

TRUTH COMMISSION Offenders to get pardon at cost of polls ambition

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and
SHAMIM ASHRAF

The government is about to finalise a new law for launching the Truth and Accountability Commission to prevent corrupt persons from participating in any election and holding public offices and posts in financial organisations for five years without trial.

The constitution and the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) already have provisions to imprison and bar the corrupt from election for the period of conviction and appeal.

But the power of the Truth Commission in this regard will be sweeping as the bar comes as a

consequence of the punishment of depositing ill-gotten wealth to the state exchequer following voluntary disclosure of their offences.

The much-talked-about Truth Commission will be constituted for six months under the Voluntary Disclosure Ordinance 2008, which is now in the making.

Law Adviser AF Hassan Arif told journalists on March 20 that the government will form the commission in a month.

The idea of Truth Commission emerged last year as an alternative to dealing with graft cases and graft suspects to give the offenders opportunity to admit their culpability and be penalised monetarily instantly instead of prolonged legal

process and conviction by courts.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and other agencies concerned are now scrutinising the draft of the ordinance. They will give their opinions on it and the ordinance will be sent to the law ministry for vetting after the cabinet approves it in principle before giving the final nod.

Any person who makes such voluntary disclosure before the Truth Commission shall be disqualified for a period not exceeding five years from holding any public or elected office including parliament, zila parishad, upazila parishad, union parishad, municipality, city corporation, or any trade organisation and profes-

sional body.

They will also be barred from being appointed as chairman, member or director of any statutory corporation or authority created by law or any office under the constitution.

The Truth Commission will notify the Election Commission about any such order, which will be "conclusive proof of disqualification" of a person.

However, this provision will not apply for a person "who applies to the commission for making a voluntary disclosure seeking leniency" and for those who have already deposited any sum in Bangladesh Bank upon admitting

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Govt to take up dev projects in CHT: CA

UNB, Bandarban

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed has said various projects will be taken up for the development of underprivileged tribal people of the CHT region with special emphasis on education.

"The present government is also giving importance to various income-generating projects for the people of the region," the CA said at a cultural programme performed by Murang tribe at Kapurpara here yesterday morning.

Earlier, the head of the caretaker government visited the members of Murang tribe at Kapurpara, 50-km from Bandarban town.

Murang people welcomed the CA by playing their special musical instrument and wearing traditional dress. He donated Tk1 lakh to solve the crisis of pure water in the area.

The chief adviser arrived here Thursday and spent the night in army-operated Nilgiri resort. Army Chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed and top military and civil officials accompanied the CA.

Tax holiday to 999 units makes positive impact

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Tax holiday facilities to 999 industries in last two fiscal years have brought positive impact as production values were 30 times and export value 17 times more than the revenue losses due to the facilities, reveals a study by NBR.

Introduced as incentives for business investment, the system of tax holiday, which facilitates reduction or elimination of taxes, will end in June. But National Board of Revenue (NBR) last week recommended that the government continue the facilities considering its positive outcomes.

According to the NBR study, total revenue loss of the government was Tk 1,205 crore in the FY 2005-06 and FY 2006-07 due to tax holiday.

Field level survey of the study

reveals that total value of the total products in the industries, which have been enjoying tax holiday facilities, is Tk 36,382 crore in the two-year period. Total export of the industries during the corresponding period was Tk 20,354 crore.

Both World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have prescribed the government for an end to tax holiday facilities to increase revenue earnings.

In a report, the IMF told the government tax holiday facilities reduce the equity and legitimacy of the tax system and contribute to the public's cynical attitude toward the tax system by eroding the civic responsibility to pay taxes.

The NBR however referred to the similar tax holiday systems in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia where the system has

been contributing to industrial growth.

The NBR report has been submitted to the finance ministry with four alternatives from which the government may choose one for the next phase of tax holiday facilities.

The NBR has proposed to continue tax holiday facilities for the industrial units in Dhaka and Chittagong (except CHT) for four years and in other four divisions (Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal) and CHT districts for six years.

The period would be counted from the beginning of production of a respective industrial unit.

The other option for tax holiday facilities of the NBR says industrial units in Dhaka and Chittagong (except CHT) will enjoy the facilities for five years. In such cases, the

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Members and officials of the Asia News Network pose for photograph during a river cruise yesterday. They joined a series of discussions on various issues on board 'cruise vessel Sarina'.

PHOTO: STAR

'Time to expand ties beyond South Asia, Asean states'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday called for greater cooperation among Asian nations to foster development and peace, and establish a culture of pluralism.

"We must evolve a methodology for cooperation and how we can move forward together...Japan, China and India will lead and others will follow," he said, speaking at a post-dinner speech at Spectra Convention Centre in the city.

The Daily Star hosted the dinner in honour of the visiting members of Asia News Network (ANN). Editors or their representatives from different newspapers from across Asia attended the programme.

"We should now concentrate on cooperation beyond South Asia and ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries," the adviser told the gathering also

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Bangladesh must learn to live thru' climate change

Experts tell roundtable organised for
visiting ANN editors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Climate change is an issue of justice and security that poses a serious challenge to the country already faced with numerous problems, experts told a discussion yesterday.

It warrants a change in lifestyle and adaptation to different geographic, economic and social changes, they observed.

Titled "Challenges of Global Warming", the discussion was organised by The Daily Star.

It was part of a series of discussions arranged for the visiting editors of Asian News Network (ANN), an alliance of Asian newspapers. Mahfuz Anam, current ANN chair and editor of The Daily Star, was the moderator at the daylong event on board a cruise ship on Buriganga.

Dr QK Ahmed, executive director of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, and Dr A Atiq Rahman, executive director of Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, were the key speakers on the effects of global warming. The two are lead authors in the Nobel Prize winning International Panel on Climate Change.

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Dr Ahmed in his discourse said Bangladesh has multiple stresses on its economy and governance that would be even worse off due to devastating effects of climate change.

He said despite a growing awareness about effects of global warming, there is little connection between policy making and the realities on the ground.

Dr Rahman said climate change

is an issue of justice since individuals who are born in the countries hit hardest by it are inherently worse off while those born in the developed countries enjoy a far better lifestyle at the expense of greater carbon emissions.

He observed that regardless of global actions, Bangladesh must adapt to climate change, a term that denotes long-term alteration in global weather patterns, especially increases in temperature for emissions of certain atmospheric gases.

"We have to have changes in the way we live and people are already starting to do it," he added.

He said there is a 'carbon colonialism' in the global management of climate change as rich countries can buy into greater emissions. Atiq proposed 'swapping carbon for people' whereby the countries

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Formation of body to review women policy protested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Samajik Protirodh Committee, a body comprising different women, human rights and development organisations, yesterday protested formation of a high-powered committee to review the National Women Policy 2008.

In a statement, the committee leaders questioned the necessity of forming such a body to review the National Women Policy 2008 only a month after the head of the caretaker government announced the policy approved by the advisory council.

They said four advisers to the caretaker government went to an institution on Thursday and formed the committee.

They also said the committee was formed with those people whose role in the last 50 years was

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JCD CLASH Injured Kajol dies at hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jagannath University student Kajal Debnath, who received severe injuries during a clash between two groups of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on the university campus on March 22, died at Rashmono Hospital in the city yesterday.

Kajol, a third year student of Bangla department, had been on life support in the intensive care unit of the hospital since March 23. Relatives said doctors of the hospital withdrew the life support yesterday morning and declared him dead.

Police sent the body to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

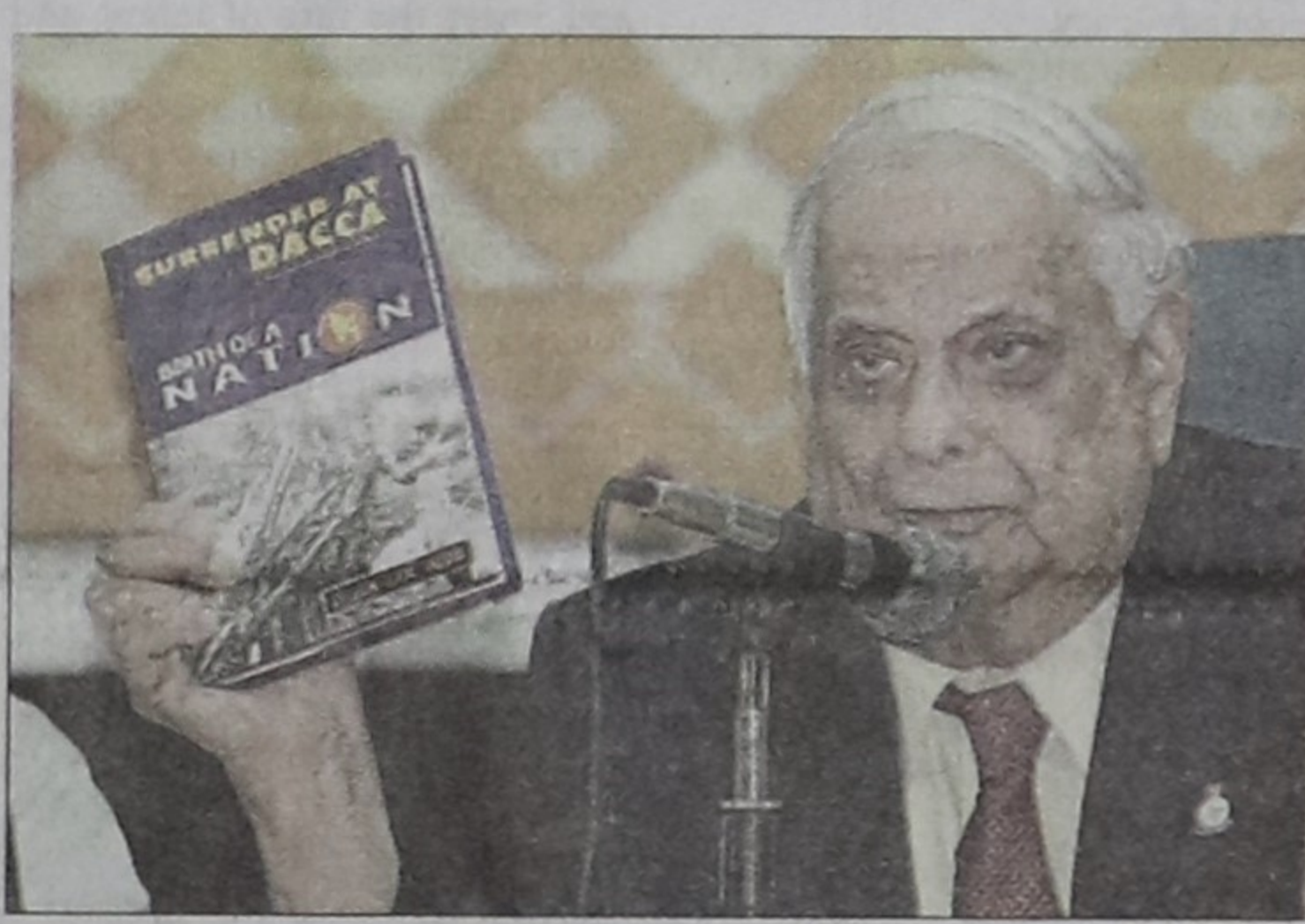
Kajol's uncle Sanjay Debnath filed a case with Kotwali Police Station on March 23 accusing 20 leaders and activists of JCD Jagannath University unit.

Two JCD factions—one led by Jagannath University unit President Pervaz Reza and the

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FFs fought valiantly to free Bangladesh in '71 war

Ex-Indian general JFR Jacob tells newsmen



JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and
SHAMIM ASHRAF

Former chief of the Indian army's eastern command Lt Gen (retd) JFR Jacob yesterday said it was the freedom fighters' gallantry that liberated Bangladesh from Pakistan occupation.

He said the full credit goes to them. They have done the real job and their acts of valour won the nation independence.

The man who is credited with making Gen Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi, the then commander of Pakistan army's eastern command, surrender in public on December 16, 1971, said the freedom fighters including the soldiers of the East Bengal Regiment had emerged as "terror for the Pakistani troops".

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Criminals steal 3,500 metal clips from rails in city

Communication stops for 5 hours,
officials suspect sabotage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Trains to and from Dhaka early yesterday could have run into fatal accidents as criminals stole around 3,510 metal clips that tie rails to the sleepers between Banani and Cantonment railway stations in the city.

Bangladesh Railway officials termed the incident mysterious and suspected that it was an act of sabotage which could have resulted in several fatal train wrecks.

Seventeen trains had crossed the stretch before the detection of the theft, they said.

Rail communication between the entire country and Dhaka was suspended for five hours from 8:00am yesterday. The authorities replaced the missing clips on the two-kilometre stretch of tracks after a three-hour effort and with

the help of 50 workers from a private company.

Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Railway Mohammad Abul Kashem told The Daily Star, "The clips on around two-kilometre stretch of rail lines between Banani and Cantonment stations were stolen by an organised gang sometime between midnight and 8:00am today [Friday]."

Terming it mysterious he said, "Sleepers clips are often stolen in areas where workshops and industries are located. In similar incidents earlier, thieves stole a few clips so that accidents do not occur immediately. But this time, no such consideration was given, which forces us to think that it may be an act of sabotage."

The clips were removed from six rails of both multi-gauge lines between Banani Railway Station and Staff Road.

Bangladesh Railway sources claim it would have taken 10 people over five hours to remove the iron clips with proper equipment.

"The 3,510 stolen clips weigh around four tonnes and each clip could fetch Tk 110 to Tk 120," the chief engineer said, adding, "It took the culprits at least three hours to remove the clips."

"The cost of clips is not important...the theft could have resulted in accidents killing and injuring hundreds of people," he said.

He said, "It is not possible to guard the entire railway lines 24 hours a day. We have Keyman who visit lines every 12 hours. Noticing the theft, he informed the matter to the authorities which suspended rail communication from 8:00am."

Sub-inspector (SI) Rezaul Karim of Kamalapur Railway Police Station said the Egarosindhur

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Rice supply crisis grips Asia

Prices may go up by 40pc more

AP, BBC Online, FT, Manila

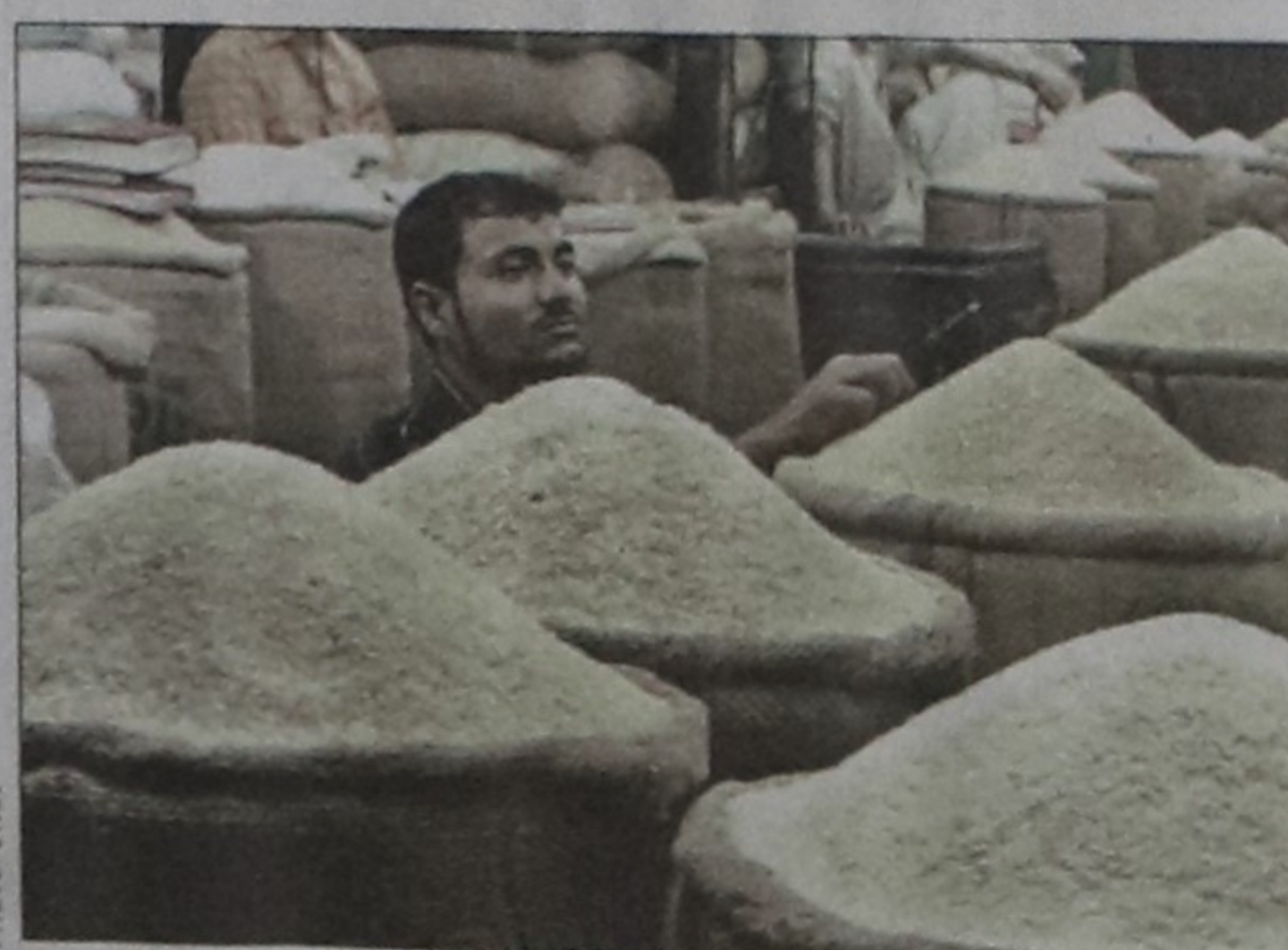
Philippine activists warn about possible riots. Aid agencies across Asia worry how they will feed the hungry. Governments dig deeper every day to fund subsidies.

Rice prices jumped 30 per cent to a record high yesterday across Asia, where the grain is a staple food for more than 2.5bn people.

The sharp rise in the price of rice is hitting consumer pocketbooks and raising fears of public turmoil in the many parts of the subcontinent.

Part of a surge in global food costs, rice prices on world markets have jumped 50 percent in the past two months and at least doubled since 2004. Experts blame rising fuel and fertiliser expenses as well as crops curtailed by disease, pests

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A rice trader at Karwan Bazar waits for customers. Rice price jumped to a 30 percent record high yesterday across Asia and it could get even pricier in the sub-continent in the next few weeks.

Retailers fix prices of essentials at will

No impact of fall in wholesale rates

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and
WASIM BIN HABIB

Retailers at different kitchen markets in the capital are charging prices of some essentials at will although the prices fell in the wholesale markets in the last two weeks.

Market sources said people are not getting the benefit of the reduced wholesale prices of pulses, flour, edible oil and sugar as the market monitoring system by the joint forces and the city corporation remained inactive for the last few weeks.

A high official of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) said since the prices of some commodities have dropped in the wholesale markets, it must

have some impact on the retail market soon.

He, however, did not make any comment on market monitoring.

Most consumers meanwhile said they do not know that the prices of some commodities fell in the wholesale markets. They alleged that the retailers are taking advantage of the lack of publicity of the reduced prices.

At different wholesale and retail markets in the city, it was found that a huge difference is there between the wholesale and retail prices of pulses, flour, edible oil and sugar.

In the meantime, prices of chicken and egg continued to rise in both wholesale and retail mar-

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Railwaymen install new sleeper clips, left, on the two-kilometre stretch of rail tracks between Banani and Cantonment stations in the city. Right, a partial view of the rail tracks from where 3,500 clips were stolen.

PHOTO: STAR