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Cabinet okays Upazila Parishad Ordinance

UNB, Dhaka

The Council of Advisers yesterday approved in principle the Upazila Parishad Ordinance 2008, creating two posts of vice-chairman in the local government body, one reserved for women.

The ordinance provides that the chairman and two vice chairmen of the upazila parishad will be directly elected by voters. Union parishad chairmen, municipal chairmen and elected women members to the reserved seats of wards under the upazila concerned will be members of the upazila parishad.

Chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, the meeting of the Council of Advisers sent the draft of the ordinance in the light of some suggestions for vetting by the law ministry and asked for placing it again before the council "as soon as possible".

Under the new ordinance, dispute regarding election cannot be filed with any other court except for election tribunal. The election tribunal and election appellate

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Towns in China quake zone razed to ground

Death toll rises to 15,000, tens of thousands more feared buried or missing

AFP, Beijing

Some towns near the epicentre of China's huge earthquake have been 'razed to the ground' with no houses left standing, a People's Armed Police official was quoted by state media saying yesterday.

"The losses have been severe. Some towns basically have no houses left. They have all been razed to the ground," Wang Yi, head of an armed police unit sent into the disaster zone, was quoted as saying by Sichuan Online news site.

Wang said "some" of the eight towns in Wenchuan county at the epicentre of the 7.9-magnitude earthquake had suffered the heavy damage.

He did not specify exactly how many towns had been flattened by

the quake that struck on Monday but was quoted as saying they "include" the towns Yingxiu, Xuankou, and Wolong.

AP from Hanwang reports: Military helicopters dropped food and medicine to Chinese earthquake survivors who remained cut off yesterday in remote mountain villages behind roads clogged by landslides. The official death toll rose to nearly 15,000, and tens of thousands more were feared buried or missing.

As help began to arrive in some of the hardest-to-reach areas, some victims trapped for more than two days under collapsed buildings were still being pulled out alive. But the enormous scale of the devastation meant that resources were stretched thin, and makeshift aid

stations and refugee centers were springing up over the disaster area the size of Maryland.

The official Xinhua News Agency quoted government officials as saying rescuers who hiked yesterday into the city of Yingxiu in Wenchuan county the epicenter of Monday's magnitude 7.9 quake found it "much worse than expected."

The official death toll rose to 14,866, Xinhua said, but it was not immediately clear if that number included the 7,700 reported dead in Yingxiu. In Sichuan province alone, another 25,788 people were buried and 14,051 missing, provincial vice governor Li Chengyun said, according to Xinhua.

The toll was expected to rise

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Khaleda Zia's assignment officer Firoz sued again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) on Tuesday night filed two more corruption cases against former premier Khaleda Zia's assignment officer Dr Firoz Mahmud Iqbal and two government officials.

ACC Assistant Director Abdul Based filed the cases with Shibganj Police Station in Bogra.

The first case was filed against Firoz and Sardar Anisur Rahman Rana, former acting executive engineer of Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Bogra on charges of misappropriating over Tk 14,750,000 from government funds.

It was mentioned in the case statement that Firoz in connivance with Rana misappropriated the money from the LGED fund in the name of carrying out development works at Aharhat in Shibganj upazila.

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Drug addicts and other delinquents crowd Osmani Udyan in the capital all day long, making it difficult for other city residents to use the park for respite in the concrete jungle.

Envoy to UAE sued for misuse of power

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday sued Bangladeshi ambassador in Abu Dhabi ATM Nazimullah Chowdhury on charges of causing loss to the state exchequer through misuse of power and deception.

ACC Deputy Director Abdullah Al Zahid filed the case with Shabbagh Police Station under sections 409 of the Penal Code and 5 (2) of the Corruption Prevention Act, 1947.

The complainant in the first information report (FIR) brought three allegations against the ambassador.

He accused Nazimullah of irregularities in renting the ambassador's house, corruption in purchasing furniture for the abode and appointing gardeners at his residence.

The complainant said the irregularities and corruption by Nazimullah caused a loss of Tk 21 lakh to the state exchequer adding

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Iftexhar slates Jaipur bombing

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftexhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday strongly condemned the bomb explosions in India's Jaipur.

"It was a mindless and shameful act that deserves condemnation in the strongest terms," he said.

The adviser said, "Our hearts go out to the families of the victims and sympathies to the Indian authorities."

He said, "These are terrorists who have done this sordid and heinous deeds, and terrorists have no boundaries."

When his attention was drawn to news items in the Indian media that Bangladesh-based Harkatul Jihad (HuJ) may be involved in the grisly attacks, the adviser said, "The media should not jump to conclusions before thorough investigations are conducted."

Youth shot dead in city by robbers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Robbers yesterday shot dead a youth in the city's Jigatola.

The deceased was identified as Arif Hossain Khokon, 27, a salesman of Azad Pharmacy at Jigatola.

Locals said a gang of six to seven robbers stormed the house of Ruhul Amin, the owner of Azad Pharmacy, at Notun Rasta at Jigatola at about 3:30pm and tied

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Prayer Timing		
May 15		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-10	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-36	6-40
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation



Pedestrians prefer to use dangerous crossings riddled with road works despite having access to a foot over-bridge nearby. The picture was taken from opposite Shaheen School near Jahangir Gate of Dhaka Cantonment.

Research in universities slips into sorry state

Lack of qualified teachers, funds blamed

SURANJITH DEABNATH

Although universities are meant to bring forth new ideas and knowledge through comprehensive research, the picture in Bangladesh is quite opposite due to a lack of well-qualified teachers and necessary funds.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is supposed to award 12 scholars for their outstanding research every year. But as quality research is not being conducted at the public and private universities, UGC could find only 20 teachers for the honour in four years since 2002, according to a publication of UGC-Award (2002-2005).

The expenditure on research

has increased by 24 to 108 percent in the last few years, while the budget in this regard has yet to be increased, says UGC annual report-2006.

Besides, position of Bangladeshi universities is very poor in the regional and global ranking due to poor research. Only five Bangladeshi universities -- two public and three private -- have kept their position on the list of 100 to universities in the Indian sub-continent.

The Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) is ranked 24th, Dhaka University 56th, East West University 64th, Ahsanullah University of Science & Technology

69th and North South University is 92nd on the list.

The UGC, an apex body of higher education, observes the number of quality research, especially in fundamental or innovative field, has decreased tremendously at university level.

On the other hand, young teachers are found less enthusiastic about such activities.

Academics blame it on recruitment of a huge number of "non-meritorious" or "unskilled" teachers on political grounds in the last several years. Most of these "non-qualified" teachers allegedly don't have the quality to conduct research.

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LAUNCH CAPSIZE Three more bodies found, toll now 45

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

The death toll from Monday's launch capsize in Ghorautra river at Nikli upazila rose to 45 yesterday with the recovery of three more bodies by the locals.

Though rescue operation was abandoned on Tuesday evening without salvaging the sunken vessel, the distraught relatives of the missing passengers kept searching along the riverside till yesterday evening.

The dead were identified as Russel, 20, of Mitamoin, Tapan Kumar Saha, 45, of Bajitpur and Sajit Kumar Saha, 22, of Bajitpur.

The locals found the decomposed bodies floating near Nikli dam about 3 kilometres from the

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LAUNCH DISASTERS Shipping cops proposed to watch river routes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Department of Shipping has proposed forming shipping police to intensify patrol on river routes for strengthening enforcement of rules and checking launch disasters.

The department, which failed to check such disasters occurring every year despite various steps over the years, also requested the government to form the police wing with cops from the police department.

"We have requested the government to immediately appoint 50 police personnel for only monitoring if the vessels are following the rules," said Shipping Department

Director General Captain AKM Shafigullah.

He said the government is sincerely considering the proposal.

According to sources in the shipping department and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, most of around 8,000 motor vessels operating at present lack the basic safety standards, which is the main reason behind high casualty in vessel capsize.

"These vessels are operating all over the country but we are so badly equipped with manpower and logistics that we can only monitor them at major terminals like Sadarghat and Chittagong," said Shafigullah.

Vessels, especially passenger launches carrying extra passengers and goods, touch numerous points en route, but the department has only four inspectors to look after all the vessels.

The shipping department DG suggested updating local weather forecast during this time of year when storms are frequent. "We also proposed preventing launches from plying in the afternoon when nor'westers usually strike but the owners did not agree," he said.

Sources said most vessel masters do not have the minimum level of qualification.

"Most of the masters are illiterate and lack proper training on how

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NIKO CASE Jail authorities asked to produce Hasina at court on May 21

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday directed the jail authorities to produce detained former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and two other detainees before it on May 21 in connection with the Niko graft case.

The court also directed the authorities concerned to publish an advertisement in two national Bangla dailies, summoning six other absconding accused to appear before it on the same date.

The other two detainees accused in the Niko case are former state minister for energy Prof Rafiqul Islam and former energy secretary Dr Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury.

On May 7, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) pressed charges against Hasina and eight others for awarding a gas

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BORO PROCUREMENT Move on against people out to hoard rice

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Food ministry will send a letter to the Bangladesh Bank (BB) today urging it to ask private commercial banks not to provide loan facilities to individuals who might use it for stockpiling rice.

The initiative is aimed at making the current boro procurement drive of the government successful and stabilising the price of rice, said food ministry sources adding that the BB earlier instructed all commercial banks to ensure that their rice miller clients repay loans within three months of disbursement of the loans.

Meanwhile, the boro procurement drive that was launched on April 17 has yet to gain momentum.

As per the data provided by sources at the food ministry, the government, till May 11, procured only 17,584 tonnes of boro -- paddy 3,609 tonnes and rice 13,949 tonnes.

The government set the boro procurement target at 15 lakh tonnes by August this year. Out of the procurement, 12 lakh tonnes would be rice and 3 lakh tonnes paddy, said the ministry sources.

The food ministry officials are hopeful that the government will be successful in reaching the target, hoping to procure the major portion of the target in June and July.

The government during the last boro season procured 7.06 lakh tonnes of rice.

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Govt urged to reserve 40pc seats for women in local govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women leaders yesterday urged the caretaker government to honour its earlier pledge of reserving 40 per cent of seats for women at all tiers of the local government system so that female representatives can be elected through direct elections.

At a press conference held at the LGED auditorium in the city, they also threatened to go for a tougher movement if 40 percent seats for women are not declared before approval of the Local Government Ordinance 2008.

Meanwhile, women leaders submitted a memorandum to President Iajuddin Ahmed on May 11 asking him to step in to solve the issue to effectively empower women at all levels of the local government system.

The council of advisers on March 23 approved in principle two ordinances regarding formation and function of city

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