

Defence purchase

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that there had been a lot of anomalies in the purchase of F-7 fighters.

The government on June 26, 2005 signed an agreement with the China government to purchase 16 F-7/FT-7 BG fighters.

The air force headquarters in a report to the standing committee on defence on April 16 said the total price of the fighters stand at \$117.9 million.

Awami League (AL) lawmakers and member of the committee rejected the DGDP statement and said the government should come clean about the matter. They also expressed resentment at the prime minister's prolonged absence at the committee meetings.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is in charge of the defence ministry.

"Defence minister should explain the allegations of corruption and irregularities in the procurement process," said Shawkat Ali, AL lawmaker and member of the committee. He asked, "Why the defence minister is not present here."

In reply to Shawkat, the committee chairman said the prime minister is too busy to be here and so she has sent her representative. "However, we will be happy if she attends the meeting as her presence will bring in more transparency," he said.

Meanwhile, Naval chief Hasan Ali Khan yesterday informed the parliamentary standing committee on defence that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has cancelled the move to purchase six high-speed boats following allegations of irregularities, said meeting sources.

The Armed Forces Division earlier sought the prime minister's clearance to procure these boats at a cost of Tk 14.5 crore. It procured six similar boats in 2005 for only Tk 9 crore. There were allegations of bid manipulation in the current procurement process.

Committee Chairman Mahbubur

Rahman said they have recommended that the ministry concerned arrange a monthly allowance for the freedom fighters from the armed forces who won gallantry awards for contribution to the Liberation War.

"It's a shame that a presidential order issued in 1972 showed that members of the armed forces division who received gallantry awards are not freedom fighters," Mahbub told the reporters at his office in parliament after the meeting.

"Such discriminatory order should be cancelled and the ministry should take immediate steps to this end," he added.

Dengue patients

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monitoring, a total of 710 dengue-infected people have been admitted to different city hospitals and none of them have died so far, claimed DCC.

The actual number of dengue-infected people is much higher than the DCC figures, a DCC official said requesting anonymity.

As a part of the ongoing anti-dengue drive by the DCC, a mass awareness rally was organised yesterday by DCC on the streets of ward 52 in Dhamondi area that carried colourful banners with dengue-awareness slogans.

The DCC has identified Dhamondi as a high dengue-prone area as a significant number of dengue-infected patients were detected in this area.

Dengue fever causes acute muscle and joint pain, high fever and severe headache while a more dangerous form can cause internal haemorrhage leading the patient to death.

Aedes mosquito spreads dengue and no vaccine for it has been invented yet.

Poor road work

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"It is very hard to restore a road to its previous condition once it is dug. Generally digging into the roads is causing the rundown condition," said the chief engineer.

Interestingly the city authorities allocated Tk 28 crore this year to dig into the roads.

Some contractors of the city corporation alleged that they are simply unable to deliver quality work as they have to pay no less than 40 percent of the total schedule price as bribes at different stages from getting the work to getting the payment for the work.

"Everything requires bribe. If you simply want to get the tender form, you have to bribe 20 percent of the total schedule price of the work. Then again 20 percent you have to pay as bribes to different people while carrying out the work and finally for getting the bill paid," said a contractor for the city corporation.

Buying the schedule, getting the work order, getting the work inspected, bill measurement, bill format, preparation of vouchers and signing of vouchers all these are done in the city corporation only in exchange of bribes, some contractors said requesting anonymity.

"This is very open. Everyone knows about the practice of bribery. But you cannot prove anything,"

said a contractor who has been working for Nagar Bhaban for seven years.

Sources in DCC said in collusion with some of the engineers of DCC, the contractors do not use good quality materials causing run down situations of the roads, although the city authorities spend a good amount for repairing the roads.

"We do not complete our work as mentioned in the tender. Then a field engineer comes to visit the site and finds the gap. But we strike a deal with him," said a contractor with a grin. "Generally the deal is sixty-forty. He gets forty percent of the cost of the unfinished section and I get sixty percent," he added.

According to the budget, every year, the city authorities have been spending more than Tk 100 crore to repair the roads. Besides, the city authorities spend a hefty sum of money to repair damaged roads after floods. But conditions of the roads remain the same years after years.

In 2004, DCC authorities sought Tk 415 crore from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to renovate damaged roads and footpaths.

al-Qaeda vows

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extending from Afghanistan to the Palestinian territories in order to liberate "the whole of Palestine."

"We cannot watch these rockets raining down their fire on our brothers in Gaza and Lebanon and remain inactive and submissive," Zawahiri said in the footage.

It was the first reaction by al-Qaeda to the onslaughts which started in late June in Gaza and on July 12 in Lebanon, triggered by the capture of Israeli soldiers by Palestinian militants and Lebanon's Shia Hezbollah movement.

"The rockets and missiles tearing apart the bodies of Muslims in Gaza and Lebanon are not purely Israeli. They come from and are funded by all the countries of the crusader alliance," Zawahiri said in a reference to the United States and Western allies.

"Hence, everyone who took part in the crime must pay the price ... The whole world is an open field for us. Like they attack us everywhere, we too attack them everywhere."

Zawahiri's comments – in which he invoked revered Shia figures like Prophet Mohammed's grandson, Imam Hussein, as well as figures revered by Sunnis – indicated that al-Qaeda, which is made up of Sunni Islamist extremists, was prepared to help Hezbollah despite differences with the Shia sect.

"The war with Israel ... is a jihad (holy war) for the sake of God ... that seeks to liberate Palestine, the whole of Palestine, and to liberate every land which (once belonged to) Islam, from Andalus to Iraq," Zawahiri thundered.

"These events (in Lebanon and Gaza) show the importance of the Jihadi fronts in Afghanistan and Iraq. All Muslims must assist them so that America's forces get out of them crippled ... and pay the price of its aggression against Muslims and its support for Israel," he said.

"Iraq has the benefit of being close

EC secy admits

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be possible to complete the task within the scheduled time limit of August 10.

In addition to the procedure for updating the voter list at their offices from July 1, the EC started sending its staff for door to door visits from July 21.

The EC assigned officials working under different departments the task of voter list updating through door to door visits but they have shown lack of interest in the work due to uncertainty about their remuneration, said officials at the meeting.

The EC secretary told the meeting that they will get the fund for the task next week and then they will clarify the issue of remuneration for the staff, sources said.

The EC Secretariat at the meeting also decided to initiate steps for making preparation for setting up polling stations for the next parliamentary election.

It will send letters to the deputy commissioners asking to submit reports about the status of polling stations used during the last elections.

Ministries of education and primary and mass education will be requested to repair, if necessary, the school buildings to be used as polling stations, sources said.

The EC Secretariat will also take steps for repairing the ballot boxes that will be used for the next election.

Power sector

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"We can hire a world famous consultant to work for us, to bring about a change in the power sector but no reform will yield dividend if the present practice is not changed and if the projects are not implemented properly," he said.

Expressing his frustration over mismatch between income and expenditure, he said Power Development Board (PDB) is buying power at higher prices but selling them at lower prices. So, there is already a gap.

Moreover, Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) is buying power from PDB and not making payments. "How do you adjust with these types of situations?" he posed a question.

"If we could utilise for the power sector the money allocated for the annual development programme we would not even need assistance from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank," he said.

However, Talukdar said different problems facing the power sector today have been specifically identified and there will be a tremendous improvement in the power situation within the next 40 to 50 days.

"We need to improve the overall situation of the power sector for the sake of our economic development," the state minister said adding that electricity is now one of the indicators of development of a nation.

250 shanties

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informed the fire service of the incident soon after it began. "The loss in the fire would have been much less, had the fire fighters reached the spot earlier," said victim Rehan Ahmed.

FACTORY FIRE

Around 6:45pm yesterday, the fire fighters were still pumping water inside the seventh floor from a crane. Around 14 firefighting units were called to douse the fire.

Factory staffs alleged the fire spread to seventh floor around 10:30am yesterday due to negligence of the firemen. They alleged the fire spread when two of the firefighting units left the spot.

Witnesses said the incidents lay bare the serious dearth of necessary equipment of Fire Brigade and Civil Defence Department. They found it very difficult to reach water to the sixth and seventh floors due to lack of equipment to pump water to high-rise buildings.

"We faced difficulties in pumping water to all the rooms on the seventh floor due to the walls. We could not even enter the rooms due to severe heat," said a fire fighter official seeking anonymity. He said they could not enter even after wearing fireproof jackets.

Meanwhile, Minister for Commerce Hafiz Uddin Ahmed visited the scene yesterday afternoon.

He said the owner of the factory assured him that he would move the factory to another place and continue to pay salaries to the workers and officials of the factory. He also asked the police not to allow anyone near the building as it may collapse anytime.

The fire caused extensive damage to the garment's machinery, accessories and readymade cloths. Golam Kabir Chowdhury, one of the owners of the Hong Kong-Bangladesh joint venture factory, said they initially estimate the loss to be between Tk 10 and 12 crore.

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has formed a three-member probe committee headed by the chairman of civil engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

President of BGMEA SM Fazlul Haque said the factory was compliant to all the factory regulations.

ARF meet today

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growth rate of more than 6 percent for almost a decade.

He highlighted the initiatives of the present government in promoting education, empowerment of women and microcredit.

Mentioning that a large number of Bangladeshi students are studying in Australia, he wished to see the numbers to grow in the coming years, to which his counterpart responded positively.

Thai Deputy Prime Minister Dr Surakart Sathirathai congratulated the Bangladeshi foreign minister upon Bangladesh's joining the ARF.

Surakart briefed him on ASEAN endorsement of his candidacy for the position of UN secretary general.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar shared with the Bangladeshi foreign minister his concern over the crisis in Lebanon and the occupied territories as a result of Israeli aggression and atrocities.

They agreed on the urgency of an immediate and unconditional ceasefire stressing the mandated

role of the UN Security Council.

Morshed thanked his Malaysian counterpart for their strong support for Bangladesh's entry into ARF. He appreciated Malaysia's decision to restart recruitment of workers from Bangladesh.

The two foreign ministers felt the need for ensuring a smooth recruitment process.

In his meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon, the Bangladeshi foreign minister stressed the economic cooperation and investment relations between the two countries.

They discussed regional and global security issues as well as matters relating to the election of the UN secretary general.

In the afternoon, Morshed along with the ARF foreign ministers called on Prime Minister of Malaysia Abdullah Bin Ahmad Badawi, where he conveyed the greetings of the prime minister of Bangladesh to her Malaysian counterpart.

President urged

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The July 22 roundtable resolution also asked the government to take immediate initiative for talks on the reforms of caretaker government system and Election Commission.

The resolution asked all political parties to nominate devoted and well-reputed candidates in the election and prevent unauthorised use of money and muscle power in the election.

Removal of the CEC and the two commissioners can be considered for their 'crime and inability', it said.

"Public money has been wasted as the voter list prepared earlier was not accepted and became unusable. The voter list was prepared in violation of the High Court verdict," it said, adding that the failure of the CEC and two commissioners is an assault on the constitution and structure of the democratic state.

Govt anomalies

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dominance over the judiciary.

Observing that the basic concept of the judgement and the constitution regarding separation of the judiciary had been overlooked, he requested the court to scrutinise the rules that contradict the objective of the 12-point SC directives.

Court-appointed lawyers were brought in to ensure that the trial could not be stopped by the defence boycott and are advised by foreign legal experts.

"One of the big lessons of this trial is how critical the IHT defence office is," said Newton, a professor at Vanderbilt Law School and an advisor on international law to the court's judges.

"There were several times in the trial where they stepped in to guarantee the due process rights to a fair trial when the retained counsel

Saddam's first trial

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me that would be better than what you said to me before."

Bandar's stand-in lawyer made a brief statement in his defence, arguing that as a judge in a Saddam-era revolutionary court, his client had only done his duty in signing the Dujail villagers' death warrants.

"He was a man applying the law and all the defendants were transferred to the revolutionary court legally," the lawyer said.

US legal expert Michael Newton

said: "The judicial chamber will now consider all the evidence in light of the defence arguments made this week and the prosecution arguments to try to reach a judgment by the next trial session."

While the verdict in the Dujail case is awaited, attention will turn to Saddam's next trial. On August 21 he is due to face prosecution for his role in his regime's bloody Anfal campaign against Iraq's Kurds in the early 1980s.

For the Dujail case, Saddam's defence team was based in the Jordanian capital Amman, from where they periodically issued statements arguing that the trial was unfair and that it was unsafe for them to travel to Baghdad.

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"There were several times in the trial where they stepped in to guarantee the due process rights to a fair trial when the retained counsel

were not doing their job," he said, calling the defence boycott "shameful".

Saddam was not present at Thursday's final hearing, but had attended the previous day's hearing, where he refused to recognise the court appointed defence council or the court and called on Iraqis to fight US-led forces.

He also expressed a preference for the firing squad rather than the noose if he is found guilty, arguing that as a former military man -- he made himself a field marshal as president -- he deserved to die by a bullet.

The judges will be expected to decide on a method of execution if and when they reach a guilty verdict, officials said.

The defendants were captured at various times following Saddam's overthrow by a US-led invasion in April 2003, and are being held in US custody, but their trial is the responsibility of an Iraqi High Tribunal set up after the war.

Indo-US nuke

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W. Bush's Republican Party, soundly rejected an amendment that would have forced India to halt fissile material production as a condition of the nuclear deal.

The House also rejected an