

Call to outlaw party

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with the political parties hampers the educational environment as well as relation among the teachers and students, he said.

"Without academic freedom of the teachers and autonomy in the educational institutions, culture of knowledge is impossible," Prof Miah said.

However teachers are not above accountability, the former DUV said.

"Some vice-chancellors considering the autonomy of the universities as their personal autonomy misuse the power," he said.

Prof Muzafer Ahmed of Dhaka University said the University Order clearly states that elected student bodies are allowed to do political activities in the university.

"It is possible to remove crime and clashes from the campus by following the prevailing University Order", he said.

About the students' and teachers' politics, he said, "Any conscious person who has political wisdom must work and do research on politics."

"This culture is followed everywhere in the world," he said.

"Disciplinary committee would look into if any teacher does any immoral deeds," he said.

"Teachers' and students' involvement in party politics is an obstacle to higher education in universities," said Prof M Asaduzzaman, chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

"Dhaka University Order, 1973 has to be modified and developed to ensure the teachers' accountability," he said.

"We don't want to interfere in the activities of the universities. We want to bring development in the academic environment of the

universities," said the UGC chairman.

He urged the caretaker government to strengthen the UGC.

In appointing teachers and vice-chancellors at the universities, political influence plays a major role but it should not continue, he said.

Referring to the UGC's 20-year plan, he said, "A Search Committee would be formed and VCs would be appointed as per their recommendation."

"Universities cannot sustain without ensuring academic freedom of the teachers," Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University said at the discussion.

"Autonomy of the universities should not be curtailed or interfered with," he said.

He expressed his opinion against strengthening of the UGC.

"Every political government has used the universities as employment generators for their party adherents," Anu Muhammad said.

He urged appointing university teachers without being influenced by political considerations.

Dr Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University said the existing University Order is enough to bring back the glory of the universities.

Sahabul Haq, lecturer of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, presented the keynote paper at the discussion.

Dr SI Khan, VC of Jagannath University, Dr Ali Murtaza, former VC of BUET, Rashid E Mahbub, former VC of BSMMU, DR M Shamsur Rahman, VC of Kabi Nazrul University, Professor Syed Rashidul Hasan, pro-VC of National University, Dr Shakhawat Ansari and Sheikh Hafizur Rahman Karzon among others took part at the open discussion.

Next polls

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existing system.

Mainul Hossain made the comments while speaking at the concluding ceremony of a training programme for reporters organised by Bangladesh Economic Association.

"The upcoming election will not be so ordinary like the previous ones, [because] the representatives elected [in that election] will not be able to plunder the public exchequer for their personal gains," said the adviser.

Mainul also said, "We are working on to hold such an election after appropriate electoral reforms when political mafias will have no opportunity to assume national leadership."

"The system of a caretaker government should not be a permanent one. And that is why all of us want an election and want to hand over the charge to an elected government. But, before holding an election in the country, we want to ensure that the future elected government will ensure happiness of the people," Mainul added.

About the ongoing anti-corruption campaign by his government, the law adviser said all the corrupt will be put on trial under the laws of the land. The Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) is working relentlessly to collect evidence against the alleged corrupt so that they [the corrupt] are proven guilty by the court of law.

The information adviser put emphasis on the role of the media to free the country from corruption and the corrupt. He also urged the journalists to be careful, analytical and objective while preparing their reports so that no report can cause sufferings to an innocent person.

A total of 40 journalists from different media houses took part in the training. The law adviser handed over certificates to the participants after completion of the programme.

Bird flu

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Upon receiving information, livestock officers from both the capital and Savar rushed to the farm yesterday morning and sent sample of chickens to the laboratory in Dhaka for testing.

Four teams of the Savar Livestock Office have been conducting drives in the area to investigate if there is any fresh infection of the avian flu virus at any farm or place in the upazila.

Meanwhile, our Narayanganj correspondent reports: Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Dr Chowdhury Sajedul Karim visited two bird flu-infected poultry farms in the district yesterday and urged all to remain alert about the virus' infection.

"Although infection and spreading of the virus has been prevented temporarily, everyone should always remain alert to keep the poultry farm industry alive," said Sajedul Karim at a meeting with poultry farm owners, local journalists and government officials.

"The [fisheries and livestock] ministry will sort out a working plan by next week to determine how to help or compensate the affected poultry farm owners," he added.

Earlier, Sajedul visited Mukta Poultry Farm in Narayanganj sadar upazila and Chistia Poultry Farm at Shiarchar in Fatulla.

The adviser gave assurance to provide modernised instrument, increase trained manpower, and other laboratory facilities for testing bird flu infection.

He also directed the deputy commissioner (DC) to take necessary measures to provide the tuition fees and other necessary academic facilities for the children of the affected poultry farm owners.

Livestock Secretary Syed Ataur Rahman, Joint Secretary Khalilur Rahman Siddique, Deputy Secretary Anisur Rahman, Deputy Commissioner Ahsan Habib and Superintendent of Police Sibgatullah were present at the meeting among others.

There are 989 poultry farms in Narayanganj. A total of 2,476 chickens have so far died since the detection of the virus while 12,004 chickens were culled at the bird flu-infected farms in the district.

Sylhet gas

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Under this project, the SGFL would daily produce 16 barrels of Natural Gas Liquid (NGL) and about nine barrels of associated condensate using 45 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) gas.

The first tender for this fractionation plant project was floated in May 2005 but it fell flat. The project was re-tendered in January 2006 and this time three offers were dropped by Sinopec, Thermo

Designs and Astra-Evangelist. By February 2006, the consultant came up with its evaluation of the bids declaring Astra-Evangelist and Sinopec as non-responsive and recommending Thermo Designs of Canada.

Illegal VoIP denies

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the companies to the illegal business.

According to Rab sources, the case against the GP was filed on February 12 after the authorities had busted an indoor base station of the GP and special SIM cards at Moghbazar in the capital. The GP authorities have denied responsibility for running any illegal VoIP through this system but the Rab has filed a case saying that evidence of GP's involvement in this operation is overwhelming.

A Rab team last month met Banglalink authorities and showed them the evidence it gathered on the company's illegal VoIP operation. Banglalink authorities admitted that illegal VoIP operators used their equipment for such operations in the past but stopped it in January. They claimed that the company never directly ran any VoIP operation. The Rab filed a case soon afterwards.

Aktel's massive illegal VoIP operation was busted late last month in a Rab raid at its office in Gulshan. The Rab recovered huge equipment along with financial records which indicate that Aktel was earning between Tk 100 crore and Tk 180 crore a year from this operation. A case was filed against Aktel.

PENALTIES

A Rab source said investigators were now filing a report along with a set of suggestions on what the government should do about the mobile phone companies involved in the illegal operation.

An official of the telecoms ministry said, "The government should at first calculate how much tax has been evaded and how much the BTBT was deprived of its revenue from illegal VoIP operations. Mobile phone companies would accordingly pay these money to the national exchequer."

He added, "Then the phone companies should be penalised in some ways for being involved in illegal activities... They may be additionally warned of cancellation of licences if they are found engaged in illegal activities in future."

Sources in phone companies pointed out that the present situation could have been easily avoided had the authorities acted in the interest of the people. They say it is important that the government do whatever benefits phone subscribers the most.

HOW IT GREW

Insiders said the country's first illegal VoIP operation was introduced in 1996 by film actor Helal Khan, whose massive establishment was busted in late January. A section of unscrupulous BTBT staffs helped him in this illegal business.

In 1998, a mobile phone company, having strong political clout, started VoIP operation in full swing

and concentrated fully on this operation till recent times.

Banglalink's package aimed at VoIP operation was introduced in late 2004. Sources said the company used to rent out E1 switches and set Base-station Transceiver (BTS) to help operators run VoIP.

Sources however could not say exactly when the GP's packages were being used for VoIP operation. But they claim that the GP had run its own operation and also rented VoIP related equipment according to its convenience. The GP authorities however denied this allegation.

Aktel started such operation in October 2005 as it saw that "all mobile companies were involved in it," said one source, adding the company ran its own operation.

Initial illegal VoIP set-ups were made in connivance with a section of unscrupulous BTBT employees and officials. "They used to provide the operators with BTBT's E1 circuits for call termination. Many such BTBT E1 circuits in the capital's Gulshan area are still in operation," the source said.

"BTBT's unscrupulous staffs rented out huge E1 circuits under Gazipur exchange in 2003. There are many set-ups there," he pointed out.

Rab investigators also admitted this.

Since illegal VoIP operation involved thousands of crores of taka, bribery and illegal influence on officials and policymakers were almost an open secret.

"Bribery ranged from cash to foreign trips or even Malaysian second home immigration schemes, and illegal VoIP operators offered all this to officials and policymakers to delay VoIP licensing or facilitate their illegal operation," said an insider.

"There are about 1,50,000 people involved in illegal VoIP operation outside mobile phone companies. About 5,000 of them made huge money which remains black ... for instance, I know a 35-year old man who has more than Tk 30 crore in his accounts."

Another source pointed out that though money laundering is part of this illegal business, Bangladesh did not lose anything in this business as incoming overseas calls dominate the situation. "About 90 percent of monetary transactions were made in favour of Bangladesh for the incoming calls."

This money came into Bangladesh mostly through unofficial channels. The operators also used legal means to bring in a part of the money. "About 80 percent of the foreign exchange earned through software export is simply VoIP earning," he added.

11 job seekers

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The job seekers arrived at ZIA on an Ethihad Airways flight at 10:00am Friday. Immigration police interrogated them and it was revealed that several travel agents were involved in sending them to work abroad.

A high-ranking immigration official at ZIA said a section of immigration officials in connivance with unscrupulous travel agents and civil aviation officials allow such passengers to travel with forged passports or more than one passports and fake documents in exchange for bribe.

"This practice cannot be stopped unless the corrupt officials and travel agents are punished," the official said adding that it was for these people illegal migration and human trafficking have not stopped.

Immigration police sources said authorities concerned are going to conduct a crackdown soon on brokers and recruiting or travel agencies that are involved with such illegal practices.

Meanwhile, Tejgaon police arrested a broker of a manpower recruitment agency Monir Hossain after a case was filed against him with Ramna Police Station. Mohammad Azim had filed the case with the police station. In the case he said Monir cheated at least 10 people with the promise of them of sending them to Singapore to work.

Azim told The Daily Star that Monir took Tk 2.8 lakh from him to send his brother to Singapore one and a half years ago.

Hasina

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even started the work yet.

The poll chief at a press briefing on Thursday announced the 18-month timeline and unveiled a set of electoral reforms.

Huda said the ban on indoor politics should be lifted soon to allow the commission to talk with the political parties about the electoral reforms.

The proposed reforms include making mandatory registration of the political parties and not allowing anyone to contest from more than three constituencies.

Hasina said the reforms were needed to rid politics of corruption and free the electoral process of muscle power and black money.

"This government has done some good work and we supported them," she said adding that reforms are necessary, but they should never be used as a pretext for delaying the polls.

The present caretaker government took over on January 12 and the previous day a state of emergency was declared after weeks of political unrest. Later, the national election scheduled for January 22 too was postponed.

The administration has reconstituted the Election Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission while carrying out an anti-graft crackdown that has so far seen a number of political bigwigs and businessmen detained on graft charges.

They include Tarique Rahman, senior joint secretary general of BNP and son of the immediate prime minister Khaleda Zia.

14 killed

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to douse the flames.

Police said the jeep was transporting explosives -- meant for clearing stones to construct roads -- from a licensed shop.

They ruled out earlier reports that the vehicle might have been transporting weapons to the coast to be smuggled to northern Sri Lanka, where rebel Tamil Tigers are waging a deadly insurgency.

7 killed

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during the last two weeks with a sinister motive of tarnishing the image of the Tigers," LTTE spokesman Rasiah Ilanthiriyar was quoted as saying.

Five people were dead on arrival at Vavuniya hospital, where two passengers died from their injuries, a hospital official said, adding seven soldiers were among those wounded.

Tamilnet said the blast killed at least seven civilians and injured 27 others, including four children.

The attack came five days after a bomb exploded inside a bus in the east of the island, killing 17 people and wounding 25.

Immediately after Yesterday's blast, the government asked people to be cautious of "suspicious persons or activities" ahead of the traditional New Year next week.

"The government is requesting the general public to be cautious of suspicious persons or activities, especially at crowded places, inside buses and trains during the upcoming festive season," the government said in a statement.

Security has also been intensified across the island's northern and eastern regions in a bid to prevent Tiger attacks, the government said.

Yesterday's blast came a day after Sri Lanka's navy and Tiger rebels fought a sea battle off the island's northwestern coast with the warring parties each claiming losses for the other side.

Developing nations

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not gear up to adapt biotech by training up adequate manpower, conduct need-based researches and find ways to use this technology at local level and formulate monitoring mechanism, they will lag far behind, they said.

"Just in a decade or so, our life will be significantly influenced by biotechnology. Many biotech drugs, medical services and vaccines are already available in the market. We are also using biotech crops, such as soyabean, but there is no special surveillance or regulatory mechanism in the country to oversee the matter," Professor AK Azad of National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases said.

As there would be more and more biotech drugs, breakthroughs in vaccine development, highly specific and sensitive biotech diagnostic reagents, the developing countries need to be prepared for utilising this situation to improve health and nutrition of the people, he said.

Stressing the need for preparing workforce on biotechnology to explore opportunities, the biochemist said, "We shall have to keep watch on the health and nutritional safety issues of the biotech drugs, crops, fish and meat, and on the environmental exposure of the biotech materials."

By expanding the quality of biotechnology education, research and number of students, Bangladesh can have sufficient skilled manpower to work at home, Prof AK Azad noted. The country can also earn remittances, by exporting the trained workforce to global market, he added.

Professor Ahmed A Azad of Brac University said that despite having bright people, Bangladesh is lagging behind just due to lack of proper leadership, political instability and lack of world-class research activities.

"For improved food security and health equity, biotechnology has become a necessity," he said, adding that the brain drain of molecular scientists to the developed countries will continue unless they are utilised at home.

Education and training in the developing nations are mainly donor-driven instead of need-based, Professor Azad observed, adding that establishment of drug research and development network in these countries is a must. Traditional medicines and technologies should also be recognised, he said.

Professor Asma Ismail of Institute of Research Molecular Medicine of Malaysia said without trying to compete with the developed countries, the developing nations must look at their local needs before going for biotechnology.

Israel launches air strike

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Ahmed Abul Gheit condemned the raid, calling in a statement for "an immediate halt to all acts... that complicate the situation."

On Wednesday, Israeli troops entered the Gaza Strip in their first incursion since a November ceasefire, killing one Palestinian militant.

Israel withdrew all of its troops from the territory in November as part of a truce with militants who undertook to halt rocket fire.

But some militant groups have refused to abide by the ceasefire deal, and have since fired 155 rockets at Israel, according to the army. In December rocket fire wounded two teenagers in the Israeli town of Sderot.

On March 28, Israel launched its first strike against a militant rocket team in Gaza since the truce, but no soldiers entered the territory at the time.

Last Sunday, Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz ordered troops to take "decisive action" against militants and rocket fire.

"I think difficult questions are being posed in regard to the ceasefire, which is why we are preparing ourselves for any scenario," he told army radio on Monday.

In the northern West Bank town of Jenin on Saturday, the local commander of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Zakaria Zubeidi, sustained a bullet wound to the shoulder during an Israeli incursion, according to sources from his militant group, an armed offshoot of president Mahmud Abbas's mainstream Fatah faction.

Zubeidi, who became infamous in Israel after female Israeli friend Tali Fahima was detained three years ago for aiding and abetting his operations and jailed until January this year, was "wounded in a targeted operation by the Israeli army aimed at assassinating him," the sources said.

But the Israeli army denied trying to carry out a "targeted killing" against the militant leader.

"During a routine operation in Jenin, our soldiers came under attack with small arms and explosives, and returned fire," a spokesman said.

Zubeidi was unbowed by his injuries, however, and vowed to carry on his campaign of armed resistance.

"My men will continue to fight against the Israeli army as long as it

ogy. Abdul Awal Mintoo, chairman of East West Seed (Bangladesh) Ltd, called for utilising the full potential of biotechnology, but cautioned that the radical changes caused by the new technology will affect employment, trade pattern and economy, mostly the poor and the underdeveloped countries.

"The eugenics revolution may transform social order so fast that it may push many societies on the verge of chaos," he said.

Speaking at the seminar, Ministry of Science and ICT Secretary SM Wahiduzzaman said that the government has already adopted national biotechnology policy considering its necessity for poverty alleviation and improvement of life.

Noting the lack of adequate public funds for research and human resources development, he said the government would encourage public-private partnership in this regard. He also pledged full support to develop the existing National Institute of Biotechnology into a centre of excellence.

Professors Anwar Nasim from Pakistan, Mehmet Ozturk from Turkey, Dhaka University Pro-Vice Chancellor Yusuf Haider, Incepta Pharmaceuticals Managing Director A Mukhtadir, Square Agrobiotech Executive Nafisa Akther Rouf, Brac University Professor Dr Shah Md Razzaque also spoke.

Bangladesh Rice Foundation Chairman M Sayeduzzaman and ICCDR, B Executive Director Dr David Sack chaired the sessions.

FBCCI worried

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They also requested the government to restrict new factories without ETPs. "It's possible to quickly set up the ETPs if the entrepreneurs get necessary financial and administrative supports from the government," Mohammed Ali told the meeting.

Barapukuria

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necessary measures" to increase the mine's output from present level by the stipulated time.

During the visit, the adviser directed the officials to make necessary coal import from India to supplement the fuel for the power plant.

Barapukuria Coal Mine Project Managing Director Abdul Aziz and officials of the 250MW power plant appraised the adviser and his entourage of the latest state of operation, production and maintenance of both the mine and the power plant.

continues to carry out incursions into Palestinian towns," the militant commander told the Ynet website of Israel's top-selling daily Yediot Aharonot.

Zubeidi said that his men had detonated a bomb to halt the advance of 15 Israeli military vehicles and a bulldozer into Jenin refugee camp.

2 missing

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southern Helmand province, a Taliban stronghold where the rebels hold several districts, a provincial governor said.

The governor and the police chief are the first officials to confirm that the nationals, who went missing on Tuesday in the southwestern province of Nimroz, had been kidnapped.

The latest kidnapping comes less than three weeks after an Italian journalist was freed after some two weeks in Taliban captivity in Helmand.

"Our intelligence reports indicate that they've been kidnapped by Taliban and we believe one or more of the Afghans travelling with them were involved," said Askaryar, police commander of Nimroz province. He did not provide details of the intelligence reports.

"Our search operations which included house-to-house searches didn't result in any success. I think they've been moved from the area -- maybe to Helmand."

The aid workers from Terre d'Enfance (A World for Our Children) were taken from Khash Rod district, an area on a highway that links Nimroz to the main western city of Herat, said Ghulam Dastgir Azad, provincial governor for Nimroz.

The French pair were wearing traditional Afghan clothes, which were provided by their Afghan assistants, Askaryar said.

"Their Afghan colleagues we suspect were involved had provided local dresses, a burqa for the woman and a turban for the man. They left the (Nimroz) province in a very suspect manner and did not inform police about their trip," Askaryar said.

He said their fourth Afghan colleague -- a translator -- had been detained by police for questioning. He did not say when the Afghan was detained.

The Taliban militia, who have mounted a bloody insurgency since they were ousted by US-led forces in 2001, claimed late Wednesday to have captured the five. Their spokesman, Yusuf Ahmadi said he had no updates on the case.