

Asian journos

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"The military junta's crackdown on demonstrations bodes ill for the future of basic freedoms in this country. Journalists continue to work under the yoke of harsh censorship from which nothing escapes, not even small ads," it said.

Newspapers print only under strict censorship, private broadcasting is not allowed and most websites carrying news about the country are blocked.

"There is no press freedom in Burma," Sein Win, managing editor of Mizzima News, an India-based news group run by dissidents, told AFP. "The government uses the media as a tool to spread its propaganda and lies."

At least 13 journalists and writers are believed to be in jail, Reporters Without Borders said, while a Japanese video journalist was shot dead while he covered the crackdown.

Myanmar ranked 164th out of the 169 countries in the survey -- one ranking below China.

Reporters Without Borders said it regretted China's low ranking.

"With less than a year to go to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the reforms and the releases of imprisoned journalists so often promised by the authorities seem to be a vain hope," it said.

The press freedom body said that at least 64 people currently imprisoned worldwide because of what they posted on the Internet, a total of 50 were in China.

Li Datong, a former editor of Bingdian, a weekly supplement to the China Youth Daily, said there was no press freedom there.

"In China we have a one party dictatorship where the ruling party controls everything," said Li, who was fired after his weekly ran articles on sensitive social issues.

"This system controls and suppresses the media," he said. "I can't see this system changing in the short term."

Another eight detained cyber-dissidents were in Vietnam, Reporters Without Borders said, adding that Malaysia and Thailand were also noted for cracking down on Internet journalism, arresting bloggers and shutting down or blocking news websites.

Meanwhile, military coups in Thailand and Fiji led to a worsening of press freedoms, it added, while in Pakistan, whose President Pervez Musharraf seized power in 1999, dozens of journalists were beaten and arrested during a crisis set off by his dismissal of the Supreme Court's chief justice.

Repressive restrictions also

silenced the press in communist North Korea, which ranked second from bottom in the survey.

Kim Yong-Hyun of Donguk University, a professor on North Korea, told AFP that "nearly all journalists there are regarded as civil servants armed with communist ideology."

The fog of war has also choked press freedoms in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, Reporters Without Borders said.

At least seven media workers have been killed during the past year in Sri Lanka's besieged northern Jaffna peninsula while others have been kidnapped or threatened, said the Free Media Movement, a Sri Lankan press watchdog.

Despite the bleak picture of journalism in Asia, some countries have turned their practices around.

In Nepal, an end to the civil war and return to democratic rule has revived basic freedoms, Reporters Without Borders said, while the Cambodia government had decriminalised press offences.

Charge sheet

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"Investigation into the case is almost finished. I hope the case will be disposed of soon," the IGP told reporters after making his deposition to the judicial inquiry commission headed by Justice Habibur Rahman Khan on the August 20-22 student unrest on Dhaka University campus at its Circuit House office in the afternoon.

Replying to a question the IGP said, "Absolutely the charge sheet will be given."

He added: "From the very beginning, there had been some problem, but now we have overcome the problem."

On the August 20-22 student unrest on the Dhaka University campus, the IGP said it turned into violent due to the role of a section of the university teachers.

The teachers were supposed to cool down the angry students. Instead, they expressed solidarity with the students and raised several demands which intensified the violence, Nur Mohammed said.

The campus violence spread to the city streets and other parts of the country, resulting in damage to public and private property.

The IGP said some outsiders were also involved in spreading and intensifying the student protest outside the campus.

A total of 102 witnesses, including police and army personnel, have so far given their statements to the commission.

EC to stay

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an yes/no vote (on the idea of national government)? We're not thinking about it either," Sohul said as newsmen asked him what the EC plans to do if any consensus about the proposed national administration is reached.

Sohul and the other election commissioner, Brig Gen (retd) M. Sakhatw Hussain, are scheduled to visit the UK in November to see whether or not Bangladeshi expatriates there are interested to get enrolled in the voter list.

"We'll hold view-exchange meetings with the expatriate Bangladeshi in four places -- London, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Manchester -- to explore their interest in being voters," he said.

The EC has recently held a meeting with the foreign affairs adviser about the visit. The adviser lent his full support to the commission's move towards enrolling the UK expatriates in the electoral roll.

The adviser has assured us of all cooperation of the Bangladesh High Commission in the UK, Sohul said.

"It's decided after the visit whether the majority of the expatriates are interested to be voters, how they could be enrolled and when the process will start," he told the reporters.

The EC is giving priority to have the expatriates in the UK enrolled in the voter list as the country's citizenship law ensures voting right for them for their great contribution to the liberation war of 1971.

"But getting enrolled as voters will be optional for the expatriates," Sohul said.

AL against

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government is also thinking of appointing consultants to accelerate the pace of work in the administration.

The AL acting chief, however, thanked the army chief on his remark that he does not have any ambition of becoming the country's head of state.

Zillur again demanded release of the detained party president Sheikh Hasina, other senior leaders and as well as the leaders of the AL's front organisations.

It is legal to give them bail, but denying bail is a breach of law," the veteran AL leader said.

Detention of Hasina and Khaleda and expulsion of Bhuiyan from the BNP changed the entire situation with the two parties.

AL FOR RELEASE OF PARTY CHIEF FIRST

Since the caretaker government allowed politics on a limited scale on September 10, the AL has held its presidium meeting twice and that of the central working committee once. But none of the meetings discussed the reforms issue.

The party leaders rather repeatedly demanded release of Hasina and other senior leaders.

The last AL presidium meeting decided to hold a meeting of the party's central working committee on October 22 to discuss the EC proposals for electoral reforms. The AL is scheduled to sit at a dialogue with the EC on November 4.

The AL has also started view-exchange meetings with the components of the 14-party alliance to revive the electoral alliance.

Meanwhile, a number of senior AL leaders led by party President Sheikh Hasina moved for bringing reforms within the party in July. At present, however, these dissident leaders have apparently retreated from their stance.

Political analysts observe that the AL has overcome the risk of splitting over the reforms issue.

AL PRESIDUM MEMBER SURAJIT SENGUPTA

The Jatiya Party (JP) led by Ershad, the third largest political party, has also faced split as party President Member Rawshan Ershad expelled party chairman HM Ershad by announcing a set of reform proposals.

Rawshan's move, however, could not gather support from the grassroots level.

The JP recently formed a committee to draft its reform proposals.

The Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh has been in a better shape as it has not faced any difficulties so far regarding party reforms.

Other small political parties have been running their activities since indoor politics was allowed and they have not faced any problems regarding reforms.

Judiciary separation

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Judicial magistrates to perform their duties with sincerity and honesty and assured them of all-out support from the Supreme Court.

Adviser Mainul Hosein said the present caretaker government is trying to establish an independent judiciary in the country and working wholeheartedly to make democracy sustainable.

He said an independent and responsible judiciary is essential for democracy.

The present government is fully aware of the role that the judiciary should play in the country's forward march towards democracy, Mainul said, adding that the lifeline of democracy is the rule of law, not the rule of corruption.

The adviser appreciated the Supreme Court for its guidance and said without the leadership role of the Supreme Court it would not be possible for the government to accomplish such a gigantic task.

Mainul said the present caretaker government has expressed its firm commitment to democracy and the rule of law by

extending all sorts of cooperation to complete the process of establishing an independent judiciary.

Referring to bitter experiences of undue political interference in the judiciary that had weakened the independence of the judicial system and the process of disposal of fair judgment, the adviser said the whole democratic structure fell apart because of such practices and the need for taking an army backing became imperative to save the country from the danger of an imminent civil war.

"We fought for the country's freedom so that we can live with our rights and dignity. The rights guaranteed by our constitution are meaningless if the judiciary is not freed and made independent to protect such rights," he said.

Mentioning the gravity of the judges' responsibility, the adviser said the members of the judiciary should work with a high standard of morality to make the judicial system stronger and earn people's full confidence.

A total of 67 additional district and sessions judges and joint district and sessions judges participated in the programme.

26 senior citizens

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famous expert on India Dr Joachim K. Bautze to the French ambassador in Dhaka, in which Bautze termed the process of fixing the insurance money for these archaeological masterpieces a "financial fraud".

Bautze said the total insurance money for the 187 pieces -- Tk 10 crore -- is far less than the price of a part of a painting of Vincent van Gogh.

The senior citizens also expressed their concern about carrying the artefacts by a single aircraft, which might lead to losing of all the invaluable artefacts if the aircraft faces any accident.

They raised objection against the deal signed between Bangladesh and France where absolute restoration rights were given to the Guimet Museum authorities.

They said they do not want the next generation to blame them and the current government for failing to preserve the elements of the country's history and legacy properly.

The statement was signed by educationists Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid, Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Prof Borhanuddin Khan Fahangir, Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Prof Mustafa Nurul Islam, Prof Syed Akram Hossain, Prof Salahuddin Ahmed, Prof Naresha Khatun and Prof Ajay Roy, singers Kalim Sharai and Sanzida Khatun, journalist Kamal Lohani, botanist Dwijen Sharma, poet Belal Chowdhury, architect Rabiu Hussain, artists Rafiqun Nabi, Bulbul Osman, Emdad Hossain and Aminul Islam.

Distillates, which include heating oil and diesel fuel, rose by 1 million barrels last week, nearly triple analyst expectations for a 1 million barrel increase. November gasoline rose 0.43 cent to \$2.178 a gallon on the Nymex.

Crude imports jumped last week by an average of 539,000 barrels a day, while imports of gasoline fell by 230,000 barrels a day on average.

Demand for gasoline rose by about 53,000 barrels last week, but is off 0.5 percent over the past four weeks, the EIA said.

Many analysts said the report strongly counters a market perception in recent days that oil supplies are falling as demand is growing. Reports by the Energy Department, the International Energy Agency and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries over the past week have all supported that belief.

Hannan alleged that BNP has

become a victim of 'dual policy' of the caretaker government as it has allowed all political parties except BNP to open their offices.

He urged the authorities to permit opening of his party's office.

Hannan appreciated army chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed's recent remarks in London about the factors that led to the state of emergency, and about activities of the caretaker government. He however said people would be happy if the government would lift emergency and complete its tasks as the situation has improved.

"The caretaker government that discharge its responsibilities in accordance with the constitution, and they could not finish their duties... Had they done these, such a situation would not have been created," he said.

Asked about 'unfinished tasks' of the government, he said, "Election and handing over of power to an elected government".

"I have nothing to say as it is his personal affair," was his reply to a question on the army chief's comment that he has no desire to become president.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen (retd) ZA Khan, another adviser to the BNP chairperson, also welcomed the army chief's remarks.

"The army chief spoke for clean democracy which will inspire the politicians," he said. Proper leadership will flourish if reforms in the party are implemented, he told newsmen after meeting Mannan Bhuiyan at his Gulshan residence.

Biman

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chaos, Biman cut in seven international routes in a span of one and a half years including New York, Yangon, Mumbai, Frankfurt, Orly (Paris), Brussels, and Manchester.

Biman incurs a loss of Tk 30 lakh per flight on Dhaka-New York route, Biman sources said.

The sources said they need wide-bodied aircraft like Boeing 747 to make viable to operate long-haul routes like Dhaka-New York.

Biman now has air service agreement (ASA) with 42 countries, but can use only 18.

Expatriate Bangladeshis urged the chief adviser to restore Dhaka-New York flight during his visit to the US to join United Nations general assembly.

"The chief adviser told Biman to procure aircraft as early as possible and to find a way to restore important routes like New York," Altaf Ali told The Daily Star last night.

"The government is giving importance to revive those important routes, which had been closed earlier," added Altaf.

"As Biman is now a public limited company, its board will discuss the matter and take initiatives."

With the Airbus, the number of Biman's own aircraft stands at 11. Biman currently owns three types of aircraft -- four DC10-30s, four B727s, and three A310-300s.

Of those, only four can fly every day, while the rest are grounded due to technical malfunctions.

Poor response

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Dhaka supports the UN initiatives in Burma and Bangladesh hopes to form the National Human Rights Commission soon.

"We also discussed Bangladesh's new role as the chairman of the Least Developed Countries and the Dutch government has assured us of assistance in this respect," Iftekhar said.

Oil prices

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week ended Oct. 12, more than the 1 million barrel increase analysts surveyed by Dow Jones Newswires, on average, had expected.

But prices reversed course and rose after the Turkish parliament vote. Traders worry that any escalation in the conflict between the Kurds and Turkey will cut oil supplies from northern Iraq. Despite the decision, Turkey's government said an incursion into Iraq is imminent.

The EIA also reported that gasoline supplies rose by 2.8 million barrels last week, nearly triple analyst expectations for a 1 million barrel increase. November gasoline rose 0.43 cent to \$2.178 a gallon on the Nymex.

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