



The Daily Star

Plus Star Lifestyle



REGD. NO. DA 781 • VOL. XIX No. 14 • DHAKA TUESDAY JANUARY 27, 2009 • MAGH 14, 1415 BS • MUHARRAM 29, 1430 HIRI • 24 PAGES PLUS STAR LIFESTYLE PRICE: Tk 10.00 • www.thedailystar.net

Govt leans on advisory clout

Amends rules of business to allow PM to appoint as many advisers as she wants

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The new government has amended its rules of business, empowering Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to appoint as her advisers and special assistants as many persons as she deems necessary. The amendments authorise the premier to determine the terms and conditions of the appointments as she deems expedient in public interest, and also allow her to let any of the advisers or special assistants attend meetings of the cabinet or any other government committee. Exercising his constitutional authority, President Iajuddin Ahmed on Thursday brought the amendments to some sections of the rules of business, sources in the cabinet division said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already appointed to herself six advisers with the ranks and status of full-fledged ministers. Highly placed sources in the government told The Daily Star on Saturday that Hasina, also the president of Awami League (AL), is expected to appoint a few more persons as her advisers. On functions of the advisers and special assistants, the new provisions say the prime minister may seek advice and assistance from them on any subject. An adviser or a special assistant will also be obliged to carry out any special task assigned to him or her by the prime minister from time to time. On their resignation or termination of their appointments, the new provisions say any of

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Second deputy speaker from opposition

Speaker says constitution to be amended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newly elected Speaker Abdul Hamid said yesterday the government will soon place a bill in parliament to amend the constitution to create a second post of deputy speaker, who will be elected from the opposition. BNP, the major opposition party in the House, however said they will not propose anyone for the post that will require amending the constitution. Senior BNP lawmaker Salauddin Quader Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday that they would not accept the post of deputy speaker (to be created). "BNP is not in such a distressed condition that it will have to take donation like VGD (vulnerable group development)," he said.

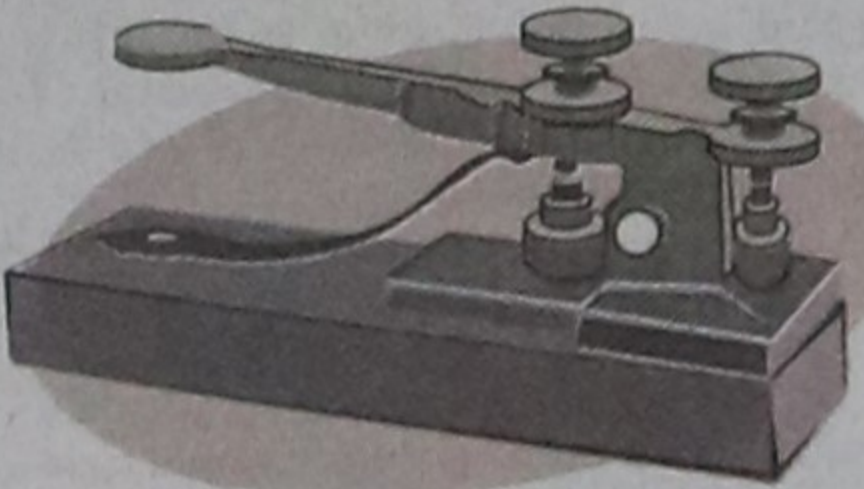
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Telegraph scripts trouble

Offices of the obsolete technology spend 15 times their earnings; ACC asks BTCL to shut all offices soon

EMRAN HOSSAIN

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) recommended Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd (BTCL) to permanently close all its telegraph offices after a probe revealed that expenditure of the almost idle and corruption-riddled offices were 15 times their income between 2000 and 2008. The investigation found that even though telegraph is hardly used nowadays, there are about 3,500 people employed in 450 telegraph offices in the country. A number of employees are involved in abusing power and corruption causing a huge loss of government money, the ACC said. The probe also revealed that during the eight years each telegraph office on a monthly average received and distributed telegrams worth only Tk 200. It was found that in the eight years the telegraph sector under BTCL-former BTB-earned about Tk 2 crore and spent Tk 29.76 crore in operating cost. The



investigation disclosed that a large chunk of this money was misappropriated through various illegal means and corruption. There has been hardly any work at telegraph offices after 1999 when mobile and internet technology started spreading fast. Most countries in the world do not use telegraph anymore. Only ships use it as a last resort of communication. "In reality, the people employed in telegraph offices do not have any work. And the little work that is done does not require fulltime employment of so many," ACC Director General Col Hanif Iqbal told The Daily Star yesterday. "The government can use this man-

power in other service sectors," Hanif added. He said corruption in telegraph offices is still under investigation and action will be taken as per law against people involved in illegal activities. The telegraph offices only deal with a few telegrams made by a number of banks. Government and a few private office employees also use telegraph when they need to extend their leave as telegraph provides evidence of their communication with their offices, the ACC investigation found. **CORRUPTION** Of the total 29.76 crore spent by telegraph offices, Tk 87.14 lakh was spent under office contingency during the eight years. Officials of telegraph offices showed that they had to pay Tk 83.70 lakh in electricity bills against an allocation of Tk 82.87 lakh. However, the investigation found that only Tk 6.52 lakh was actually paid for electricity and the rest Tk 77.17 lakh was misappropriated under the cover of repair works and purchase of materials.

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Grateful thanks to BNP and its allies

They gave us the best joke of the year

MAHFUZ ANAM

We have always complained about the opposition normally being unhelpful, unreasonable, quarrelsome, combative, quick on their feet to walk out, and generally negative. Seldom have we found anything to thank them for. At last BNP-led opposition has given us something to cheer and be grateful for. On Sunday, they gave us the best joke of the year. For what else can we call their walkout in protest at President Iajuddin's speech because



he 'violated the constitution'? Hear, hear! BNP's sudden love for the constitution would have been extremely heartening, if only (and how sincerely we wish) it were genuine. The joke is not that the president is accused of violating the most sacred document in a democracy, but that it is coming from the very party that was behind all the mischief committed by him. There is a Bangla saying, whose English rendering would go somewhat like this, 'For whom I steal, now (s) he

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President may be elected Feb 18

BNP wants Iajuddin to be impeached

SHAKHAWAT LITON and RASHIDUL HASAN

The main opposition BNP wants to see President Iajuddin Ahmed impeached for 'violating the constitution by failing as the chief adviser to hold the parliamentary polls within the stipulated 90 days'. Policymakers of the ruling Awami League (AL) however do not subscribe to the BNP's views on grounds for the possible impeachment. They think the president had 'flouted the constitution by assuming the chief adviser's role' in the first place. Against this backdrop, the Election Commission (EC) yesterday informed Speaker Abdul Hamid about its plans to hold the presidential election on February 18 as Iajuddin's tenure had long expired, sources in the EC said. The commission will unveil the formal schedule once it has the speaker's consent. If the election is not uncontested, the House will be the polling venue, added the sources.

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Travesty of probe

4 years on, no progress yet in Kibria killing case

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Probes into the assassination of former finance minister SAMS Kibria symbolise the bankruptcy of law-enforcement agencies, as the latest finds completely contradict the previous investigation report. During the last BNP-led alliance rule, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) pressed charges against 10 BNP men including a top leader of Habiganj district unit. But its latest probe prompted by a series of complaints from Kibria family and the complainant unearths a link of banned Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami with the assassination. CID Special Superintendent of Police (SSP) Md Nisharul Arif, who is supervising the investigation, told The Daily Star: "I'm convinced



from the findings that Huji is responsible and we're about to press charges against Mufti Hannan and eight of his men. "We haven't found any links between the killing and the 10 men accused in the previous chargesheet." Arif however declined to comment when asked if the previous probe findings were completely inaccurate. The fundamentally contradictory findings have left the Kibria family and the complainant baffled about which police findings are true. "We can't really say whether Huji or the 10 previously accused killed my husband. But we have to find out the masterminds behind the assassination," said Asma Kibria. "The way the then ruling BNP tried to cover

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EC yet to act on complaints

More upazila poll objections poured in

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) Secretariat continues to receive complaints from defeated upazila election candidates but the commission is yet to work out a procedure to investigate those, and go for the next course of action. Of the two complaints it received yesterday, one is against state minister Dipankar Talukder and the other concerns ruling Awami League (AL) lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder. In the last two days, the EC Secretariat got over 100 complaints from defeated contestants stating that ruling Awami League (AL) lawmakers and activists influenced voting, intimidated voters and stuffed ballot boxes after beating up and driving out their polling agents. Three defeated candidates for the post of chairman in Kawkhali upazila of Rangamati jointly filed a complaint that said Dipankar Talukder influenced the local administration during the January 2 upazila parishad elections. Influenced by the state minister, the local administration refrained from taking any action against AL activists although they intimidated voters and threatened to drive them out from the area if they do not vote for AL-backed chairman candidate

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PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

Encouraged by the reduction of fertiliser and diesel prices, farmers prepare seedlings for the Boro season at Karaldanga of Boalkhali upazila in Chittagong.

Iceland govt resigns amid financial collapse

AFF, Reykjavik

Icelandic Prime Minister Geir Haarde announced yesterday the immediate resignation of his government following massive protests over its handling of the country's dire

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ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH

Saifur's son Babu jailed

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A special court in Dhaka yesterday sentenced Shafiqur Rahman Babu, absconding younger son of former finance minister M Saifur Rahman, to 13 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) in a corruption case. Special Court-4 Judge

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PHOTO: STAR

The partial solar eclipse which was visible in Dhaka yesterday. The photo was taken at 4:01pm.

Govt should study other countries' experiences

Says UN official

UNB, Dhaka

UN Resident Coordinator Renata Lok Dessallien said Bangladesh government should study on how the war crime issue was handled in other countries so that Bangladesh can avoid any unfortunate experiences. "Because in some countries they have managed very well, and it worked extremely very well, and in some countries it has not gone so well.

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Govt moves to try war criminals

HASAN JAHIID TUSHER

In line with its election pledges, the Awami League government has taken initiatives to try war criminals after long 37 years of the Liberation War. Three ministers and the attorney general yesterday held a meeting on how to start the much-expected trial of war criminals who were involved in genocide in 1971 in collaboration with the Pakistani occupation forces. Law Minister Shafique Ahmed, Home Minister Sahara Khatun and State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam entrusted Attorney General Mahbube Alam with the task to examine the legal aspects of the procedure. Earlier, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her maiden press conference immediately after her party won a resounding victory in the December 29 national election vowed to take immediate measures to try the war criminals. After taking the charge of her ministry, Foreign Minister Dipu

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Congo warlord denies war crimes

First-ever trial at Int'l Criminal Court begins

AFF, The Hague

The first-ever trial at the International Criminal Court began yesterday with a Congolese militia commander denying he committed war crimes by recruiting hundreds of child soldiers to kill and rape. "At this stage our client would like to plead not guilty," Thomas Lubanga's lawyer, Catherine Mabille, said on the first day of the trial in The Hague.

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JS SEATING PLAN

BNP sees fresh complication

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP fears fresh complication over rearrangement of seats of lawmakers at the Jatiya Sangsad as the speaker yesterday said he will reorganise the seats. BNP lawmaker Salauddin Quader Chowdhury said if the treasury bench brings changes to the seating arrangement, they would have no other option but to boycott the parliament session. Joynal Abedin Faruq, opposition chief whip, told The Daily Star that the treasury bench is yet to inform him about any rearrangement of seats in the House. "Seating plan in the House would be redone following discussion with the opposition," Speaker Abdul Hamid yesterday said. Sources said the speaker may talk to leaders of the treasury and the opposition bench today.

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