

Death warrants

FROM PAGE 1
(HC) judgment upholding the death sentences for killing two judges in a suicide bomb attack in Jhalakathi on November 14.

On Sunday and yesterday, the jail authorities read out the SC rejection to all the six condemned JMB men, in accordance with the jail code.

Inspector General (Prisons) Brig Gen Zakir Hasan told The Daily Star last night, "We will fix the date of execution within the next two or three days."

Out of the six condemned members of the fanatic Islamist militant group JMB, one of them is in Rangpur jail, one is held in Kashimpur Jail in Gazipur, and the rest are on death row in Dhaka. Another condemned JMB operative is currently absconding.

Jail authority sources said they are in a dilemma about whether they will follow the new jail code or the old one, because the two codes provide two different timeframes for carrying out executions after receiving court orders.

The jail authorities will seek the help of the law ministry to clarify the matter, said jail authority sources.

IG (Prisons) Zakir yesterday said, "We informed the home ministry today that we have received a copy of the Supreme Court order."

"We will fix a date for the executions in accordance with the code and then inform the home ministry," the IG said adding, "We will wait for the government to confirm the executions."

The old jail code stated, the jail authorities would also ask the condemned to inform the authorities in seven days if they want to petition to the president for clemency.

If the condemned men petition for presidential clemency and the president turns it down, the jail authorities will fix a date for the executions within 21 to 28 days of receiving the president's decision.

In case the condemned decide not to file any petition for presidential clemency, the jail authorities will start counting down 28 days after the stipulated timeframe of seven-day for the petitions will be over, and will fix a date for their executions between 21 to 28 days. In that case if counted retroactively from yesterday the execution date will fall between February 12 and 18.

According to the new jail code, after the jail authorities receive the court order, they are bound to read out the order to the condemned, who are then provided 15 days to submit petitions for presidential clemency.

If the president rejects a petition then an execution is to be carried out within 21 to 28 days following the date of receipt of the president's decision by the jail authorities.

If the six condemned JMB men choose not to submit petitions for presidential clemency, then the execution dates will be fixed within 21 to 28 days following the date of receipt of the court order by the jail authorities, which was Sunday, January 21 in this specific case.

Sources said, the jail authorities will then inform the home ministry the dates of executions. The jail authorities will then have to wait for the government's decision up to 60 days.

If the government does not inform

14-party wants

FROM PAGE 1
money holders to create a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair poll and build people's confidence in the polls process. He however urged the CG to ensure that 'innocent' political leaders and workers are not harassed.

Mentioning that the previous BNP-Jamaat coalition government had prepared a list of criminals based on political enmity, Jalil demanded its immediate cancellation. He also demanded that the CG prepare a fresh list of criminals and arrest them.

The 14-party coordinator said the whole nation now demands arrest of those people who have amassed crores of taka by looting public money, and created and patronised criminals to protect their illegal wealth.

Jalil hoped the CA will help build a prosperous nation by implementing his pledges of taking measures against corruption and other criminal activities.

Referring to the CA's views on the price hike of essentials, he said a 'Hawa Bhaban syndicate' responsible for the price spiral during the previous government's tenure is still active. If those persons are not identified, arrested and tried, any efforts to control prices would not succeed, he stressed.

Jalil urged Fakhrudin to take steps for proper investigation into on the August 21st grenade attack on an AL rally in the capital, killings of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master and serial blasts in the name of religion. All political killings, and killings of 26,000 people during the last five years must also be probed, and those responsible tried, he demanded.

Jalil said the CA's speech has legitimised their demands for reconstituting the EC, depoliticising the administration, preparing a flawless voter roll, installing transparent ballot boxes, making voter identity cards and improving the law and order for free and fair polls.

"These demands are people's demands and that have been reflected in the speech of the chief adviser," said the 14-party leader.

Senior alliance leaders present at the briefing included Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak, Toftai Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Obaidul Quader, Mainul

Political parties

FROM PAGE 16
President Hasanul Haque Inu and General Secretary Syed Zafar Sazzad in a joint statement yesterday congratulated the CA for identifying the barriers to holding a credible election. The JSD leaders urged the CA to outline a clear plan for a free and fair election as soon as possible.

But, as soon as the government gives clearance to carry out the executions, the jail authorities are free to execute the condemned on schedule.

Although both the old and new jail codes provide specific timeframes for issuing a death warrant, the jail authorities however will receive petitions for presidential clemency up to the mid-day of the dates of executions and send them to the president for his decision, the IG (Prisons) said.

If anyone submits a petition for presidential clemency after the mid-day, the jail authorities will still send it to the president and contact him over the telephone for instructions, the IG said. "If the president tells us to stay the execution, we will do so. But if he turns down the petition we will carry out the execution on schedule," he added.

Executions are carried out at one minute past the zero hour.

Jail sources said, they are already aware that the families of at least three of the condemned JMB men, including JMB chief Abdur Rahman and another lynchpin Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai, are eager to submit petitions to the president for clemency.

The IG (Prison) said, "I am also aware that some of the condemned are eager to submit mercy petitions, but I'm not sure who they are."

"Even if the families submit mercy petitions, they will be sent to the president for his consideration," Zakir added.

The condemned six are JMB chief Abdur Rahman, top lynchpin Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai, three other Majlis-e-Shura members Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal and Khaled Saifullah, and a suicide bomber Iftekharul Mamun.

Senior assistant judges Jagannath Pandey and Sohel Ahmed were killed in a suicide bomb attack at Purba Chakdhati in Jhalakathi town on November 14 last year in the wake of a series of bombings carried out by JMB militants across the country.

The High Court on August 31 upheld the trial court verdict that had sentenced seven JMB men to death on May 29.

5 Pak troops

FROM PAGE 16
Zamaila area of neighbouring South Waziristan region last Tuesday that destroyed a suspected al-Qaeda hideout.

Military officials initially said up to 30 "foreign terrorists" and their local facilitators were believed killed in the raid, although local authorities later said they had found only nine bodies. Ten others were wounded, they said.

Residents, denying the presence of foreigners, claimed the strike killed local tribesmen and Afghan labourers. Some pro-Taliban militants at a protest rally vowed to avenge the air strike.

On Sunday, two policemen were wounded in a roadside blast near a police van in the town of Tank, abutting South Waziristan district.

Pakistan has killed hundreds of militants who fled Afghanistan after the 2001 ousting of Afghanistan's Taliban regime.

EC reconstitution

FROM PAGE 1
in the EC meeting that had taken place a little earlier.

"I will certainly resign for the sake of the country if the president asks me," Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury said in his office room.

She praised the CA for his stance against the corrupt and criminals and urged the caretaker government to take measures to hold a free, fair and credible election in the country within the quickest possible time.

Hasina, however, stressed the need for announcement of the next poll date. "People's expectation would be fulfilled if the chief adviser in his speech to the nation announced a date for holding the next general elections."

Hasina was speaking at a view exchange meeting with the leaders and activists of AL's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at her Dhannamdi office on the occasion of Swarawati Puja.

Over the criticism of political leaders by the Nobel Peace Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus, Hasina said he should not criticise all politicians in general. She admitted the existence of corrupt individuals in politics, but asked Dr Yunus to first identify the corrupt politicians and then criticise those particular corrupt ones.

The BCL leaders attending the meeting congratulated Hasina's US-educated only son Sajeeb Wazed Joy on his being nominated as a young global leader this year by the World Economic Forum.

Hasina advised the BCL leaders to concentrate on their studies to prepare themselves for building a prosperous country.

AL leaders Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, acting general secretary Obaidul Quader, Mukul Bose, Abdul Mannan, Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, BM Mozammel Haque, Enamul Haque Shamim, Ajay Kor Khokon, Sujit Roy Nandi, and BCL president Mahmud Hasan Ripon were present at the meeting among others.

"These demands are people's demands and that have been reflected in the speech of the chief adviser," said the 14-party leader.

Senior alliance leaders present at

Sangu gas production

FROM PAGE 1
location. "But we will be able to say it for sure in April when we will have all data in hand," said a source.

Sources in Petrobangla and Cairn say it is natural that a gas field's production would gradually decrease over the years but the present state is somewhat surprising.

"This field is producing gas for the last eight years. It is normal that production rate would now reduce. But we did not expect the rate to fall so dramatically," said a Petrobangla expert.

An energy ministry high official said many of the problems of the Sangu field could have been avoided if Petrobangla had allowed Cairn to conduct a three-dimensional (3-D) seismic survey. Cairn's proposal to do one such survey was refused a few years back.

"Petrobangla should have been more accommodative about Cairn's proposal. It has allowed Unocal (now Chevron) to conduct 3-D survey at Bibiyana, and Tullow in Block-9. If 3-D survey was conducted at Sangu, there could have been better drilling plans and reduced risks for both Cairn and Bangladesh," the official noted.

A Petrobangla official was critical about its role. "Petrobangla did not take many operational decisions on Sangu based on the original appraisal report on the field," he said.

"When the field started production in 1998, Petrobangla allowed Cairn to maximise production because at that time the country was reeling under gas shortage. If Petrobangla was careful, it would not have allowed 160 mmcfd production rate and would have settled for a conservative rate that would have given the field a longer life," the official said.

The decision came in line with the maiden speech of the chief adviser to the caretaker government to make election free from corrupt people and black money holders.

The central bank also recommended the finance ministry to prevent the nomenclature of defaulters of financial institutions to prevent them from contesting the election.

"The finance adviser has already discussed the issue with the law adviser," a highly placed official told the news agency yesterday.

The decision came in line with the chief adviser's speech.

Meanwhile, a large number of writ petitions remain pending with the High Court challenging the verdict of money loan court against the defaulters.

"Realising default loans by banks has become difficult as the defaulters take shelter to the High Court seeking stay orders," said a senior Bangladesh Bank official.

He said the extent of default loans has come down, but not up to the mark and it's because of the writ petitions.

According to the central bank figures, 17.6 per cent of the total outstanding loans was classified in 2004, which declined to 13.6 per cent on December 2005 and again rose to 16.6 per cent in June 2006. It, however, came down to 14.3 per cent in September 2006.

Oriental Bank scam

FROM PAGE 1
former executive vice-president and another former executive vice-president Muhammad Muktadir Billah were picked up from their houses in the early hours yesterday.

Tariqul Islam Khan, the other accused and also a former assistant vice-president of the branch, is still at large.

The arrestees were brought to the Tejgaon Police Station first.

From there, they were sent to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.

The court ordered them to be placed behind bars, setting February 22 for the next hearing.

The scam came out after the bank authorities carried out a probe into Ashfaqul Hakim's account transactions last week.

The investigation followed Ashfaqul's resignation from the bank.

The investigation team found one Kiron Traders deposited Tk 5 lakh in his account on June 18, 2006, before the central bank took over the problem-ridden private bank.

It also gathered that the voucher of the Kiron Traders did not describe details of the deposited money. Further investigation revealed that the Kiron Traders' account with the Oriental Bank's Karwan Bazar branch was opened flouting the existing rules. Besides, it had a safe address.

Five more fake accounts had been opened in the last four years under the name of Swadesh Enterprise, Friends Trading, Mahbub International, Bikrampur Traders and Iqbal Enterprise.

A huge amount of money, transferred from the general account of the bank's head office, had been withdrawn from those accounts.

The officials accused were involved in erasing from the bank's computer system the transaction records of the six accounts.

The investigators however have managed to recover some of the data with the help of Leads Corporation, software provider for the bank's computer system.

A high official of the Oriental Bank told The Daily Star that some influential individuals outside the bank might have a hand in the scam. "I don't buy that some junior branch officials have appropriated such a massive amount. I believe further investigations will identify the real culprits," he said in return for another.

However, the acting CEC Justice Mahfuzur Rahman, while leaving his office yesterday afternoon, did not respond to the reporters' query about the election commissioners' possible resignation or the recent resignation of Justice MAAziz from the post of the CEC.

Law and Information Adviser Mainul Hosein told The Daily Star on Saturday that all the 'controversial' commissioners will have to resign including acting CEC Justice Mahfuzur Rahman.

He said reconstituting the EC is a difficult job as constitutionally the government cannot sack or remove the CEC or the election commissioners. "We expect them to resign voluntarily... how long could we keep them on leave. This is really a crisis!" Mainul added.

An ACC official told The Daily Star that they would quiz the arrestees to know who the other people involved in the crime are.

Earlier, a Bangladesh Bank (BB) investigation revealed that Tk 595 crore had been swindled out of the Oriental Bank with the connivance of its top management.

The ACC filed a case in this connection, but till date nothing had been done to arrest the accused, majority of who are shareholders of

Rights body

FROM PAGE 1
inquiry reports.

"We are deeply shocked as killing without trial in 'special drives' after forming 'special forces' in the name of law and order, instance of which was established earlier, did not stop even during the present caretaker government," ASK said in a statement yesterday.

Number of deaths in Rab crossfire and deaths in army custody is on the rise although the government keeps on saying that it will remain cautious about protecting human rights, said the statement signed by ASK Executive Director Sultan Kamal.

Quoting newspapers, ASK said five people were killed in army custody since the declaration of emergency.

The rights watchdog noted that inhumane and extra-judicial activities like killing without trial are contrary to the present caretaker government's vow to eradicate all injustice, corruption and irregularities from the country.

"And the panic it is creating is a clear breach of human rights principle 'freedom from fear'."

"It seems that most of the citizens welcomed declaration of the state of emergency. People have developed positive expectations from the army especially for their laudable and significant role in foreign peace missions."

"So, the army needs to play a more skilled and responsible role regarding the detainees' security. Otherwise, their positive image will be tarnished," the statement said.

ASK expressed hope that the army will behave in a humane, responsible and lawful manner in case of arresting people and during interrogation following the arrest.

It said the government should conduct proper investigation into the deaths, and take necessary and effective steps immediately to stop recurrence of such incidents.

Referring to newspaper reports and its own sources, a press release of Odhikar said 19 people were killed by law enforcement agencies in last 10 days.

Of the 19, three were killed due to torture by army, one died while trying to escape from an army van, one jumped off a six-story building and died in joint forces' custody, one arrested by the joint forces died in police custody, eight were killed in Rab 'crossfire', one tortured to death by police, two died in hospital after police arrest, it said.

Of the 19 victims, Odhikar identified four as belonging to BNP, two Awami League, two outlawed Janajuddho and one each to Purbo Banglar Communist Party, Gono Mukti Fouz and Sromojibi Mukti Andolok. Besides there were a farmer, an alleged drug peddler and six alleged criminals.

Ward commissioner