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Govt mulling appointment of 'assistants' to advisers

Says Gen Moeen

UNB, Dhaka

Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed, now visiting USA, has cleared his position about drawing loan from bank, saying that he took the loan according to bank rules and has been repaying it every month.

"I have taken that amount of loan as permitted under bank rules and I have been repaying it every month," he told private TV channel ATN Bangla at JFK Airport in New York on Friday.

The army chief said question of taking a loan of Tk one crore does not arise. "I have not even taken a loan of Tk 60 lakh."

Replying to another question, General Moeen said he repays the loan from the money he gets from house rent every month. All these are documented, he added.

The army chief said since the prime task of the present government is to free the country from corruption, anyone from army, caretaker government and government officials should not get tangled in it. "Everyone should remain accountable."

About appointment of consultants, he said the council of advisers

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NEXT NATIONAL POLLS

Move to form alliance with BNP at centre to fight AL

SHAKHAWAT LITON and RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Alongside efforts to keep the BNP united through restructuring, an initiative is underway to forge an alliance of the 'nationalist' forces to contest the next parliamentary election against the Awami League (AL) led 14-party combine.

Polymakers of the immediate past ruling party are now consulting each other on how to do the restructuring at the central level that might see a fresh appointment to the much-disputed secretary general's post before the talks with the Election Commission (EC) on electoral reforms begin on November 22, said party insiders.

They want to press ahead with the plan with the consent of detained Chairperson Khaleda Zia. Dislodging her from the helm is no consideration now.

The standing committee might meet within a week to discuss how

to settle the discord to ensure that the party stays united. Forming an effective grand alliance is possible only if the warring factions agree to patch things up, a senior leader said in return for anonymity.

"If Awami League can still remain united then why can't we? We must bridge the gap among ourselves for the sake of the party," BNP standing committee member Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday. He added that the standing committee members would meet soon to discuss the overall situation.

Sources said Mahbubur has already talked to a number of standing committee members and most of them have expressed support for his move. Even Khandaker Delwar Hossain, who was appointed the secretary general after expulsion of Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan on September 2, has appreciated the initiative, added the sources.

Delwar yesterday told newsmen that there might be disagreement at individual level but there is no division in the BNP.

Standing committee member Dr RA Gani said they want to pursue politics together. "There might be a difference of opinion between some leaders but there is no disunity within the rank and file," he observed.

Success of the initiative to float a new political alliance hinges on how quickly the factions get untied by ending the conflict over intra-party reforms.

Some leaders of Jatiya Party, Liberal Democratic Party and other like-minded organisations too are working on unity of nationalist forces under BNP.

Sources close to those said it is not sure yet whether Jamaat-e-Islami would be included, but other Islamic parties would be there for sure.

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Advisory council discusses final task of judiciary separation

UNB, Dhaka

The Council of Advisers yesterday discussed the task of implementing the separation of the judiciary from the executive with effect from November 1.

A regular weekly meeting of the council, chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, discussed various modalities of smoothly and successfully separating the judiciary.

The law adviser and the law secretary apprised the council of the latest status of the separation process, along with background, through a presentation.

"November 1, 2007, the day of enforcing separation of the judiciary from the executive branch, would be a historical moment in Bangladesh," the council of advisers observed.

The meeting discussed logistic, personnel and other supports for operation of an independent judiciary following its separation from the executive control.

The CA directed the ministries concerned to sit together and look into how smoothly and successfully the long-awaited separation of the judiciary could be accomplished.

Besides, the council discussed

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Benazir vows to fight polls, combat militancy

Govt probes list of blast suspects supplied by her

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan probed yesterday a list of possible suspects given by former premier Benazir Bhutto after a suicide assassination bid that killed 139 people and bloodied her return from exile.

Benazir said she had sent President Pervez Musharraf the names of three people she accused of involvement in Thursday's blast, which ripped through a crowd of hundreds of thousands who welcomed her back to Karachi.

"I have shared the names with General Musharraf and one of the people is someone that they are (already) watching," Benazir told the BBC in an interview, but refused to give their names.

Sources in her Pakistan People's Party said they included senior army officials but would not give further details.

Benazir has pledged to stay in Pakistan to combat militancy and fight general elections in January, seen as a key step to returning the Islamic republic of some 160 million people to civilian rule.

But the attack on her motorcade, the worst suicide bombing in Pakistan's history, has cast doubt

over her previous plans to tour the country whipping up support ahead of the polls.

Benazir has said that she received a prior warning about members of al-Qaeda, Pakistani and Afghan Taliban and a Karachi-based militant group who may plan to attack her.

She has also accused Islamist supporters of late military ruler Mohammed Zia ul-Haq of being behind the blasts. He overthrew Benazir's father, prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in 1977 and had him hanged two years later.

Police said they were pushing forward with investigations but had made no arrests. Musharraf pledged to bring the culprits to justice in a telephone call to Benazir on Friday.

"Investigations are progressing in the right direction but once again we will avoid pinpointing anyone or blaming it on a certain set of militants," Karachi police chief Azhar Farooqi told AFP.

"There has been a minor piece of evidence found from the site today but we will not be disclosing it. Police have secured the site of the blast and taken samples."

Benazir's party said she would

soon visit the tomb of her father in her family's ancestral village of Larkana, deep in southern Sindh province.

"Her next stop will be Larkana to pay homage to her shaheed (martyr) father. That will come in a day or so," senior party leader Taj Haider told AFP.

"She is meeting party officials and consulting them. The programmes are being re-adjusted because of the security threat but she has said the attack will not deter her and the party from going ahead with plans."

The explosions -- a grenade followed by a suicide blast -- came hours after Benazir had flown home, sobbing as she set foot on Pakistani soil for the first time since 1999 after shrugging off warnings of militant attacks.

Benazir's husband Asif Ali Zardari has blamed one of the country's three powerful intelligence agencies.

Benazir had returned from self-imposed exile after Musharraf dropped corruption charges against her in the hope her popularity could shore up his grip on power.

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Anti-graft action ups Bangladesh's position, Crowley tells Moeen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Co-Chairman of Bangladesh Caucus in the US Congress Joseph Crowley said on Friday the ongoing anti-corruption drive has brought down Bangladesh's position in the corruption perception index (of Transparency International) from five-time champion, reports US-based news agency News World.

Terming it a landmark in the country's progress, he lauded the caretaker government for it when Bangladesh army chief General Moeen U Ahmed made a courtesy call on him at his office in New York.

Reiterating his support for the anti-corruption drive, Crowley said eradication of corruption is a pre-condition for democracy and progress.

Mohammad Aminullah, a Bangladeshi-American Democrat, who also attended the meeting said the anti-corruption drive and progress in the election process were main topics of the discussion, and Gen Moeen briefed the congressman about the progress in issuance of voter identity cards.

On the arsenic problem in Bangladesh, Crowley said it is an alarming disaster, and the government needs to play a more active

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Food inflation rises further

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Inflation rate on food items has increased in August due mainly to high prices in the international market and low domestic production but at the same time decreased on non-food items.

The overall inflation rate on point-to-point basis reached 10.12 percent in August, which was 0.02 percent higher than that of July, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data.

Inflation rate on food items reached 11.62 percent in August measured on a point-to-point basis, the BBS figures show. It was 0.20 higher than the figure of July, which stood at 11.42 percent.

However, inflation rate on non-food items has decreased by 0.24 percent in August and the figure was 7.99 percent.

The inflationary data from April to July shows an increasing trend of inflation rate on non-food items. But the latest figure shows continuous spiralling prices of food items in recent times.

According to the BBS data, there was a higher inflation rate in urban areas in August, while the rate in rural areas has slightly decreased.

In rural areas, the overall infla-

tion rate has decreased by 0.03 percent and reached 10.07 percent. On the other hand, the rate in urban areas has increased by 0.15 percent and reached 10.24 percent.

Inflation rate on food items in urban areas has increased by 0.48 percentage point and reached 12.94 percent. On the other hand, it has increased by 0.09 percentage point in rural areas and the figure was 11.6 percent.

In case of non-food items, inflation rate has decreased in both rural and urban areas in August and it decreased more in rural areas.

"The decrease of inflation rate on non-food items in rural areas has affected overall inflation rate in rural areas," an official of the Bangladesh Bank (BB) said.

According to a BB quarterly report released last week, higher transport costs as well as additional demand side pressures and market syndication are main reasons for price disparity of food items between urban and rural areas in recent time.

The BB report says in the international market there has been a rapid rise in the prices of commodities and between December '06

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PHOTO: STAR

Bogra municipal authorities fell century-old trees at Edward Park yesterday without government permission and floating of tenders to set up New Market and a slaughterhouse there.

Subsidy for PDB to continue until power tariff raise

SHARIER KHAN

The government will continue to pump in direct subsidy of Tk 50 crore per month to Power Development Board (PDB) to cover its losses till an improvement of the economy allows an increase of power tariff.

A top official of the power ministry said though the sector's pitiable financial health demands an immediate power tariff hike by Tk 0.54 per kilowatt hour (or a unit) to reach a break-even point, the government will not go for it now considering its economic pressure on the people.

"The government has resorted to a wait-and-see policy in this regard," said the official. "Till things improve, the PDB will get financial support to keep the sector alive."

The government has already allocated Tk 600 crore as subsidy for the PDB this fiscal year and has disbursed Tk 100 crore of it, he said.

PDB sources said the power board had been hammering on two proposals -- either the government increase power tariff by at least Tk 0.50 per unit, or give it support to cover losses. And the government opted for giving it financial support.

"Many factors are preventing

the government from fixing an economic power price at this point. First we need to improve power service to make a higher tariff acceptable to the public. Moreover, a tariff hike will have widespread impact on the economy and the people. The people are already facing strong inflationary pressure, and we don't want to worsen their sufferings through a power tariff increase," the official added.

But on the other hand, the condition of power sector that serves as one of the lifelines of the economy is pitiable.

Most of the existing power plants are too old and they need to be replaced. At the same time sharp increase in the demand for power must be met by setting up a large number of new plants. The PDB is counting so much losses that the investors do not feel confident about returns on their investments.

The government in March this year increased power tariff after four years. But this increase did not ensure profit or break-even point for the PDB that buys power from power plants and sells it to bulk and retail consumers.

Presently, the PDB on an average buys power at Tk 2.53 per unit

FROM PAGE 15 COL 4

Bandits fling passengers off train: 2 killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two passengers were killed and another two injured as they were flung onto the ground from the rooftop of a running train by robbers at Singher Batgachh in Mymensingh's Gafargaon upazila Friday night.

The dead, in their mid-twenties, could not be immediately identified while the injured were named as Belal and Mamun.

Locals said a gang of robbers swooped on the rooftop passengers

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EC invites JP's Ershad faction for talks

RASHIDUL HASAN

The Election Commission (EC) has finally sent invitation letter to Ershad-led Jatiya Party (JP) to participate in dialogue on electoral reforms, rejecting Rawshan Ershad faction.

Protesting the EC's decision, JP faction led by its self-proclaimed chairman Rawshan Ershad will send a letter to EC by next Wednesday claiming their supremacy over the party, sources said.

"We got the EC's invitation letter

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CAMPUS VIOLENCE

7 CU student leaders among 10 charged

CU CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday submitted charge sheet accusing 10 student leaders, employees and a university correspondent of a Bangla daily in the case filed in connection with vandalism on Chittagong University (CU) campus on August 22.

Investigation Officer Wahiduzzaman submitted the charge sheet to the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

Sub Inspector Anisur Rahman of Hathazari Police Station filed the case on August 26 accusing 1,400 to 1,500 students and others.

The charge-sheeted accused are CU Samajtantrik Chhatra Front President Kanchan Sarker, General Secretary Zamir Uddin Russel,

Vice-president Moni Dipa Bhattacharya, Office Secretary Mezbah Uddin, activist Bijoy Kumar Das, CU Chhatra Union President Moni Boishnob, CU Bangladesh Chhatra League Deputy Science and Technology Secretary Jahid Hasan Jewel, terminated president of officers' association Zaker Ahmed, suspended general secretary of employees' union Nazim Uddin and Mohiuddin Tipu, CU correspondent of Dainik Sangram.

Of the accused, police arrested Moni on September 18 and Bijoy on September 02.

According to sources, Bijoy is still behind bars while Moni was released on bail bond on the night

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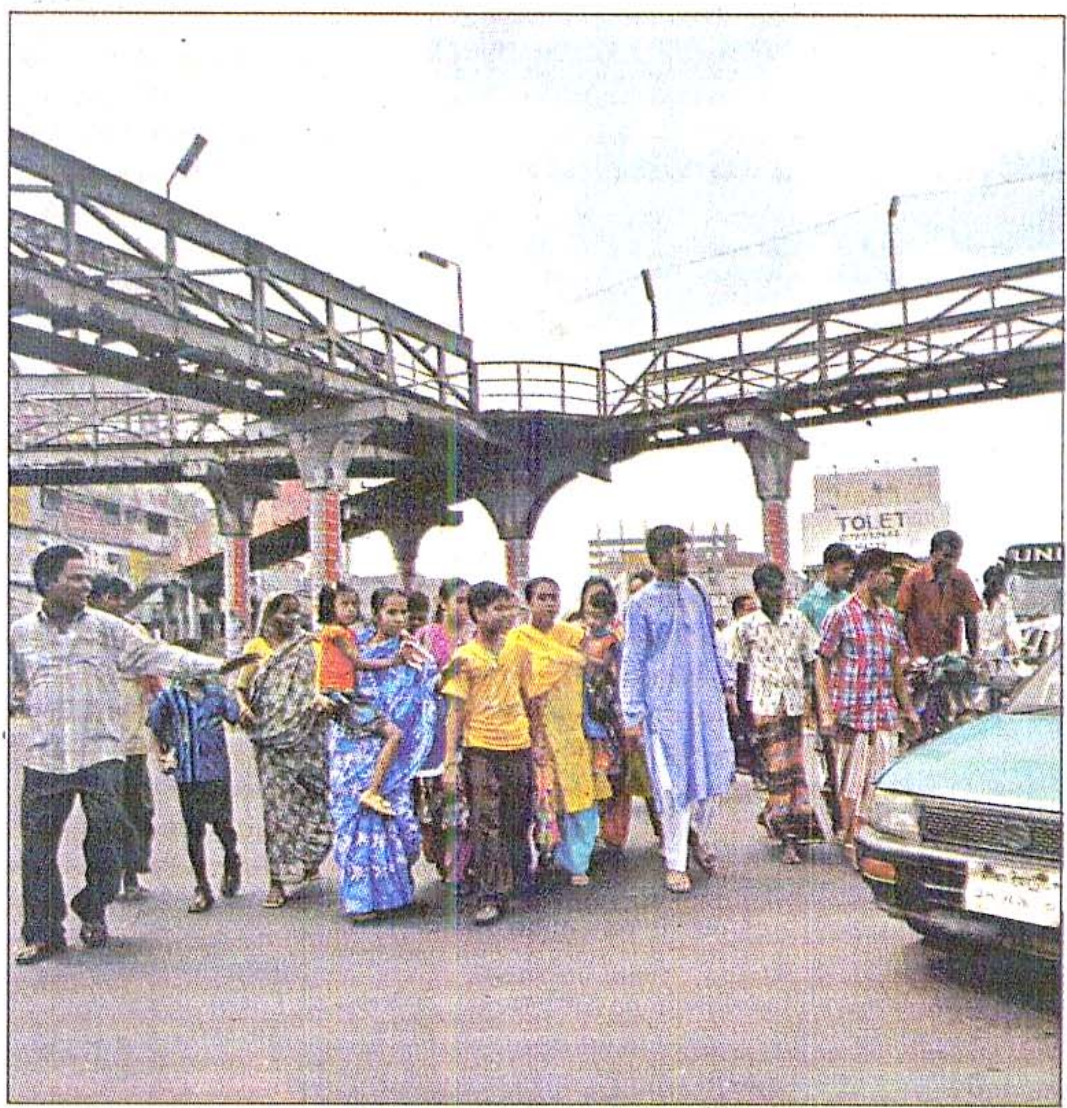


PHOTO: STAR

People crossing Jatrabari roundabout in the capital yesterday risking their lives as the authorities are yet to reopen the flyover which was shut before the Eid-ul-Fitr for repair.

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