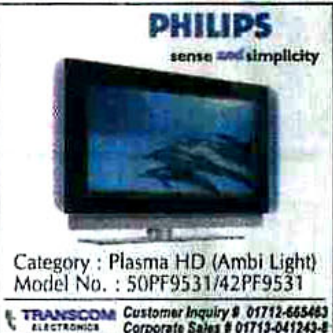




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Judiciary clean-up on cards

CJ's recent remarks seen as an indication

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The government is seriously considering options for restoring the image of the higher judiciary, which has been tarnished in the last five years through acute politicisation and appointments of judges with lack of qualifications or competence.

A competent Supreme Court source said yesterday that the government is now collecting background information about all controversial judges who were appointed or whose services were confirmed between 2001 and 2006.

"We believe that the move is an indication that the government is planning to do something to clean the judiciary and to restore its independence," he said.

Chief Justice Mohammad Rulul Amin told a gathering of lawyers on

Sunday in Noakhali that the damage done to the judiciary in the recent years will take more than 20 years to remedy.

The Supreme Court source added that the chief justice's remark will help the authorities to concede to the widespread demand for freeing the judiciary from partisanship through reforms.

Senior lawyers of the Supreme Court yesterday welcomed the statement of the chief justice. But they said instead of waiting 20 years to cleanse the higher judiciary, the authorities could form a supreme judicial council or find other means to start reforming it immediately.

According to Supreme Court sources, there are 68 confirmed judges in the High Court Division and seven in the Appellate Division

including the chief justice.

Out of the 68, the appointments of 41 were confirmed during the regime of the immediate past BNP-led four-party alliance government which had appointed 45 additional high court judges during its regime. After the authorities appoint an additional judge and the person serves for two years, the chief justice makes a recommendation for confirming her or his appointment based on performance. As a norm, the government always accepts the chief justice's recommendations.

When a judge's appointment is confirmed, he or she cannot be removed unless the person voluntarily resigns or a supreme judicial council removes the person. And that is why the chief justice said it will take 20 years to cleanse the judiciary.

There have been allegations of partisanship and nepotism in relation to most of the 41 confirmations. There are also allegations that some of these judges had been active leaders of BNP. One additional judge used to be a BNP lawmaker in the sixth parliament and there is at least one judge against whom there are specific allegations of corruption.

The alliance government made these appointments in four instalments. In addition, the alliance government also extended the retirement age for the judges allegedly to place a candidate of its choice as the chief of the caretaker government before the ninth parliamentary election. The move in turn also extended the tenure of the controversial judges.

In the last instalment of

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Constitutional basis of CG weak: Hasina

UNB, London

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina has said the constitutional basis of the incumbent caretaker government is weak and called for a specific date for holding the stalled parliamentary election.

"Since the basis of the present caretaker government is weak, it can't stay in power for long," she told a meeting organised by the UK unit of the party in East London on Sunday.

Hasina said people fought for a free and fair election and they do not want any delay in holding the polls. She demanded early elections to maintain the democratic process.

The Awami League chief said she will fight lawfully the corruption and murder cases filed against her.

She thanked the people, particularly the expatriate Bangladeshis and British ministers and MPs, for raising their voice against the restriction on her return to Bangladesh.

ADP revised down 17pc

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The current Annual Development Programme (ADP) has been cut by 17 percent to Tk 21,600 crore due to poor revenue collection, donor conditions and inefficient and slow implementation of projects.

The revised ADP was approved by the National Economic Council (NEC) at a meeting yesterday, chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed.

The NEC also extended the tenure of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) by a year until June 2008.

The biggest losers in the ADP cut are the communications sector with 33 percent of its allocation slashed, agriculture 30 percent, health five percent, education and religion sector 24 percent and transport sector losing 10 percent of allocation.

The rural development and institution sector was given an

additional 10 percent allocation in the revised ADP. To this end, block allocation for city corporations, zila parishads, paurasabhas, upazila and union parishads has been increased by Tk 210 crore to Tk 874 crore.

The original ADP allocation is Tk 26,000 crore comprising Tk 14,682 crore local resources and Tk 11,318 crore foreign resources.

Local resources have been cut down by 22 percent to Tk 11,480 crore while foreign resources have been slashed by 11 percent to Tk 10,120 crore, of which Tk 2,070 crore will be available from the World Bank's development support credit.

"Transport, power, rural development, health and education are the priorities in this ADP," Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam told reporters after the NEC meeting.

According to a planning ministry report at the meeting, rural development got 15.87 percent allocation in the revised ADP, trans-

port 13.85 percent, education and religion 13.55 percent, electricity 12.86 percent, and health 11 percent.

In the original ADP, sectoral block allocation was Tk 3,025 crore but no such allocation was kept in the revised ADP.

But a special block allocation of Tk 230 crore has been kept in the revised ADP, which would fund 171 unapproved projects that until now have got no funds.

The number of unapproved projects in the original ADP was 429.

There were 886 projects in the original ADP while the revised ADP contains 1,092 projects.

Only 32 percent of the original ADP involving Tk 8,267 crore was implemented in the first eight months of the current fiscal year. During the corresponding period of last fiscal year, 37 percent of the original ADP had been implemented.



PHOTO: STAR

Vehicles use only a part of the Titipara level crossing in the capital as the other part is worn-out due to lack of regular maintenance.

Dhaka keen to negotiate tri-nation gas pipeline

Bangladesh seeks Myanmar land on lease for farming

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh is willing to negotiate the much-talked-about tri-nation pipeline passing through the country's territory for transmission of gas from Myanmar to India.

"We are ready to negotiate for allowing the pipeline if Myanmar sells gas and India agrees to buy...We'll obtain best possible advantage through negotiations-we'll get revenue," Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury told reporters after return from Myanmar.

Iftekhar said the tri-nation pipeline issue came up during his meetings with Myanmar leaders, including Acting Prime Minister Li

Gen Thein Sein, in the Myanmar capital.

According to the previous estimate, Bangladesh was to receive \$ 100 million to \$ 120 million as transmission charge or "wheeling charge" annually for the 950-km pipeline.

However, the immediate past BNP-led alliance government put three conditions to allow the gas pipeline.

The conditions: Bangladesh's passage to export its products to Nepal and Bhutan through India, reduction of Dhaka's trade deficit with New Delhi and allowing the import of electricity from Nepal and Bhutan crossing over the

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Shamim Osman jailed for 3yrs in first-ever graft case verdict



A CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

In the first-ever verdict in a case filed by the reformed Anti-corruption Commission (ACC), a

Narayanganj court yesterday sentenced, in absentia, former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Shamim Osman to three years' imprisonment for not submitting wealth statements to the commission.

Included in the ACC's first list of suspected corrupt people, Osman was ordered in February by the commission to submit his, his wife's and wards' wealth statements.

Senior Special Judge Abdul Kuddus Mia of Narayanganj district court delivered the verdict yesterday in a packed courtroom and the entire area cordoned off by security personnel.

The verdict stated that Osman is

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BUSHRA MURDER Delay in getting SC stay order led to release of two convicts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unusual and mysterious delay in reaching a Supreme Court stay order on the release of two persons who were condemned to death by a lower court judge for killing Rushdania Islam Bushra led to the recent release of the two accused.

Meanwhile, Bushra's mother Laila yesterday told The Daily Star that the two released accused threatened her over telephone to kill if she does not leave her Hazipara residence.

The SC stayed until May 27 a High Court verdict issued on January 29 acquitting the two accused -- Sheikh Shawkat Ahmed



Ruhul and his brother Sheikh Kabir Ahmed -- whom a trial court sentenced to death on June 30, 2003 in

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Khaleda's brother made BNP vice-president

She is to go for Umrah after lifting of ban on indoor politics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's younger brother Maj (ret'd) Saeed Iskandar yesterday disclosed that he was made a vice-president of the party by the chief, amid widespread speculation that her stay abroad might be prolonged if she goes to Saudi Arabia for Umrah.

Nazrul Islam Khan, joint secretary general of BNP, told The Daily Star yesterday, "Iskandar was made a vice-president on January 10 but we could not disclose the matter formally as the government has a ban imposed on politics."

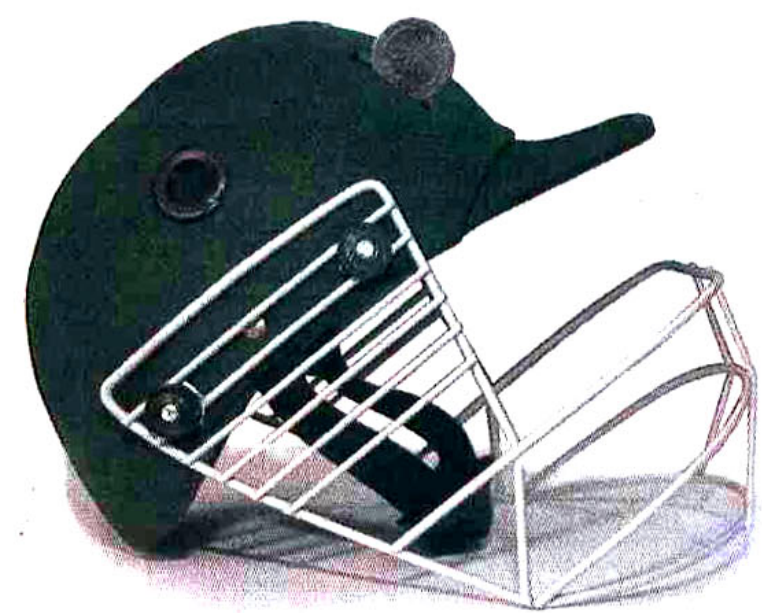
With Saeed Iskandar's induction, the number of vice-presidents in BNP now stands at 15, although

the party constitution limits the number within 12.

Other vice-presidents are -- Emran Ali Sarkar, Tariqul Islam, Justice TH Khan, LK Siddique, Nazmul Huda, Begum Sarwari Rahman, Rabeya Chowdhury, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Shawkat Ali, MK Anwar, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Shahjahan Siraj, Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, and Mohammad Nurul Huda.

A party source said Khaleda Zia decided to appoint her brother as a vice-president within the last few days during her meetings with party leaders at her cantonment residence as she is 'facing tremendous pressure' for leaving the country.

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