



FUNDS FOR CONSTITUENCIES

Move to end clout of powerful politicians

Cabinet approves ordinance

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The cabinet yesterday approved in principle an ordinance that will end disproportionately high allocation of funds for constituencies of powerful politicians and compel the government to clearly state allocations marked for each upazila, district and division in the budget.

This practice will ensure equity among different geographical communities, the ordinance says.

The last household and expenditure survey of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics show that Barisal and Khulna divisions are

the poorest with the lowest poverty alleviation rate. According to a finance ministry high official, it happened due to the lack of "powerful ministers" from these two regions.

"During a political government's rule, there is a tendency of giving higher allocations to areas represented by powerful ministers or policymakers. As a result, a large part of the country remains deprived of minimum development allocations," he said.

"This ordinance will hopefully end this anomaly," he added.

The caretaker government's council of advisers at a meeting

yesterday approved in principle Public Resources and Budget Management Ordinance (PRBMO), 2008. Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed chaired the meeting.

The ordinance lays out some rules and regulations to ensure transparency in government expenditure. It imposes legal bindings on how the government borrows from local or international financiers, frames macro-economic policies and mentions do's and don'ts in public expenditure.

It dictates that the government borrowing from internal resources

should remain within two percent of the country's GDP. The government should also try to avoid taking loans from the central bank.

The government should not take hard-term loans, including supplier's credit or non-concessionary loans, exceeding one percent of the GDP.

The government should also not exceed its annual borrowing target—except in case of national security and natural disaster. In cases of exceptions, the finance minister will explain to the parliament why borrowing had to increase.

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Term of Speedy Trial Act gets 2yr extension

UNB, Dhaka

The Council of Advisers yesterday extended the term of the Speedy Trial Act for another two years, amending the tough law meant for effectively dealing with serious crimes.

A meeting of the council, with Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in the chair, approved the home ministry's proposal for extending the duration of the law by endorsing the Law and Order Disruption Crimes (Speedy Trial) (Amendment) Ordinance 2008.

The Speedy Trial Act 2002 was formulated to ensure quick trial of serious crimes like extortion, obstruction to transport movement, damage to vehicles, destruction of movable and immovable property, snatching, creating the reign of terror and anarchic situation, and tender hoodliganism.

The law was enforced on April 10, 2002 primarily for two years. The duration of the law was extended for another two years in 2004 while in 2006 it was given another two-year extension.

LOCAL POLLS BEFORE NATIONAL ELECTION

Govt, parties still wide apart on issue

SHAKHAWAT LITON

There is still no visible move to bridge the rising differences between the government and political parties over holding local government elections before parliamentary polls that has triggered a fresh spell of uncertainty about the immediate political scene.

Political analysts believe the situation could have been different had the caretaker government opened its dialogue with the political parties soon after taking the decision on January 10.

But the government is still waiting for the completion of EC's talks with the parties before opening its dialogue.

Most political parties including the Awami League and BNP have been vehemently opposing the government decision to hold local

government elections first.

The Election Commission (EC) is meanwhile preparing to hold polls to a few local government bodies next month in line with the caretaker government's plan.

Two former advisers to the caretaker government have observed that the situation might destabilise if the EC announces this month the schedules for holding the elections to four city corporations and seven municipalities.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, they urged the caretaker government to open its announced dialogue with political parties without delay to bridge the differences between them.

"The government should not take the unilateral decision to hold polls to local government bodies. It should consult with the political parties to reach a consensus so that

the latter cannot blame it," former adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury said.

"There might be some uneasiness if the political parties continue opposing holding local government elections before parliamentary polls. So, issues should not arise that might obstruct holding of the parliamentary elections in a free and fair manner," Moinul said.

Echoing the view, former adviser M Hafizuddin Khan said had the caretaker government opened the dialogue in January, things could have been better now.

"It might lead to an alarming situation if the political parties continue opposing the local government polls and the government moves for holding them despite the objections," he said.

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Army HQ terms false some reports, editorial on Gen Moeen's Delhi visit

UNB, Dhaka

The army headquarters yesterday termed false and fabricated some newspaper reports and editorial that the army chief during his India visit had stated that Bangladesh would show respects to the martyred Indian soldiers of 1971 on March 25 every year.

"As a matter of fact, during his India visit, the army chief did not make any such statement formally or informally," said an ISPR release.

It said that at different meetings during the visit, apart from entourage of the army chief, the Bangladesh high commissioner to India was present.

"During the meeting of the two army chiefs, the Bangladesh army chief recalled with respect India's cooperation and sacrifice during the Liberation War and expressed his gratitude," the release said.

Referring to the reports published by Indian English daily The Hindu on February 26 and Bangladesh Today on February 27 and Sadeq Khan's editorial published in Nayadiganta on March 7, the release said the army chief is

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A large number of people throng the BDR-run fair price outlet at Badda in the capital yesterday to buy edible oil, the price of which is higher in open market.

INT'L WOMEN'S DAY

CA for right atmosphere for women development

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed has called upon all, irrespective of their professions and positions, to put in their best efforts for creating an appropriate political and socioeconomic structure to ensure overall development of women.

He made the call while addressing a function marking the International Women's Day 2008 organised by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city yesterday.

The theme of this year's Women's Day is "Investing in Women and Girls".

Women and Children Affairs Adviser Rasheda K Chowdhury presided over the function. Women and Children Affairs Secretary Begum Rokeya Sultana also spoke on the occasion.

At the function, the CA formally unveiled the cover page of National Women Development Policy 2008 that suggested setting aside one-third of parliamentary seats for women and arranging direct election to the reserved seats.

It also suggested appointment

of an adequate number of women, if necessary, under the related section of the constitution to the highest-level of Cabinet Division and the policy-making level of the administration.

On health and nutrition part, it called for formulating and implementing a law for providing maternity leave to working women for five months.

The CA said, "The country needs to think about such a social structure where women will get the full opportunity to express and show their capabilities and efficiencies."

"For this, it's necessary to change social attitude towards women first. If we can build a liberal and real democratic system through combined efforts then certainly there will be a remarkable change in Bangladesh's women sector," he told the function.

Advisers, diplomats, noted personalities, senior civil and military officials and women and girls were present at the function.

The CA said a committee formed by the present government on strengthening and infusing dynamism into local government

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BNP UNIFICATION

Khaleda wants Oct 29 issue in reconciliation draft

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia wants the issue of controversial October 29 standing committee meeting to be included in the draft proposal for reconciliation of the factions.

Prepared by some pro-Khaleda leaders following discussion with pro-Saifur leaders, the draft was placed to the former prime minister through her lawyers.

But instead of giving her nod, she has sent it back and asked the unity organisers to include something specific about the October 29 meeting, where M Saifur Rahman and Maj (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed were appointed acting chairman and acting secretary general.

Besides, expulsion orders against Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Ashraf Hossain were not approved. The two, then the secretary general and joint secretary general of the party, were expelled by Khaleda Zia just before her arrest.

According to insiders, those behind the fresh unity move did not mention anything about the

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PRICE SURGE

Non-brand edible oil disappears from markets

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Non-brand soya bean oil disappeared from city wholesale markets yesterday with a sudden surge in edible oil prices.

Soya bean oil wholesalers in city markets including Moulvibazar and Karwan Bazar said a sudden shortage of non-brand soybean oil was being experienced during the last three days, but the crisis deepened yesterday afternoon.

"Today it seems that soya bean oil has vanished from the city markets," said an oil trader at Karwan Bazar. Yesterday, not a single litre of non-brand soya bean

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Plying rivers without fitness

SHARIFUL ISLAM

A large number of vessels operating along the inland waterways do not have fitness or registration papers and have a tendency to violate river traffic rules as apparently no government authorities are overseeing them.

The crew of most of these unauthorised vessels also don't have enough experience and expertise required by the law to do the job.

The illegal practice of running vessels without proper documents bribing officials of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) and the Department of Shipping (DOS) is nothing new. But it has again been in the spotlight following capsizing of MV Shourav-1

on the Buriganga on February 28.

The probe committee formed to investigate the last month's launch disaster has gathered that the officials concerned had issued the fitness certificate for the passenger carrier without carrying out a survey.

Though the vessel had capacity to carry only 67 people, it had seats for 150.

The sand-laden cargo that rammied MV Shourav-1 causing it to sink on impact had managed to obtain its certificate despite being 2.3 metres longer than permitted.

The committee also concludes that masters of both the crafts were unskilled.

Officials from BIWTA and DOS say they have nothing to do if any vessels violate river traffic rules.

They say BIWTA is tasked with maintaining timetables for launches and checking documents when a launch docks. Besides, it also looks after navigability of rivers and safe passage for vessels.

On the other hand, DOS oversees construction of vessels, fitness, registration documents and training for crew, they add.

"Since most of the cargo vessels don't touch BIWTA terminals, it's not possible to take any action against those," BIWTA Chairman Abdul Mannan Howlader told The Daily Star.

With the latest loss of lives, around 4,200 people were killed in waterway disasters in the last decade alone.

Such disasters occur frequently

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Fresh Indian restriction on non-Basmati rice

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Indian government has placed new restrictions on the export of rice, allowing shipments of non-basmati varieties of the grain which cost more than 650 dollars per tonne.

Earlier, non-basmati rice costing minimum 500 dollars a tonne could be exported.

The lowest export price for superior quality basmati variety has been fixed at 900 dollars, an all-time high, according to a notification of India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade under the commerce ministry.

Furthermore, rice can now only be shipped through four ports.

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A doctor is seen at her chamber at Suhrawardy Hospital in the capital yesterday afternoon during an outage at the hospital for about 10 hours.

10hr outage at 4 city hospitals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four major hospitals in the city experienced severe power outage for around 10 hours yesterday due to technical glitch, causing an ordeal to patients.

Dhaka Shishu Hospital, Shaheed Suhrawardy Hospital, the National Institute of Traumatic Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation (NITOR) and the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), all in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, faced the power outage.

A top official from Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa) said the power went off around 7:00am due to a fault in an 11KV feeder line.

Engineers of DESA rushed to the spot and found that a cable had

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