

BNP clique trying

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If Iajuddin resigns from the presidency, Speaker Jamiuruddin 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 Jamiuruddin 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 Jabor 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 within150 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 Lutful 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.

"The initial elements of the first group are here," he told a news conference. He declined to give more details or say when operations would start but he said a report that 4,000 of the planned 17,500 extra troops had arrived was "real high".

Asked about reports of frustration among U.S. officials with Iraqi counterparts over the planning of an operation to be led by the Iraqi government with U.S. help, Casey said: "Transitions generate friction. And we are in a period of transition."

But he said U.S. and Iraqi officials were working hard to ensure a workable command structure that would allow Iraqi control while maintaining the security and effectiveness of U.S. troops.

"We are working out understandings at every level to ensure there are no misunderstandings," Casey said.

"This is a plan that is Iraqi-conceived but we have been involved every step of the way," he said. "American forces will remain under American command ... Our forces will not be put at risk because of the command relationship."

He was confident the Iraqi government would "purge" elements from its security forces which were loyal to militias and other groups outside the government.

Casey cautioned the Iraqi public not to expect an instant improvement in security in the capital.

"It's not going to happen overnight," he said, speaking of a "gradual evolution" over two to three months, with the hope of showing results in the summer or autumn.

Asked how long it would last, he said: "Until we succeed ... until the job is done."

Senior Iraqi officials told Reuters it would last at least six or seven months.

Appointment

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to join, said a source.

When contacted, Commander Alauddin told The Daily Star that he was sent by the navy to replace Commander Monirul Islam as the chief engineer and ship surveyor.

"The president issued a letter appointing me to the post and the establishment ministry placed me with the Ministry of Shipping as per the government rule," he said.

"I reported to the Ministry of Shipping and have been attending office there every day but the ministry is yet to issue necessary orders giving effect to my appointment" Alauddin said, adding that he does not know anything about the stay order by the High Court.

Strong lobbying at the shipping department stood in the way of his joining the post of chief engineer and ship surveyor, sources said. The existing six ship surveyors lobbied with the government high-ups for getting the appointment to the lucrative post.

One of them filed a petition with the High Court and consequently, the shipping ministry delayed in giving the final order for appointment of Alauddin to the new post.

Director General of Shipping AKM Shafiqullah had recommended four names from the existing six ship surveyors for the post of chief engineer and ship surveyor.

The post of chief engineer and ship surveyor at the shipping department is very vital as he is responsible for issuing annual survey certificates against 8,500 vessels plying different routes. There are allegations of exchanging huge amount as bribe for issuing the certificate.

The director general of shipping in his recommendation to 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.

Poll date depends

FROM PAGE 1 among us (advisers) and we have also discussed the issue with the Election Commission," Mainul added.

On the Supreme Court directive to separate the judiciary, he said, "We are thinking about it. I would be glad, very glad, if I could do this during my tenure."

Regarding press freedom during the state of emergency, the adviser said, "Emergency is not against press freedoms. Certain changes will take place in the ordinance within a short time."

Blaming politicians for creating a situation followed by a state of emergency, he said the press and the people should not pay for politicians' mistakes.

25 injured as farmers

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The angry farmers then brought out a protest procession and blockaded the highway near Shahebganj bazar 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 Ullapara 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 Irri-Boro 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.

Hazi Tamser Ali, 60, of Dadpur village in Raiganj upazila told The Daily Star that he got only one bag of urea fertiliser from local dealer against his demand of 20 bags for his around 10 acres of 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 Irri-Boro cultivation this year which requires about 2,70,00 metric tons of fertiliser immediately.

Contacted, Sirajganj deputy commissioner Ibrahim Khalil said

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 PBPCP 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.

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.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan said, "Why the central bank did not send the report on time I can't say. But our investigators did not find Obaedul Karim guilty in their investigation. I will examine whether his name was dropped deliberately."

"Now we have the BB report which pinpoints Obaedul Karim. Now we can file cases against him," Khan said.

A central bank official on condition of anonymity told The Daily Star that the delay occurred because the BB report had been confidential and the authorities were checking if there was any legal obstacle in sending the report to the ACC.

Meanwhile, sources said one of the possible reasons for Karim not being implicated in the ACC investigation and for the central bank's delay in sending its report could be that he is a very influential person having connections with the top level of BNP.

"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 Meghnaghat-2 power project under the names of Orion-Belhasa

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 militia.

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.

Bela filed the writ challenging the legitimacy of the Rajuk earth filling in violation of the Waterbody Act and ignoring the apex court edicts on approved layout plan.

Advocate M Enayetur Rahim appeared for petitioner Syeda Rezwana Hassan of Bela.

Maoists joins

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constitution and parliament would turn a page in Nepali history.

"The promulgation of the interim constitution will be a revolutionary step in establishing a new Nepal. Now, Nepal will witness lasting peace and security," said Sushil Koirala.

Some politicians, however, had earlier called for the interim document to be amended.

"There are still some faults in the interim constitution. It has not addressed the sentiments of the public as expressed during the April 'people's movement'," said Bharat Mohan Adhikari, a leader from the CPN (UML).

Rebel spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara told AFP the Maoists were "excited and looking forward to being part of the interim legislature".

The Maoists and seven parties in government struck a loose alliance in November 2005, after King Gyanendra seized direct control of the state earlier that year.

The king restored parliament in April last year, after weeks of mass protests forced him to end direct rule.

The rebels and parties agreed last year to place their weapons and combatants under UN monitoring, with the first arms to be deposited on Monday.

The rebels want Nepal to become a republic, but other parties in government prefer a ceremonial monarchy.

Iran working

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standards and was a terrorist act," Elham said of the raid on the Iranian office on Thursday.

"America should give up on its illegal acts. We consider this our right to follow up the case and we will follow it up in due time," he said without giving details of what Iran would do.

The U.S. military said the five men had ties to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard-Qods Force, which it said was known for providing funds, weapons and training to "extremist groups" seeking to destabilize the government of Iraq.

Tehran denies backing the insurgency and blames US troops for the violence and for stoking tensions between Iraq's Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims.

When President Bush said last week he would send more US troops to Iraq, he also pledged to interrupt a "flow of support" to insurgents from Iran. Other US officials have also said Washington would do more to contain Iran.

Washington also accuses Iran of seeking to make nuclear bombs under cover of a civilian atomic program, a charge Tehran denies.

"TEHRAN STANCE VERY NEGATIVE"

Reuters adds from Brussels: Defense Secretary Robert Gates accused Iran yesterday of doing nothing to help the United States in Iraq, saying Washington could only engage with Tehran if it showed it was ready to be constructive.

Gates, making a first visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels after taking over from Donald Rumsfeld last month, said the Iranians "clearly believe that we are tied down in Iraq, that they have the initiative".

"They're doing nothing to be constructive in Iraq at this point. In addition, they have supported Hezbollah's efforts to create a new conflict in Lebanon," he told a news conference after talks with NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

"And so the Iranians are acting in a very negative way in many respects. My view is that when the Iranians are prepared to play a constructive role in dealing with some of these problems, then there might be opportunities for engagement," he said.

Tehran denies backing the insurgency in Iraq and blames U.S. troops for the violence and for stoking tensions between Iraq's Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims.

It further denies Western accusations that it armed and financed Lebanon's Hezbollah guerrillas during a 34-day war last year with Israel, insisting it merely provided the group with political and moral succor.

The bipartisan Iraq Study Group called last year for Washington to deal directly with Syria and Iran, with whom it broke off ties in 1979, to help rein in violence in Iraq.

But Tehran's reaction has been cautious and U.S. officials including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have insisted Iran must first suspend uranium enrichment as part of a nuclear program the West suspects is aimed at securing the bomb. Iran says its program is to generate energy.

LONG HAUL PRESENCE

Gates played down the significance

of recent orders by President George W. Bush to send an additional carrier strike group to the region and deploy Patriot missile defense systems, steps widely seen as a warning to Iran and Syria.

"We are simply reaffirming that statement of the importance of the Gulf region to the United States and our determination to be an ongoing strong presence in that area for a long time into the future," he said.

Bush asked Gates, a former CIA chief, to replace Donald Rumsfeld after the president's Republican party lost control of the U.S. Congress in November elections. The defeat was driven in large measure by voter anger over the Iraq war.

Gates held talks this weekend with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in London and plans to head for Afghanistan, where NATO leads a 32,000-strong peacekeeping force.

U.S. officials say they have information suggesting the Taliban are planning a campaign to build on their resurgence in 2006 and Gates wants to ensure that any progress there is not put at risk by the hardline Taliban Islamists.

"... Success in Afghanistan is our top priority ... It's important that the members of NATO fulfill the commitments that each has made to one another," Gates said.

He did not elaborate, but there has been a sometimes bitter debate in the alliance over getting allies including Germany, France, Spain and Italy to do more to face down the insurgency in the south of the country, the heartland of the Taliban.

De Hoop Scheffer said Gates's decision to visit NATO so early in his term showed the importance of the alliance, which the United States bypassed when it invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban in 2001.

Army

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who had served two years as the president of Mirersarai upazila BNP, at his village home in Korerhat around 12:45am yesterday. Delu was accused in a number of cases including extortion and encroachment of land, sources said.

Hazari was handed over to Chittagong police an hour after his arrest. He was produced before the Court of Additional Metropolitan Magistrate Moksedur Rahman around 3:00pm yesterday. The court sent him to jail rejecting his bail petition.

Sources said the raids were carried out as part of a crackdown on "corrupt people and godfathers of criminals" across the country.

On Sunday, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) also arrested another union parishad chairman Abu Jafar at his village Goschi of Bagowan union and recovered a pistol and bullets.

Hasina

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he (Tarique) drove a Tk 2 crore car, wore suit worth lakh taka and squandered thousands of crore taka in gambling abroad.

The petitioner said the news, which contained Hasina's remark and got wide coverage in the media, was false and baseless and aimed to dent his political image.

Israel unveils

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chief negotiator Saeb Erakat told AFP. "It's defying the international community and undermining Secretary of State Rice's peace efforts."

He also refused "any temporary or transitional solutions, including a state with temporary borders, because we do not believe it to be a realistic choice that can be built upon."

Rice has made clear since the outset of her tour that she is bringing no US proposals to jumpstart the moribund peace process, saying: "I think no plan can be 'Made in America.'"

But she stressed on Sunday that "the United States is absolutely committed to helping to find a solution" and to building on what she called "the momentum that is currently in Palestinian-Israeli relations."

Diplomatic sources in Jerusalem have suggested that Rice may not be pushing a firm peace plan because of the political weakness of both Olmert and Abbas.

Olmert, whose approval ratings have plunged to 14 percent, is facing the possibility that a new graft investigation may be opened against him while Abbas remains mired in a deadly power struggle with the Islamist Hamas movement that leads the Palestinian government.

Rice is also due to visit Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as she seeks to promote US President George W. Bush's new policy to quell surging sectarian violence in Iraq with the deployment of 21,500 more troops.

The plan revealed Wednesday has come under fire in many Arab capitals, even among staunch allies in the Gulf, with critics saying it provides a recipe for more sectarian violence in Iraq that could backfire elsewhere in the region.