

BNP clique trying

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If Iajuddin resigns from the presidency, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar will act as the president in accordance with the constitution until a new president is elected following formation of the next parliament through the general election.

As the acting president, he will hold the defence portfolio and he will preside over any change in the armed forces as the armed forces will be under his jurisdiction during the tenure of the caretaker government, which is authorised to bring changes in the civil administration only.

Since the resignation of Iajuddin from the post of chief adviser, some important changes took place in the armed forces, which is now deployed to maintain law and order for holding a free and fair election.

The Inter-services Public Relations (ISPR) however yesterday said the changes that were made in the armed forces were part of a routine work.

The speaker, who was elected by the immediate past ruling party BNP in the last parliament and who acted as the president on several occasions in absence of Iajuddin, has proven his loyalty to the party in running the last parliament.

Considering his loyalty, the BNP leadership had already made moves once before for bringing a change in the presidency and to elect Jamiruddin the new president. But at the time, they retreated from the plan as they were convinced that Iajuddin would remain loyal to them, sources said.

Now the move is on again and they are searching for ways to bring the change.

A senior official of Bangabhaban in the last couple of days met the speaker twice. But it could not be learnt what they discussed, sources added.

Saddam's brother

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Like Saddam's execution, the government made an official film, a government source said, but it had not decided whether to release it. It shows Barzan wearing a hood in the noose.

Appeals

After Saddam was hanged amid sectarian taunts captured on a mobile phone camera, the United Nations urged Iraq to reconsider further death sentences and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, an opponent of capital punishment, said last week he thought there should be a delay in executing the other two condemned men.

Talabani left the country on Sunday to visit Syria.

The emergence of illicit mobile phone video showing Saddam being taunted by Shi'ite observers at his execution, four days after his appeal failed, angered many Sunni Arabs, embarrassed the Shi'ite-led government and the U.S. administration and raised sectarian tensions in a nation on the brink of civil war.

Shias again celebrated in the streets of Baghdad's Sadr City slum, a bastion of the cleric and militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr. His name was heard being chanted at Saddam on the gallows. A unnamed guard faces legal proceedings following a government inquiry into the circumstances of Saddam's execution.

After Barzan's hanging, Moussa Jaber in Sadr City said: "This is the least he should get. He should have been handed over to the people. Execution is a blessing for him."

Barzan was a feared figure in Iraq at the head of the intelligence service in the 1980s, at a time when the Shia majority was harshly

Asthma takes

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and Chittagong cities where a large number of diesel-run vehicles ply, Dr Mohammad Nasiruddin said.

The situation in other areas cannot be known as there is no continuous air monitoring stations, he said.

According to the United States Environment Protection Agency guideline the presence of PM-10 should remain within 150 microgram per cubic metre and PM-2.5 within 65 in the air, which is quite double in Dhaka and almost the same in Chittagong.

"After withdrawing the two stroke three-wheelers from the capital in 2003, the amount of PM-10 and PM-2.5 was reduced to 31 and 41 per cent respectively, but it has again increased in the recent time," he said.

As there are a large number of brick kilns and factories to the south of the city, in winter polluted air blowing from the north adds to the air pollution in the capital and it acts as a factor behind worsening of the asthma situation.

A study reveals prevalence of asthma among higher percentage of people in rural areas.

The percentage of asthma patients is 3.9 in the capital while 5.2 in other urban areas and 7.1 in rural areas, said Prof ARM Lutfil Kabir of Institute of Child and

First US troops arrive in Iraq for new plan

REUTERS, Baghdad

The first additional American troops who will take part in a major new security plan in Baghdad have arrived in the Iraqi capital, the US commander in Iraq, General George Casey, said on Monday.

As Rice was meeting Olmert, Israel announced plans to build another 44 housing units in a Jewish settlement on the West Bank.

The internationally-backed roadmap plan calls for a halt to Israeli settlement activity.

The Palestinian chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, said Israel had to choose between peace or settlements, but could not have both.

Peace Now, an Israeli pressure group that opposes the building of settlements and monitors their expansion, said the announcement was splitting in the face of the American government.

Rice has now arrived in Egypt where she is meeting President Hosni Mubarak and Arab League chief Amr Moussa.

She then heads to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in an attempt to drum up support for President George W Bush's new strategy in Iraq.

Rice has said Arab leaders have every incentive to help as a stable Iraq is also in their interests.

In advance of her visit, the secretary of state said she was not bringing new proposals but would be listening, talking and looking for "creative" solutions.

She said concerns about Iraq and Iran had not distracted Washington from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

oppressed, some like those from Dujail due to suspected links to Shia Iran, then at war with Iraq.

Barzani presided over the Revolutionary Court which sentenced 148 Shia men and youths to death after an assassination attempt on Saddam in the town in 1982. With Saddam, they were convicted on November 5 and their appeals rejected on December 26.

Barzani is to be buried in the village of Awja, near the northern city of Tikrit, where Saddam was born and where he was buried two weeks ago, the provincial governor told Reuters.

Muslim tradition dictates he be interred within a day.

Barzani would lie close to Saddam's sons Uday and Qusay, who were killed by U.S. troops in 2003, not in the building that has become Saddam's mausoleum, visited by thousands of mourners.

EC waits

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told reporters that all activities of January 22 election had been stopped after the proclamation of state of emergency and the formation of a new caretaker government. The top EC officials, however, kept mum on this issue.

When asked who, the EC or the caretaker government, has the authority to hold the elections, the acting CEC avoided answering the question.

About his meeting with two members of the European Union (EU) election observer team, Mahfuzur said, "It was a courtesy call. They just informed us of their leaving the country."

the ministry underscored the need for giving the appointment from the shipping department officials, saying that they have expertise in mercantile marine related issues.

According to him, the department earlier faced difficulties as the chief engineer and ship surveyor was appointed on deputation from other departments who lacked adequate knowledge about the subject.

They, however, said with increased awareness about respiratory problems, more people now come to hospitals. Besides, modern technology helps to detect the disease more accurately and it raises the number of newly diagnosed patients, they said, adding that the population has also increased during the last ten years.

Salesmen of several drug stores said sale of asthma medicine including inhalers and tablets increases during the winter as there are more patients.

The sale of inhalers and tablets for asthma almost doubles in winter and this year the number of patients coming to buy inhalers and tablets is higher than that of the last year," said Reaz Ahmed, sales manager of Nusrat Pharmacy at Uttara.

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25 injured as farmers

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The angry farmers then brought out a protest procession and blockaded the highway near Shahebganj bazaar at around 11:00am demanding fertiliser.

Informed, Solonga police rushed to the spot two hours later. The law enforcers started charging batons on the agitating farmers indiscriminately to disperse them resulting in a violent clash between both sides, the demonstrators alleged.

At least six vehicles were damaged and two shops were ransacked at this time.

The injured were admitted to Raiganj and Ulapara health complexes and different clinics.

At around 1:00pm, Raiganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Halimuzzaman Halim and Upazila Agriculture Officer visited the spot and brought the situation under control after assuring the agitating farmers of adequate supply of fertiliser.

Talking to The Daily Star, several farmers alleged that some unscrupulous dealers and traders had increased the price of fertiliser and selling them on the black-market adding that a 50 kg bag of urea is being sold at Tk 400 to Tk 450 against the government rate of Tk 295. As a result, the farmers could not get required fertiliser, which is causing them loss. The target of Irrigation cultivation may not be achieved due to this problem during the peak hours of cultivation season, they feared.

Some dealers seeking anonymity cited short supply and faulty system of distribution by the government as reasons behind this problem.

They also suggested open market selling so that the farmers can get their required quantity of fertiliser instead of the present system of an amount fixed by the authorities per person irrespective of their cultivable land.

Hasibur Rahman, deputy director of Sirajganj Agriculture Extension Department, said that a total of 1,26,760 hectares of land have been brought under the Irrigation cultivation this year which requires about 2,70,00 metric tons of fertiliser immediately.

He also suggested open market selling so that the farmers can get their required quantity of fertiliser instead of the present system of an amount fixed by the authorities per person irrespective of their cultivable land.

As a result, the officials said, the country will have to face severe gas shortage along with huge load shedding in power supply.

Hearing from the officials, the new power and energy adviser directed them to evolve short-term strategy to manage and improve the situation.

Oriental Bank

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Obaedul Karim's name did not come up in the investigation result. But the BB report shows how Karim had been deeply involved in siphoning off unsuspecting depositors' money. "Why his name did not come up in the ACC investigation is a real mystery," commented a source.

But an ACC investigator requesting anonymity said, "We have investigated some fake borrowers and filed the cases. We did not know that the money withdrawn by these fake borrowers ultimately went to Obaedul Karim. Our investigation is still on."

Sources said the ACC formally asked the central bank to provide it with the investigation report first on November 6. But the BB did not respond. On December 4 the ACC gave a reminder saying that the commission's investigation was being delayed due to not having the report in hand.

Finally the central bank sent a copy to the ACC chairman's residence on December 30. "Why did the BB send us the copy just after filing the cases remains another mystery," commented an ACC source.

"The investigation has become certain that the money shown in the BB report is not unearned profit, rather an outstanding amount of money that was illegally misappropriated and was deliberately and craftily shown as the bank's loss to erase the amount from the bank's ledger," the BB report says.

The report also says that by issuing unauthorised Inter-Branch Debit Advice (IBDA) Karim siphoned off Tk 342 crore from the Principal branch, Tk 66.4 crore from the Karwan Bazar branch, Tk 29.13 crore from the Nawabpur branch, and Tk 2.83 crore from the Mirpur Road branch of Oriental. The total amount of money misappropriated comes to Tk 488.5 crore.

In addition, the Bangshal branch issued Tk 25.66 crore loan against 17 false names. Principal branch issued Tk 29.13 crore against 27 false names, Karwan Bazar branch issued Tk 32.97 crore against 10 false names and Nawabpur branch issued Tk 14.73 crore against 14 false names. In total Tk 102.49 crore was given against 68 false clients.

Besides, he has so much money now!" an ACC official exclaimed.

Known as a close ally of BNP for a long time, Karim always received unusual business favours whenever BNP was in power. In the last five years of BNP's latest stint in power, in addition to many small and medium scale business deals Karim managed to secure the contracts for Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover project and Meghna-2 power project under the names of Orton-Belch-

that they have adequate stock of fertiliser, which are being distributed to the farmers by 256 appointed dealers. A monitoring team led by Magistrate Mahbub is also overseeing the distribution, he added.

2 PBCP

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leader of PBCP Janajuddho faction, said Ataikula police.

According to a Rab press release, a team of Rab 12 acted on a tip-off and raided Charadangi Primary School at around 4:00am where the criminals gathered for a meeting.

As soon as Rab reached the scene, the criminals fired shots at Rab triggering a 40-minute long gunfight with the law enforcers.

Anwar and Chand Ali were found dead on the spot after the shootout was over, claimed the press release.

Rab recovered two firearms, a number of bullets and a sharp weapon from the scene.

Anwar Hossain was accused in 11 criminal cases including seven for murder whereas Chand Ali was accused in seven cases including four for murder, the press release added.

Adviser

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demand for the two utility services shoots up throughout the period.

Power ministry officials said the country's electricity demand will go up to 5,000MW from the present level of 3,500MW against the reliable generation capacity of 3,300MW.

This means the electricity deficit will be at least 1,700MW on a regular basis with the start of summer from March.

The officials said the operation of irrigation pumps will add to the demand of electricity.

On the other hand, the demand for gas supply will increase to about 2,000 mmcfd from the present level of 1,500 mmcfd as power plants will push for a big consumption.

There is only Bibiana gas field project, which is expected to start producing 200 mmcfd from March. But this will not be enough to cope with the big shortage.

As a result, the officials said, the country will have to face severe gas shortage along with huge load shedding in power supply.

Hearing from the officials, the new power and energy adviser directed them to evolve short-term strategy to manage and improve the situation.

Greek police quiz witnesses of US embassy attack

REUTERS, Athens

Greek anti-terrorist police yesterday were questioning dozens of witnesses of a grenade attack against the US embassy in Athens, the most daring hit by leftist guerrillas in Greece in years.

Police suspect the Revolutionary Struggle group launched the rocket-propelled grenade on the mission on Friday, raising fears of a resurgence of leftist militant violence.

"The struggle against terrorism requires a serious and responsible stance," Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis told reporters in Zagreb. "In this fight ... we are uncompromising and ruthless."

Police said more than 50 people testified that they had witnessed the attack while the origin of the rocket, which caused minor damage to the embassy's glass facade but no injuries, is also expected to yield clues.

"We have 7 witnesses who say they saw the attackers' faces and we are bringing them in for further questioning," a police official said.

Police were also investigating how the rocket launcher used in the attack, a Chinese-made RPG 7, came to Greece, where no such weapons are used by the military.

The tapes of security cameras around the embassy, a common target for Greek leftist demonstrators, were also being checked.

Police said only Revolutionary Struggle would have the expertise to launch such a daring attack on the capital's most well-guarded building, making them the most dangerous guerrilla group in Greece after the dismantling of the deadly November 17 group in 2002, two years before the Athens Olympics.

American specialists have returned to Greece's anti-terrorist squad, which police officials say has been largely dormant since the capture of November 17 members, and are aiding the investigation, police said.

The group has claimed responsibility for the attack in anonymous phone calls to the security firm guarding the embassy. But police are waiting for its usual statement to be sent to media before they can confirm Revolutionary Struggle was behind the attack.

The group emerged in 2003 with a bomb attack on a court building and has since claimed an assassination attempt against Greece's culture minister in May and a bomb at the Economy Ministry which wounded two people 13 months ago.

It has adopted November 17's anti-US rhetoric in its statements to the media. None of its members have been arrested.

HC injunction

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be declared illegal.

The bench issued another rule asking the respondents why they should not be directed to remove the earth so far used to fill the lake.