implicating him in a case. He said SI Alam told him to vacate the house as per directions of the OIC. The SI also demanded Tk 20,000 as toll from him, the complainant alleged.

Following the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Mizanur Rahman directed the Additional Inspector General of Police (CID) to take necessary steps against the accused after an investigation into the matter.

Admitting the fuel smuggling to a neighbouring country, Nazmul Haq said, "To stop smuggling, we put forward some proposals to the government but have not got any response."

The pump owners proposed having a provision in place so that except in case of crisis, petrol pumps of Dhaka will take fuel from

political parties to find a solution", said Champa in a wabganj; Superintendent of Police Rezaul Karim.

Meanwhile, a meeting at the deputy commissioner's office on Sunday night ended without any result as the local administration allegedly influenced by a BNP lawmaker denied the release of three Kansat leaders.

Leaders of different political parties present at the meeting demanded release of the three leaders.

"We can not stay in the area if the arrestees are not released", said Shahbazpur union parishad chairman who was assaulted a couple of days back by protesters.

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Dollar price

FROM PAGE 16

"Dollar price continues to soar widening the export-import deficit. The government was forced to spend more importing petroleum products," said Khandkar Ibrahim Khaled, managing director of Pubali Bank Ltd.

The government should look for alternative ways to manage funds from foreign banks or Islamic Development Bank (IDB). Otherwise, dollar-crisis would not ease, he observed.

Trade imbalance during July-October 2004 was \$696 million, which increased to \$739 million during the same period in 2005.

The commercial banks opened LCs worth \$582 million for petroleum product imports during July-October period of 2005-06 financial year. This is almost a 28 percent or \$129 million increase from the amount in the previous year.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman on Sunday directed Janata and Agrani banks to open LCs for importing petroleum products. Bangladesh Bank (BB) will issue over-drafts in US dollar to help these two banks.

However, no such directive was given to Sonali Bank as it will not open any LCs for Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) unless the state-run agency repays the outstanding amount of Tk 5,500 crore.

These three banks had been the major suppliers of the green-back in the inter-bank foreign exchange market but two of them have already turned into buyers and Agrani bank is now selling a limited number of dollars in the foreign exchange market.

The gang first calls its target and demands toll saying even Rab would not be able to harm them. If anyone refuses they ransack his business and shoot at the targeted firm," said a businessman who had become a target of the gang a few months ago.

Seeking anonymity a local tea stall owner said Pintu's men used to take goods worth Tk 60 to Tk 80 every day from his stall. "The gangsters threaten us with beatings when we refuse to pay tolls," he said.

According to the complaints of one of the two cases, Pintu took a loan of Tk 10 lakh from the Pubali Bank's Imamganj branch in 2004 and 2005 under the name of a company, M/S Electroatra.

He gave 10 cheques to the bank on different dates but the cheques were dishonoured due to insufficient money in his bank account. Later on January 19 and September 22 last year, the bank sent two legal notices to Pintu asking him to pay the money within 15 days from date of receipt of the notices.

Pintu showed up in the scene of crime after BNP had assumed power and his brother Barkatullah Bulu was appointed as the state minister for commerce, said local residents.

The last time senior assistant secretaries were promoted to the post of deputy secretary was in May 2005, when 327 officials were promoted. In 2003, 493 officials were promoted to the post of deputy secretary.

Most of these promoted officials were from 1985 batch. Sources in the establishment ministry said these officials' seniority was considered effected from their date of promotion.

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