

## Asian journo

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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 standing.

"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 of 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 Dongkuk 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 decentralised 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 agitation," Nur Mohammad 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.

## Mahasaptami

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mandaps yesterday to receive Durga and her children -- Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartik and Ganesh -- who the Hindus believe descend on earth at the invocation and supplication of the devotees through Bodhan rituals during the Mahasaptami puja.

Leaders of Bangladesh Puja Ujjapon Parishad and Mahanagar Sarbojonee Puja Committee said people from all walks of life will gather at puja mandaps mostly from today as the main attraction of the Durga Puja begins from Mahasaptami.

Ansars have been deployed at every puja mandap while Rapid Action Battalion, Bangladesh Rifles and police will patrol the puja venues for ensuring security of the visitors.

Monitoring cells have also been formed to help Hindus observe their biggest annual religious festival.

The prime puja mandap in the capital is set up at Dhakeshwari National Temple. Large mandaps

have also been built at Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University, the Ramkrishna Mission, Ramna Kali Mondir, Siddheshwari Kali Mondir, Tanti Bazar, Shankhari Bazar, Bangla Bazar, and at Mohakhali and Farmgate areas.

President Prof Iqbaluddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday felicitated Hindus on the eve of their largest annual festivities.

In his message, President Iqbaluddin Ahmed said Durga Puja is an indivisible part of the Bengali culture though it is the main religious festival of Hindus.

In a separate message, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed said people of all faith have been living in harmony in the country for ages and every achievement, success and glory belong to all of them.

Different political, social and cultural organisations, meanwhile, continued to felicitate Hindus on the eve of the festival. They also condemned the attacks on puja mandaps and desecration of Durga idols throughout the country.

## Bangladesh to seek

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\$1,590 million to Bangladesh for the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 Fys, it gave the country only \$819 million. Of which, \$456 million was provided for 2005-2006 FY and \$363 million for 2006-07 FY.

The Bangladesh team will ask the WB for the carry over from last two FYs, which is \$771 million, along with WB's commitment for the current FY, which is \$852 million.

According to well-placed sources, the WB has already given a hint of granting \$800 million, which, if disbursed, will be highest ever assistance for the country in a single FY.

Of the fund, \$200 million will be disbursed as transitional budget support, \$100 million as power sector support credit, 100 million as education sector support credit, \$75 million as budgetary support for flood rehabilitation, and rest for water procurement and avian flu prevention.

Bangladesh will, however, pursue the WB for more assistance and is hopeful about receiving \$1,623 million as the WB seems happy with the reform initiatives including ongoing drives to curb corruption, separation of the judi-

ciary from the executive and boosting up operations at the Chittagong Port, ERD sources said.

A part of the World Bank's allocation for International Development Association (IDA)-14, which is going to end next year, will remain unspent, and Bangladesh is going to ask the WB to reallocate the unspent IDA-14 fund for Bangladesh to help carry on the reform and development initiatives.

In his speech at the WB-IMF annual meeting, the finance adviser will also raise the issue of the developing countries' not receiving the pledged amount of assistance from different forums including the United Nations, which hampers development activities in those countries, sources said.

To succeed in its attempt to get the assistance, Bangladesh will have to take initiatives for reform in different sectors including energy, power and banking, they added.

The Finance Division has prepared a separate report on the government's steps in this regard and the Bangladesh team will brief the WB officials in Washington about it.

## 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 Sakhawat Hussain, are scheduled to visit the UK in November to see whether or not Bangladeshis expatriates there are interested to get enrolled in the voter list.

"We'll hold view-exchange meetings with the expatriate Bangladeshis 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'd be 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 leaders said.

If Sheikh Hasina is given bail, she would not flee the country, Zillur said adding that if she wanted to flee, she would not have returned home from the US.

He also thanked the government for allowing Hasina to talk to her children in the US over phone.

Zillur conveyed greetings to the Hindu community on the occasion of Durga Puja.

## Bangladeshi

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discharged as corporal of Bangladesh Air Force in 1990, said he is earning five times his air force salary working as farmer.

Azad, who made a fresh start of his career in Comilla, said, "For me, this award is as good as winning the Nobel Prize."

## Gatco case

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director general (DG) of the same ministry are included on the list of government officials to be questioned by the ACC.

The officials are to be questioned as they were in charge of different government offices concerned when Gatco was awarded the controversial container-handling job in Dhaka and Chittagong.

The CPA official questioned is Mosharraf Hossain, chief accountant of CPA.

Three senior principal officers of Sonali Bank handed over the bank documents and records to the ACC at its local office located at Sonali Bank head office in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, the ACC will soon initiate investigation of cases filed against Lutfuzzaman Babar, former home minister, Harris Chowdhury, former political adviser to the then prime minister, Barrister Nazmul Huda, former communications minister, and Advocate Taimur Alam Khandaker, former chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) for taking bribes, concealing information in wealth statement and misappropriating public funds.

The ACC will appoint investigation officers for the cases in a couple of days.

The ACC will soon submit charge sheets against controversial businessman Giasuddin Al Mamun and Awami League leader Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya as the commission approved the submission of charge sheets against them on October 16.

During investigation, the ACC found that Mamun accumulated wealth worth Tk 111 crore in the last five years while Maya concealed information about wealth worth Tk 6.27 crore in his wealth statement.

The commission also approved a first information report against Awami League (AL) Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader and his wife for concealing wealth information worth Tk 62.84 lakh in their wealth statements they had submitted to the commission.

## 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 Hossain 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 corrupt ones.

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.

## Reforms in parties

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expelled BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan disclosed a set of reform proposals including one to exclude Khaleda Zia from the party helm.

AL Presidium members Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed and Suranjit Sengupta also separately disclosed reform proposals that included a proposal for curtailing some absolute power of the party chief.

These AL and BNP leaders desperately tried to gather support of the leaders at the parties' grassroots level as the party high commands became divided over the reforms issue.

Meanwhile, former premier and AL President Sheikh Hasina was detained on July 16 and former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia was detained on September 3.

Detention of Hasina and Khaleda and expulsion of Bhuiyan from the BNP changed the entire situation within 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 Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu 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 Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta, who disclosed a number of proposals for reforms within the party, yesterday told The Daily Star that they simultaneously want release of the party chief and reforms in the party.

"In the changed political situation when a number of leaders have been arrested, our first priority now is to free the party chief and other leaders and then liberalisation of the political situation," Suranjit said, adding, "Once these priorities are met, we will go

for reforms in the party."

Referring to the current ban on indoor politics at the district level, Suranjit said, "It is not possible to go for reforms without political activities across the country."

BNP STILL IN TROUBLE Like other political parties, the BNP could not hold any formal meeting of the party forum in last one month due mainly to the discord among its senior leaders in the pro- and anti-Khaleda camps.

The police did not allow the BNP to open its central office as both the camps have been claiming to be the mainstream of the party. Newly appointed BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain and a few other leaders loyal to Khaleda tell the media almost every day about their demand for Khaleda's release. They also questioned the government attitude towards the BNP. But they are not speaking about reforms in the party.

"The BNP has not even decided yet if it will sit at the EC dialogue on electoral reforms on November 22."

BNP chairperson's Adviser Brig Gen (retd) Hannan Shah yesterday said, "Our office has been kept closed. As a nationalist political party, the BNP is failing to play its desired role."

On the other hand, the move initiated by Mannan Bhuiyan and a few other leaders for bringing reforms within the party has apparently become stalled following expulsion of Bhuiyan from the BNP.

These pro-reforms leaders announced their proposals on June 26 and declared that they would hold the party council by August-September to implement them. But they failed to convene the council and the possibility of holding it in near future is also slim, a pro-reforms leader said.

OTHER PARTIES The Jatiya Party (JP) led by Ershad, the third largest political party, has also faced split as party Presidium 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.

## Belated move

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questions about its revenue. Petrobangla made a makeshift arrangement to provide two percent of its total revenue to Bapex for staff salaries and other basic overhead costs. Bapex was given several ring-fenced gas structures in the late nineties, without any basic investment to utilise these assets. It was made a full-fledged company a few years back but is yet to be given a basic investment or a financial goal, or a financial structure that would help it grow.

NEW PROJECTS While the past governments sat on a number of proposals of Bapex, the caretaker government has approved some of these, and is seriously considering approval of some vital projects that would help enhance overall gas supplies in the country.

The energy ministry is reviewing the Semutang field development proposal which aims at production of gas from June 2009. Located in Khagrachhari, this field

would probably produce about 30 mcmcf gas at a cost of Tk 65 crore.

Bapex, under a joint venture with BGFL and SGFL, would develop Begumganj field in Noakhali under a self-financed project worth Tk 205 crore. Initially, this field would produce 20 mcmcf gas. It has already received the finance ministry's clearance.

The company would drill an exploratory well at a cost of Tk 58 crore in Kapatia. This government-funded project is awaiting clearance from the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Enec).

Bapex is now estimating the project cost for re-exploring Srikal gas structure where it had previously drilled a well at a wrong place. It aims at drilling a new well in this area in 2008.

Under a Tk 67 crore project, Bapex may drill a well in Sundalpur, close to Begumganj, in 2010.

The company is also planning to drill two new wells in Salda river gas structure.

## 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 Jahangir, Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Prof Mustafa Nurul Islam, Prof Syed Akram Hossain, Prof Salahuddin Ahmed, Prof Naoshaba Khatun and Prof Ajay Roy, singers Kalim Sharafi and Sanzida Khatun, journalist Kamal Lohani, botanist Dwijen Sharma, poet Belal Chowdhury, architect Rabiul Hussain, artists Rafiqun Nabi, Bulbon Osman, Emdad Hossain and Aminul Islam.

## BNP to change

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residence.

Steps are being taken to strengthen the party units in Dhaka and adjacent districts, he added.

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 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 did not 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 handover 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 it 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 F28s, and three A310-300s.

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

"We hope the airlines will take the opportunity of the open sky policy and operate more flights for their own interests," he said.

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.

## 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.

Distillates, which include heating oil and diesel fuel, rose by 1 million barrels last week, the EIA said. Analysts had expected distillate supplies to fall by 400,000 barrels. November heating oil rose 0.98 cent to \$2.3485 a gallon on the Nymex.

In other Nymex trading, natural gas futures rose 11.2 cents to \$7.479 per 1,000 cubic feet. In London, December Brent crude fell 43 cents to \$83.12 a barrel on the ICE Futures exchange.

The EIA also reported that refinery activity fell last week by 0.5 percentage point to 87.3 percent of capacity. Analysts had expected refinery utilization to grow by 0.4 percentage point.

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.