

Cabinet decides

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adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed for a year, including security, health care and accommodation.

"We have reviewed the overall law and order situation of the country and asked law enforcement agencies to remain vigilant," Commerce Minister Gol (ret'd) Faruk Khan told The Daily Star emerging from the two-hour long meeting.

Chaired by Sheikh Hasina, the maiden cabinet meeting also decided to reinstate the system of fertiliser distribution of the previous Awami League regime between 1996 and 2001. During that period fertilisers used to be sold on open markets through dealers, which was later stopped by the last BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

"We want to ensure uninterrupted supply of fertiliser to farmers according to our election pledges," said the commerce minister.

The cabinet also decided to continue the drive against terrorism and other criminal activities. Referring to different violent activities in different parts of the country in recent times, the meeting directed law enforcers to deal with those with an iron hand.

The meeting directed the law enforcers to ensure the security of peoples' lives and property, and to ensure peaceful situation and law and order in educational institutions across the country at any cost. It directed different intelligence agencies to be more active in that regard.

The decision to reduce the price of diesel came due to frequent power outages all across the country. Sources in the cabinet said the meeting observed that there is no alternative to reducing the price of diesel if agricultural production is to be increased for having a food surplus.

Government sources hinted that a reduced price of diesel might come into effect in a day or two.

Prior to the meeting, Hasina had another meeting with only her ministers in the PMO, where she instructed her colleagues to understand properly the responsibilities of the

ministries concerned and to remain vigilant, so no two-way incident may take place. The prime minister also directed them to keep an AL electoral manifesto with themselves all the time, so they can be reminded what their priorities are.

As she directed the commerce minister to take immediate measures to reduce prices of essentials, the minister said traders already started reducing the prices giving up their trend of unscrupulous profiteering.

The prime minister along with her cabinet will visit the grave of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Tungipara (Gopalganj) at 10:00am tomorrow and pay tribute to the father of the nation. They will return to the capital the same day.

Meanwhile, AL President's Personal Chief Security Officer Maj Gen (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique and Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad were appointed as the security adviser and press secretary to the prime minister respectively.

Joint Secretary also Director General of the Directorate of Primary Education Nazrul Islam Khan was appointed as the private secretary to the prime minister, sources in the PMO said.

Ashrafal

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The minister also said they would work to root out corruption and bring the corrupt people to book.

Ashraf said their major three challenges are to bring down the prices of essentials, create jobs and develop the infrastructure in rural areas.

Commenting on trial of war criminals, he said the war criminals must be tried as mentioned in the party's election manifesto.

He also said the countries that have already tried war criminals are eager to help the Bangladesh government in this regard.

The foreign diplomats, who met the party president, showed their interest in giving assistance for holding trial of war criminals, Ashraf added.

Sahara

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Replying to a query, Sahara warned the law enforcing agencies to remain careful so that nobody falls victim to their intentional harassment. She also warned of stern actions against those involved in post-election violence.

Asked if the new government would review the cases of 72,000 jailed people who were allegedly harassed for political differences, Sahara said, she would think over it and take the matter to the cabinet for a decision.

"You've seen me on the streets," she said, adding she would be equally "courageous" as a minister.

Sahara sought blessings and all out cooperation from the countrymen to establish peace and maintain law and order in the country. "I will do everything possible to uphold the trust and honour reposed in me by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina."

About post-polls clashes and alleged atrocities, the new home minister said, "The law enforcement agencies will look into that". She urged the people to refrain from any kind of violence.

Ashura

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They were deprived of food and water, and many of them were put to death. Eventually, Imam Hossain was brutally slaughtered.

According to Islamic history, a disagreement among Muslims on the question of succession after the demise of Hazrat Ali, the fourth caliph, resulted in the Karbala tragedy.

The day is a public holiday. Various organisations have drawn up programmes to observe day. Tazia procession by mourners is a main feature of the occasion.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages on the occasion of Ashura.

In his message, the president said the main spirit of the day is to sacrifice life for 'truth and justice'.

"The holy Ashura commemorating the incident of Karbala inspires us to raise our voice against injustice and repression," he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in her message, said the holy Ashura teaches all not to bow to repression and injustice. "It inspires us to stand against all disturbances and malice at every stage of national life," she said.

The prime minister urged the countrymen to go by the lessons and inspirations that come from Ashura.

Muhith

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at around 12noon and discussed his plans with journalists.

He said there are price commissions in many countries including our neighbouring one and there is no hindrance to forming one of our own either.

The task of the commission is to monitor market prices and intervene, if necessary, to bring down prices.

"There are two types of syndicates -- one is for running businesses and another is illegal syndicate, which is formed to raise prices abnormally. We'll try to enter new people in the syndicate so that the illegal syndicate cannot play with prices," the minister said.

He added the illegal syndicates, built up with political patronisation, play an evil role to hike commodity prices. "Our government won't give any political patronisation to any such syndicates. We'll break up such evil syndicates."

He went on to say, "We'll increase production and build up good stock to lower prices."

The new finance minister also dwelt on some other plans. "The budgetary allocation will be divided district-wise," he said. He also plans to merge the revenue budget and development budget but added that it would take time.

A striking force would be formed to take quick decisions on different matters so that the global crisis does not have a negative impact here, the minister said.

He said, "I have taken over the charge of the finance ministry after 26 years. The size of the budget was only Tk 4,600 crore then. Now the budget size is Tk 99,000 crore. Many changes have taken place in the meantime. So I will have to have a good grasp of the changes which may take a few days."

1972 constitution

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the country will be rooted out," he said.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star at his Indra Road residence Tuesday night immediately after taking oath as a minister, Barrister Shafiqe Ahmed said his ministry will take all necessary legal steps to try the war criminals who committed genocide, rapes and torture against the people of the country during the liberation war in 1971.

The war criminals should be tried in the special tribunal under the International Crimes Tribunal Act 1973, he said.

"My first task will be to scrutinize the ordinances promulgated by the immediate past caretaker government to place those before the parliament to pass those into laws. The caretaker government has promulgated more than 100 ordinances and if those are not passed in the parliament within 30 days after the start of its session, those will be lapsed," he said.

Replying to a question Barrister Shafiqe said his ministry will very soon establish an independent secretariat for the judiciary in order to ensure the independence of the judiciary and to effectively execute the separation of the judiciary from the executive.

He said the judges should be appointed to the Supreme Court and High Court as per the rules of the 1972 Constitution so that honest, competent and qualified

Poll expense

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The candidates will have to submit the reports to the ROs, who will forward the copies to EC.

Many candidates who contested in the previous parliamentary elections did not submit such reports and those who obeyed the laws did not properly maintain their expenditure records.

But EC had never initiated steps against violation of the electoral laws. This time, EC has decided to take action against the violators and will also check authenticity of the submitted expenditure reports, official sources said.

Besides, political parties contesting in the polls might be fined for failure to submit the expenditure records within the deadline.

Don't harass Hasina

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An HC bench comprised of Justice Sheikh Rezwana Ali and Justice Md Rais Uddin extended the orders till disposal of its (HC) earlier rules that had asked the ACC and the government to explain why the proceedings of the cases should not be quashed.

The HC bench also adjourned for six weeks the hearing of the rules. Meanwhile yesterday, special court for Dhaka division adjourned the proceedings of Mig-29 war plane purchase corruption case against Sheikh Hasina and five others until July 10.

Judge of the special divisional court Golam Mortuza Majumder passed the order following a time petition filed by Hasina and two other accused seeking adjournment of the hearing, as the HC earlier stayed the proceedings of this case.

Assistant Attorney General (AAG) Khandaiker Diluruzzaman yesterday submitted a prayer on behalf of the Attorney General (AG) to the HC bench seeking two months' time for hearing the rules, as the HC orders directing not to harass or arrest Sheikh Hasina in the cases against her expired yesterday.

Her counsels Barrister Rafique-ul-Huq, Advocate AFM Mesbauddin and Barrister Sheikh Fazole Noor Taposh also prayed to the court to extend its orders. The HC on November 23

BNP ready

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The BNP secretary general was addressing at a rally at city's Muktagang.

Jatiyatabadi Svecchhasebak Dal organised the rally on the first working day of AL-led new government protesting assassination of Nazrul Islam, a Svecchhasebak Dal leader who was killed by unidentified miscreants on Monday.

Delwar said people hoped that the new government would create a new history in the country but instead it resorted to murder and criminal activities across the country.

BNP leaders Rizvi Ahmed, Shamsuzzaman Dudu, Salahuddin Ahmed, Chhatra Dal leaders Azizul Bari Helal, Shafiq Bari Babu, among others, addressed the rally.

judges are appointed there as per recommendations of the Chief Justice.

"Two vacant posts of judges of the Appellate Division will be filled up soon, as per the recommendation of the Supreme Judicial Commission. The commission on October 16 last year recommended names of four senior most judges of the High Court division for appointment of two of them to the Appellate Division," he said.

He also said at least 20 new competent and honest judges should be appointed to the High Court to dispense fair and speedy justice.

Bangladesh

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published on January 5 by Washington-based think-tank 'The Heritage Foundation'.

The article referred to US based International Republican Institute's (IRI) preliminary assessment of Bangladesh election, in which IRI stated that the election is a major step forward in demonstrating the country's commitment to strengthening democracy and yielded a result that accurately reflects the will of Bangladeshi voters.

The article also noted the challenges which the newly elected government may face and suggested that US should encourage the new government to build bridges to the opposition and take a strong stand against Islamic extremists who have sought to make political inroads through violent intimidation and exploitation of weak institutions, corruption and lack of good governance.

It also suggested that US government should encourage the BNP to honour the election results and play an appropriate role in parliament in order to effectively address the nation's pressing challenges.

The article showed that the electoral outcome in Bangladesh has aroused great enthusiasm in Washington as in many capitals around the world.

It is also an indication of expectation from the new government in Bangladesh.

Lisa Curtis, an expert on South Asia, is the co-author of the article, who has a large number of audiences in the policy making circle in Washington DC.

Dipu Moni

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effective steps to fight (in consultation with our neighbouring countries as we want peace and stability in the entire region," she said.

When asked about the trial of war criminals, Dipu Moni, who has academic background in both medical science and law, said the war criminals could be tried under the laws of the land as well as the international laws, adding that they would make a decision after considering all the aspects.

Commenting on delimitation of maritime boundary with India and Myanmar within the set timeline, she said the time is short but the matter will be resolved through negotiations with the neighbouring countries.

Asked whether the present government would pursue the previous BNP-Jamaat alliance government's 'Look East' policy, the new foreign minister said it would not be correct to focus on a particular region in this globalised world.

"In one region, there may be potential for exporting Bangladeshi manpower while in another there may be a need for improving trade relations," she said.

In a reaction to her appointment as the country's first woman foreign minister, Dipu Moni said the prime minister has given the responsibilities of the home and the foreign affairs ministries to two women as part of the implementation of the party's election manifesto -- Charter for Change.

"She (Hasina) has given the responsibilities after considering all the aspects," Dipu Moni said, adding that she would be able to perform her duty with the help of all including the media.

State Minister for foreign affairs Dr Hasan Mahmud and Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain, among others, were present.

Muggers shoot

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in the leg and snatched away the bag, which contained money at around 12:30 pm.

Foyez, along with his son Faisal Mahmud Emon was returning home on a rickshaw after withdrawing money from National Bank, Mirpur branch at section 2.

"Sensing the resistance of the locals, the criminals also charged a cocktail and sped away," Foyez added.

When contacted, Mirpur police said that they heard about the incident but no case was filed and none has been arrested yet.

In a separate incident, a gang of three muggers fired several shots at two shopkeepers while they were closing the shop at Rajardevuri at about 11:45pm, police said.

Locals rushed injured Nihar Ranjan, 45, and his brother Biswajit, 25 to the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

Biswajit sustained bullet injury to the head and his brother to the left arm, police added.

Matia

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essentials.

"If any government sincerely wants to check the price hike of essentials, it is possible. We had proved it earlier and will prove it again," Matiasaid.

The minister said she would visit the kitchen markets to monitor the prices of essentials.

Matia said during the tenure of AL government between 1996 and 2001, Hasina used to send her people to the markets to have the real picture, which helped her control the prices of essentials.

Replying to a query about taking actions against 'the syndicates', she said the prime minister will not hesitate to take any step against them.

Stressing the need for buffer stock, she said the government's another priority is to increase the country's food production.

They will also focus on agro-based industries to increase production, which will also help create new jobs.

"We want to make Bangladesh not only self-sufficient in food but also a country with food surplus," she said.

Tiger rebels

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"scores" were killed during heavy fighting around the Muhamalah defence line in the Jaffna peninsula on Tuesday.

"Security forces... are now gaining rapid tactical advantage leaving LTTE near to extinction," the ministry said, adding that intense ground battles had left "well-fortified LTTE defences crumbling and its leadership stunned."

The LTTE did not comment on the military statements, but pro-rebel website Tamilnet.com said the guerrillas would fight back.

Rebel political chief B Nadesan dismissed the fall of Kilinochchi as "an insignificant setback" in an interview published on the website.

"With the resolute backing of our people and the moral support base of the global Tamil community, we are determined to overcome the current challenges," he said.

The government was "waging a genocidal war with cowardly and indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians," he added.

Mumbai killings

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cial agencies" and that Pakistan used terrorism as an "instrument of state policy."

India's Defence Minister A.K. Anthony maintained the pressure Wednesday, expressing concern that there was "no serious attempt" to disband the 30 "terror outfits" that were working across the border.

The head of Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, Lieutenant General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, earlier told Der Spiegel magazine in an interview that it was fighting terrorism, not India.

"We may be crazy in Pakistan, but not completely out of our minds. We know full well that terror is our enemy, not India," he was quoted as saying in the German publication's online edition.

He also rejected claims that ISI-sponsored Pakistani groups were behind the attacks, accusing India of giving them "nothing, no names, no numbers, no connections."

The dossier -- a 13-page summary and 50 pages of

supporting documents -- contains phone numbers and email addresses allegedly linked to LeT commanders.

According to the transcript, one of the two attackers at the Nariman House Jewish cultural centre was told: "Brother, you have to fight. This is a matter of prestige of Islam."

"Fight so that your fight becomes a shining example. Be strong in the name of Allah... Brother, you have to fight for the victory of Islam. Be strong."

A separate call added: "Keep in mind that the hostages are of use only as long as you do not come under fire because of their safety."

"If you are still threatened, then don't saddle yourself with the burden of the hostages, immediately kill them."

The caller went on: "If the hostages are killed, it will spoil relations between India and Israel."

An attacker replied: "So be it, God willing."

Five hostages, including a rabbi and his wife, were later found dead with the two militants.

Israel resumes

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The development came as Israel halted military operations in Gaza for three hours to aid humanitarian efforts.

The lull was the first of what an Israeli spokesman said would be a daily ceasefire to allow Gazans to get medical attention, get supplies... whatever they need."

AFP news agency reported that Gaza residents had rushed out into the streets during the lull to stock up on food and visit relatives in hospital.

Israel's move came as pressure built on it and the Palestinian militant group Hamas to accept a ceasefire deal.

Little official detail has been given about the French-Egyptian proposal, which is backed by the US and UN, but diplomats say it centres around measures to halt weapons smuggling from Egypt into Gaza, coupled with moves to ease the blockade.

In a statement released yesterday, France's President Nicolas Sarkozy said he welcomed what he described as "the acceptance by Israel and the Palestinian Authority" of the truce plan.

The statement did not mention Hamas.

A senior Hamas official told the BBC that there were "positive signs but no agreement yet".

Israel said it "welcomes" the initiative but that talks were continuing on the details of the proposal.

An official told the BBC: "We are still having a dialogue. We have agreement on the principles. The challenge now is to get the details to match the principles."

Israel was not sure how long the diplomatic process would take and would need a working arms embargo on Hamas, the official said.

Israel's military said the three-hour pause in operations to create "humanitarian corridors" for supplies and fuel would happen everyday.

A Hamas spokesman told Al Arabiya television that the group would not launch any missiles at Israeli targets during the lull.

Israel has been criticised by aid agencies who have warned of a mounting humanitarian crisis for the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, who are unable to escape from the conflict because of Israel's

Five milk powder

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health ministry to send samples of powdered milk of all brands available on the market to a European laboratory through World Health Organisation and submit reports to the HC.

So far, milk powder from only five brands--Dano, Red Cow, Diploma, Nido and Anlene--have been tested.

According to the test reports, these brands contain melamine below 0.1 parts per million (ppm), which is not harmful to child health.

The three local laboratories that carried out tests on milk powder of the eight brands are Dhaka University (DU) chemistry department, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI).

DU chemistry department detected melamine in all eight brands, BAEC in seven and BSTI in only one.

The brands that will have to be tested as per HC orders are My Boy Elodrin-1, Sweet Baby-1, Nestle at 110, Kwality, DANO Instant, Diplomiak, Fresh, My Boy Elodrin-2, Nestle Lactogen-2, Baby Care-3, Mother's Smile, Mami Lac-1, Anchor, Framland, Mother's Smile (Prima), DANO vitakids, Lactogen-1, NAN-1, Baby Care-1, Lailac-1, Fabimilk-1, Primavita-1, NIDO-24, NAN-2, Biomil-1, Prolene, Star Ship and Marks, said sources.

Amir-ul-Islam, Rokanuddin Mahmud, Mahmudul Islam and Tania Amir stood for the powder milk companies and Deputy Attorney General Razik-Al-Jalil for the state.

Fertiliser stock

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till May with the current stock," said the chairman of BFA, the federating body of fertiliser importers and dealers.

Mahabub Hossain, an agriculture researcher and also the executive director of BRAC, said the demand for fertiliser would remain high till April.

"There is a trend that farmers cultivate Boro crop after harvesting vegetables and various crops during winter. So, the demand for fertiliser may remain high till April," he said.

Citing fertiliser price fall on the global market, he said such price drop would enable the government to provide less amount of subsidy than before.

At present, local farmers buy a kilogram of urea fertiliser between Tk 12 and Tk 14, increased from Tk 6 in May this year. The price of TSP fertiliser also rose to Tk 75-80 a kg from Tk 34 in May while MoP price reached Tk 45-48 from Tk 30 in the same month.

But according to a local research organisation Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), urea price dropped by 70 percent to \$225 from \$770 per tonne on the world market during August-December, 2008. The prices of other fertilisers, except MoP, also declined.

"In such a scenario, government should ensure adequate supply of urea and make it available in the market to help

BNP to reshuffle

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mittee after every two years but it could not be possible in the last two years because of an adverse situation."

The BNP chairperson appointed Azizul Bari Helal and Shafiq Bari Babu as JCD president and general secretary on January 1, 2005.

Helal and JCD senior vice president Sultan Salahuddin Tuku contested the December 29 election as BNP candidates but none of them could win.

Party insiders said Khaleda Zia might announce a new committee for Jubo Dal after bringing changes to the JCD.

Jubo Dal President Barkatullah Bhulu was elected from Noakhali-3 constituency while its General Secretary Moazzem Hossain Alal was defeated in Dhaka-13.

BNP leaders said the party high-ups decided to bring changes to JCD and Jubo Dal as the leaders and workers of the two organisations are disheartened following the party's defeat in the parliamentary elections.

BNP has 11 front organisations -- Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal, Mohila Dal, Muktiyoddha Dal, Sramik Dal, Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha, Krishak Dal, Svecchhasebak Dal, Tanti Dal, Olama Dal and Matsyajibi Dal.

farmers buy whenever they need," said Hossain.

At present, the government offers urea to farmers through a controlled distribution system that compels farmers to buy urea from one dealer in each union and they, in most cases, do not get desired quantity of urea.

"Farmers dislike buying fertiliser standing in line. It is better to make fertiliser available in the open market," he said.

Hossain also suggested the government import all types of fertiliser instead of allowing private importers to import. As the government is providing subsidy, it is better to import directly instead of depending on private ones, he said.

Utam Kumar Deb, head of research of CPD, also echoed Hossain to make fertiliser available in the open market.

Sumatra

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hospitals in Sabang town for dehydration," he said.

All of those on the boat were men and none of them spoke Indonesian or English.

The passengers were believed to be en route to Malaysia "to seek a better life", Aceh police spokesman Farid Ahmad said.

Police had referred the boat passengers' case to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and local immigration authorities, he said.

The Indian Coast Guard said last week that it was searching for around 300 illegal migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh who had abandoned a ship drifting in the Bay of Bengal.

The foreign affairs ministry in Jakarta could not confirm whether the 200 people found off Sabang were linked to the 300 missing people, who reportedly abandoned ship near the Andaman and Nicobar islands, north of Aceh.