

Canadian lawyer smells political motive

IG prisons rules out his meeting with Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina's Canadian counsel Prof Payam Akhavan yesterday said the charges brought against her are 'politically motivated' and intended to throw her out of politics and the next parliamentary election.

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Political talks should end by March

Says Zillur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League's (AL) acting President Zillur Rahman yesterday said the proposed dialogue between the government and the political parties should end by March so that the country could head towards a free and fair election.

"The dialogue should be open. We want to sit for a discussion without any precondition and with

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Home adviser warns against custodial death

UNB, Dhaka

Home Adviser Maj General (ret'd) MA Matin yesterday cautioned the high-ups of the law enforcement agencies against custodial death in dealing with offenders.

The home adviser in his first view-exchange meeting at his secretariat office with the high-ups of police, SB, DB and Rab noted that death in custody is always unexpected and it must be avoided, meeting sources said.

The meeting asked the police officials to immediately send to the home ministry the cases, which deserve to be transferred to the speedy tribunal.

He asked the members of the law enforcement agencies to take appropriate steps for investigation

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Anonymous philanthropist to donate \$130m for Sidr victims

UNB, Dhaka

A philanthropist will donate \$130 million for rebuilding the battered life of Sidr victims in the coastal areas of Bangladesh.

A four-member Islamic Development Bank (IDB) team, led by head of special assistant office of the bank Mohammad Hassan Salem, held discussion in this

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Chief justice's panel to appoint SC judges

Govt also okays proposal to free EC Secretariat from PMO's control

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday approved creation of the Supreme Judicial Commission to ensure neutral and credible appointment of Supreme Court judges. It also approved a proposal of Election Commission (EC) Secretariat to free it from the control of Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

But the government at its weekly cabinet meeting yesterday deferred the proposal for the creation of a national constitutional commission, which would bring government control over appointment to constitutional posts to an end.

The proposed EC Secretariat ordinance will ensure independence of the secretariat under full control of the chief election commissioner (CEC), chief adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim

Munaim told reporters after the meeting.

Fahim said both the approved ordinances were sent to the law ministry for final vetting before the president can promulgate them into laws.

The Supreme Judicial Commission will be a nine-member body headed by the chief justice that will select and recommend candidates as judges in the High Court and Appellate divisions of the Supreme Court.

The government took the initiative in view of a strong public demand, said Fahim, adding the government has also discussed the matter with prominent individuals in the legal field.

The other eight members of the commission include the law minister, two senior most judges of the Appellate Division, the attorney general, a member of parliament

each from the government and the opposition, the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), and the law secretary.

Through the prime minister the body will recommend to the president two candidates for each vacant post without any order of preference. The commission members may also interview the candidates.

If the president disagrees with the recommendations, he will send it back to the commission for review. If the president disagrees with the revised recommendation also, he reserves the right to reject all recommendations altogether.

Academic qualifications, professional skills, seniority, honesty and reputation will be considered while recommending names of additional judges in the High Court to bring rigour and accountability

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Shop-owners asked to close shutters by 8pm

UNB, Dhaka

Shop owners at all shopping malls and markets located in the metropolitan cities and district and upazila towns have been asked to close their business by 8:00pm every day with immediate effect to limit peak-hour power consumption.

Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser for Energy and Power Ministry M Tamim gave the directive during a meeting with the leaders of Bangladesh Shop Owners Association at the energy ministry yesterday.

After the meeting, the special assistant to the CA told reporters that the decision would take immediate effect.

He noted that the shop owners assured the government of full cooperation in executing the order.

Similar austerity measure was taken in March last year under which all shops in the metropolis and towns were kept closed after 8:00pm.

But the order was relaxed during the last Eid festival responding to the appeals of the shop owners.

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NCC's anti-graft drive running out of gas

Frequent shift in priorities, poor logistics, polls factor seen as main reasons; frustration grips task force activities

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The unprecedented anti-graft crackdown by military-led taskforces under the National Coordination Committee (NCC) to Combat Corruption and Serious Crimes is gradually losing impetus due to numerous complexities and difficulties including frequent shift in priorities.

NCC also started narrowing down its focus of attention as the preparation for holding the stalled 9th parliamentary election is gaining momentum. Against such a backdrop NCC introduced the idea of forming a truth commission as an alternative way for dealing with graft cases and suspects, which would provide an opportunity for corruptionists to admit to their culpabilities and to be penalized monetarily avoiding prolonged legal process and conviction by

courts. Although the unprecedented drive succeeded in creating an impression that no one is above or beyond the reach of law, some questions were, however, raised about different issues including discrimination in targeting corruption suspects, preparing quality graft cases, and NCC's role in dealing with serious crimes.

Taskforce sources said there were discussions among themselves about a trend of discrimination in targeting graft suspects since many influential persons widely known as corruptionists still remain out of the dragnet, but since that discussion no step to curb the trend has been taken by the high ups, resulting in a declining trend in public faith in the ongoing anti-graft drives, and in a permeating sense of frustration among the taskforce personnel.

Moreover, NCC added a new dimension to the drive by newly bringing into its focus institutional graft, targeting around seven institutions in the first phase, while leaving widely known corrupt institutions and sectors like local government and rural development (LGRD), local government engineering department (LGED), agriculture, and education still untouched.

The task force sources said fearing an adverse reaction in the bureaucratic apparatus they could not even proceed to file many graft charges as names of many former and incumbent bureaucrats appeared on the list.

The thought of reining in the drive came to NCC as a large scale panic had gripped the people in the wake of it, and because prices of essentials skyrocketed following arrests of businessmen.

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

The grip of land grabbers spreads even into Gulshan-Banani lake near Babubazar slum at Korail in the capital. The shot was taken yesterday from a nearby high-rise building.

BDR-BSF gunfight on Dinajpur border

BDR man among 3 Bangladeshis injured

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Border Security Force (BSF) of India yesterday had a over four hours long gun battle near Haripara of Birampur upazila in Dinajpur which left at least three Bangladeshis, including a BDR man, injured.

A few thousand locals fled the area amid the gun battle. The tensed situation came to an end when a flag meeting was held between the two border security forces.

The injured are Nayek Latu Mia, commander of a BDR patrol team,

and villagers Tofazzal Hossain and Nurul Haque. The injured were rushed to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital. They were reported to be in critical condition, our Dinajpur correspondent reports. It could not be known whether there were any Indian casualties.

During the firefight locals held BSF Sub-inspector Om Prokash who allegedly trespassed into Bangladesh territory. BDR later handed him over to BSF.

BDR Director (training and operations) Col Abdul Halim during a press conference at the

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Vodafone keen to invest in telecom sector in Bangladesh

MD HASAN

Vodafone Group Plc, the world's leading mobile telecom company, has expressed keen interest to invest in the mobile phone sector in Bangladesh and has sent a delegation to the country to investigate possibilities.

Headed by Gavin Darby, chief executive officer of Vodafone America, Africa, China and India, a team from the company is presently in Dhaka.

The visit follows a recent letter to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) in which the UK-based telecom giant said: "We are eager to visit Bangladesh to explore the potential of investing in the telecommunication sector."

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BARAPUKURIA MINE

Troubled coalmine shows hope for power plant

SHARIEF KHAN

The troubled Barapukuria coalmine that had been failing to produce enough coal to run the two-unit 250 megawatt (MW) coal fired power plant at its site may be able to ensure enough coal production throughout the current year, a top official of the mine said.

This is because the mine has started coal production at a new phase from January 14. This mining area is environmentally and geologically less hostile than the last production phases. On the plus side, mining equipment have been overhauled in the last two months to ensure efficiency.

The Barapukuria Coal Mining

Company Ltd (BCMCL) on Monday hit a record daily coal production of 3,685 tonnes of coal from the new phase. On Friday it had produced 3,436 tonnes of coal, more than double the regular production level achieved in the last two years.

"This has been also possible because the past energy adviser and the energy secretary took deep interest in the mine and obtained, for the first time, a work schedule from the mine's Chinese developer CMC. The power secretary also helped prompt release of mining and power equipment from the port," said a well-placed Petrobangla source.

Sources said from January 14, it

started off with producing 2,000 tonnes of coal. From January 22, the production shot up between 2,800 tonnes and 3,000 tonnes.

Now both the units of the China-made power plant are operating. Since late 2006, the plant could not go into full power generation at a stretch for a long time due to lack of coal as well as power plant glitches. The two units consume up to 2,000 tonnes of coal a day.

"Our target is to produce eight lakh tonnes of coal this year. The power plant annually needs six lakh tonnes. It means that we will then be able to sell the remaining coal to other consumers," said a top official.

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IN REMEMBRANCE



We fondly remember **Late Aziz H. A. Sattar**, the founding Managing Director of GMG Group of Industries, on his 15th death anniversary. He was a pioneer and a role model of industrialization in this country. His unfathomable depth of knowledge, vision, uphill struggle and firm determination inspires all of us. A doa mahfil has been arranged after Zohr on 31 January at GMG Industrial Corporation, Tejgaon to pray for the salvation of the departed soul. All his relatives, friends and well-wishers are cordially invited to attend.

**Family members
all officers & employees of GMG Group**

ADP implementation in 6 months dismal

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has implemented only 21 percent of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) in the first half of the current fiscal year and power division, a top priority in the development budget, spent only 18 percent of its allocation.

According to a planning ministry review, the ADP implementation rate in the last six months has hit a four-year low.

Twenty-five percent of the ADP was spent in the first half of FY07, while it was 27 in FY06 and 29 percent in FY05.

The planning ministry report identifies a number of reasons for slow implementation that include inadequate knowledge of the government officials concerned and poor application of the public procurement regulations, and hikes in prices of construction materials.

The report will be placed at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec) today.

The original size of the ADP for FY08 was Tk 26,500 crore while spending in July-December period was Tk 5,493 crore.

During the same period, Tk 3,340 crore or 20 percent of the ADP's local component was spent, while it was Tk 2,156 crore or 22 percent in case of the foreign com-

ponent that comes in the form of project aid.

In the budget for FY08, power division got the second largest allocation after local government division. "In the first half, it has spent only Tk 674 crore meaning 18 percent of Tk 3,778 crore it was allocated in total," said ministry sources.

"It's frustrating that the power division couldn't spend the money when the country has been suffering an acute crisis of electricity and things will worsen even further in summer," said a planning ministry official requesting not to be named.

The ADP review says delay in tender process and refusal by the contractors to start work for price hike of materials were the major reasons for sluggish implementation of power projects.

Of 45 ministries and divisions, 10 take up 81 percent of the total ADP allocation in FY08. They are local government, and power divisions, communications, health and family planning, primary and mass education, education, water resources, agriculture, energy and mineral resources, and post and telecommunications ministries.

Of them, primary and mass education, and agriculture ministries have used 33 percent of their allocation in the first six months. The other eight could spend between 7 percent and 28 percent

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EXTORTION CASE Hasina's trial resumes today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Trial of the extortion case against former premier and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina resumes today as the Supreme Court (SC) on January 24 cleared obstacles to holding the trial under the Emergency Powers Rules by vacating a stay the High Court (HC) had earlier imposed on the case proceedings.

The SC order came a week after the HC stayed proceedings of the

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Tarique to be sent to BSMMU prison cell soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The detained senior joint secretary general of the BNP, Tarique Rahman, will be transferred to prison cell at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) in a day or two following doctors' recommendation, a prison official yesterday said.

"As the medical board has recommended 'institutional treatment facilities' for Tarique, we'll get him admitted to BSMMU in a day or two", Inspector General of Police (Prisons) Brig Gen Zakir Hassan told The Daily Star.

The authorities formed a

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PHOTO: STAR

Passengers of a Biman flight from Chittagong to Abu Dhabi wait at Shah Amanat Airport for two days in utter helplessness as the airline changed the flight schedule five times.