

Cabinet okays

FROM PAGE 1
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"They were of the opinion that crores of taka could be saved by stopping such the malpractices," he added.

The Money Laundering Prevention (amendment) Ordinance, 2007, is among the 10 approved yesterday. Two other important ordinances approved by the cabinet are Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 2007, and Election Commission Secretariat Ordinance, 2008.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired yesterday's cabinet meeting held at the Cabinet Division of the Bangladesh Secretariat.

The meeting started around 11:00am, lasted for about five hours and discussed the 10 ordinances at length before approval.

The other ordinances are related to Rangpur university, university of professionals, trademarks, speedy trials, Tourism and money-loan court.

The cabinet also approved supplementary budgets of 2006-07 and 2007-08 fiscal years and the budget of 2007-08 and 2008-09 fiscal years.

The cabinet, however, asked the home ministry to further scrutinise the Law and Order Disruption Offence Speedy Trial Act (amendment) Ordinance, 2007, and place it before the cabinet in the next meeting for approval.

About money laundering, Bangladesh Bank Governor Salehuddin Ahmed informed the meeting that a huge amount of money had been siphoned off to Malaysia and the United Kingdom.

"He assured the prime minister of specific proofs in this regard," Press Secretary to the Prime Minister Abul Kalam Azad told reporters after the meeting.

Azad, however, did not reply when he was asked whether any decision was made about getting the money back.

Asked whether there was any discussion on a tribunal for trying war criminals, he replied in the negative.

He said the meeting gave final approval to the Rangpur University Ordinance, 2008, renaming the institution to Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur.

The press secretary said the meeting amended the Bangladesh University of Professionals Ordinance to keep the president as university chancellor, instead of the prime minister, and approved it.

The members of the cabinet observed that a probe should be launched into the flawed voter list prepared during the BNP-Jamaat regime so that the people responsible could be punished and any attempts to hold farcical election in future could be prevented.

After Election Commission (EC) Secretary Humayun Kabir informed ministers that about two crore fake voters were found in that voter list, the cabinet discussed the matter.

Local govt to stay

FROM PAGE 1
And the special committee has decided to drop similar provisions from the ordinances on city corporations and municipalities when those will be sent to it for scrutiny after being placed as bills in parliament, committee members said.

In that event, mayors and councillors of city corporations and municipalities, and chairmen and vice-chairmen of upazila parishads will not face any legal barrier to continue in their party posts.

The new ordinances widened the jurisdiction of local government institutions. They imposed restrictions on the representatives holding party posts on observation that local bodies fail to live up to public expectations due to the incumbents' involvement in politics.

Representatives in the past had allegedly used their offices as means to meet political ends.

To do away with the practices, the ordinances say those elected to local governments must resign from their party posts before taking oath.

In compliance with the provisions, mayors and councillors of four city corporations and nine municipalities quit party positions before swearing-in in August last year.

Chairmen and vice-chairmen-elect in the upazila polls are lucky in that they will not have to do that before oath.

Contacted yesterday, Advocate Rahmat Ali, chairman of the special committee, said the local government representatives should be allowed to hold party posts.

"If members of parliament can hold party posts, then why

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50 notices

FROM PAGE 16
Agreement (Tifa) with the USA.

The other issues include deterioration of law and order, rise in incidence of extortion, hijacking and post election violence, textbook crisis, shortage of power, intrusion of Indian ships into Bangladesh's territorial waters, traffic congestion in Dhaka city, violence in various public universities, water-sharing with India, trade deficit with different countries and decreasing of manpower export.

The opposition lawmakers demanded that the discussions on the issues should be held in parliament adjourning the scheduled business of the House.

Clarifying the rejection of all the notices, Speaker Abdul Hamid told the House that the ministries concerned will take appropriate actions on the issues of textbook crisis, water sharing, traffic congestions and GDP growth.

Turning down the demands for discussions on law and order and extortion, the speaker said the matters can be dealt with under the existing laws.

He said the contents of other notices are not clear while some of them are based on assumption and not related to the rules of procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad.

"So, I am extremely sorry for not being able to accept any notice," he said.

Opposition lawmakers Zahur Uddin Chowdhury, Mahub Uddin Khondur, ANM Shamsul Islam, AHM Hamidur Rahman Azad, Nazimuddin Ahmed, Joyal Abedin Faruq, Shaikh Uddin Chowdhury, Harun-ur Rashid, AKM Hafizur Rahman and Golam Mostafa submitted the notices.

Earlier, the speaker rejected 21 notices of the opposition lawmakers, who demanded holding discussions on various issues.

The speaker usually does not entertain such notices unless the treasury bench decides to hold discussion on an issue.

Ecneec to decide

FROM PAGE 1
By April 2010. If the country fails to become a member of ICAO, Bangladesh citizens' access to international manpower markets as well as obtaining all types of visas would be at risk.

Some 115 out of 187 member nations of the ICAO, including India and Pakistan, have so far issued machine-readable passports to their citizens.

"We need Tk 350 crore for software and hardware for the project and Tk 9 crore to engage the consultant firm but we have Tk 2 crore in hand," said Abdur Rob Hawlader, director general of the Department of Immigration and Passport, while talking to The Daily Star last month.

Home ministry sources said the ministry will float an international tender to start the implementation of the project immediately after the cabinet approval.

Earlier in 2006, the home ministry sent a Tk 1,561 crore project for procurement of machine-readable passport, visa and national identity cards to the purchase committee.

Of the amount, about Tk 750 crore was set aside for MRP and visa. The proposal was sent to the purchase committee without approval of Ecneec to award the tender to a single company. But the purchase committee rejected the project at that time.

During the caretaker government regime in 2007-08, the home ministry revived the project but eventually decided to leave the project for the next elected government.

India goes

FROM PAGE 16
Ahead of the parliamentary polls in April-May, the government in its budget announced several significant steps, and allocated Rs 1,31,317 crore for its flagship social sector schemes to boost a slowing economy.

The budget makes no changes in direct and indirect taxes, but for the extension of a two per cent interest subvention on pre and post-shipment credit to certain labour-intensive sectors to support exports hit by the global economic slump.

"The mandate of the government is coming to an end by May 22-23. Elections are due. I can neither indulge in reckless borrowing nor go on imposing taxes without the mandate of parliament. It will be a wrong thing to do," Mukherjee said as the Indian industry termed the budget a "big disappointment".

The opposition dubbed the budget as offering "poll lollipops" with BJP leader Arun Jaitley.

The Congress said it's a remarkable budget, especially for the common man.

LGC sees red light

FROM PAGE 1
upazila parishads operational and held accountable for their actions, a separate national budget for local government institutions, local government service structure, a policy for ensuring equal resource distribution to all areas and ensuring balance development may not get the due focus if the activities of the commission are stopped.

Official sources believe the commission could have formulated a policy so that the areas where opposition leaders are elected representative would not be deprived of due allocation for development work.

When asked, LGC Chairman Muhammad Faizur Razaque yesterday told The Daily Star, "If the commission stays effective, it could help the government by giving necessary recommendations to strengthen the local governments' bodies."

Replying to a question, he said, "Besides ensuring balanced development, the commission as an institution could play a vital role in making the local government bodies accountable for its actions and their activities more transparent."

The last caretaker government promulgated the ordinance on LGC May 11, 2008, but the commission was formed on November 1. Government appointed the chairman on November 9.

The government did not inform the LGC anything about its future.

When asked, Tofael Ahmed, member of the commission, said, "We are in the dark."

Sources said the commission already placed an impor-

tant proposal before the local government ministry where it suggested that local government bodies make their own annual and five-year development programme and draft budget in line with the national plan through discussions with locals.

When asked about the proposal, the LGC chairman said, "We made some proposals as the upazila parishad is set to start activities and I think it will be helpful for the government."

He also said they want upazila parishad to involve locals in decision-making meetings which even the local lawmaker can preside over. Transparency and accountability has to be ensured, he added.

On the commission's necessity, Tofael told The Daily Star, "The commission can play a role in ensuring proper expenditure of local government bodies' funds through monitoring."

"A separate national budget for local government bodies can be placed before the parliament by the local government minister as there are six city corporations, 481 upazilas, 64 districts, 309 municipalities and about 5,000 union parishads," he said.

Sources said the LGC was also planning to urge the finance ministry to allocate money for local government bodies with due emphasis and mentioning it clearly in the national budget.

People concerned fear the ideas and plans of the commission are going to fall flat as the ordinance is not going to be ratified.

'Luggage' issue

FROM PAGE 1
occurred long ago, adding, "I don't think enough progress could be made in the investigation."

The finance minister however assured the lawmakers that he will look into whether an investigation could be launched.

Awami League (AL) lawmaker Zillul Hakim brought the allegation during a question-answer session, saying the luggage was filled with the national currency, dollars, and jewellery.

In response to Zillul's allegation, Muhith said reports to that effect were published in newspapers and he did not know anything more about the matter.

"Even the National Board of Revenue does not have much information on it," the finance ministers said.

In response to a query of AL lawmaker Meher Afroz Chumki on the much talked about issue of getting back the money allegedly laundered abroad by the former prime minister's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko, the finance minister said a case was filed with a court of the District of Columbia in the US. "After the case is adjudicated, we hope we will get the money back," Muhith said.

In response to another query of BNP lawmaker ANM Shamsul Islam, the finance minister in a scripted answer said the country received remittance of \$8,979 million equivalent to Tk 61,587.15 crore last year.

In reply to another query of the same lawmaker who was not present during the session as his party continued to boycott the House proceedings, the finance minister said the amount of foreign reserve was \$5,670.97 million on February 5.

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55 hurt

FROM PAGE 16
Chowdhury and Aulad Shikdar of the village over land ownership.

The latest trouble started when a cow of Kabul's supporter Shamim destroyed a crop field of Aulad's supporter Bashar Lashkar Friday.

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Altal, Falu

FROM PAGE 16
country yesterday.

Sources said Falu with his wife, daughter and personal assistant got to the airport around 8:00am to fly to Jeddah on flight EK-583 scheduled to leave at 10:00am.

Meanwhile, Altal reached the airport around noon to board on TG-322 for Bangkok.

However, immigration officials told The Daily Star that they were barred from going abroad as there is ban on their leaving the country.

Fishing cat

FROM PAGE 16
Informed by the local forest officials, police rushed to the spot but could not recover the dead fishing cat.

When contacted Amiruzzaman Amir, officer in charge (OC) of Gouranadi Police Station told The Daily Star that they went to the spot but the angry villagers had already killed and thrown the cat into the river.

We asked forest department to take action against the killers but they are yet to take any step, said the OC.

Demand

FROM PAGE 16
fictions," Jewel said.

The demand for new books on science fictions is ever rising in the fair. Publishers, besides other books, are also publishing new science fictions for teenagers this season.

Around 30 new titles on science fictions have arrived in different stalls in last 16 days.

However, the boys regretted that new science fictions are not quite available in most of the stalls in the Boi Mela.

"Some authors are writing science fictions regularly and there are not many publishers translating foreign ones", Mithun said.

"Most of the science fictions I have read were by Muhammad Jafar Iqbal", Russel said.

The boys said they have been fascinated by science fictions since class VIII. Their first science fictions were of an English authoress "Frankenstein".

Booksellers said there is a good demand for science fictions among the young readers. They said girls are also purchasing science fiction novels. Science fictions by Mohammad Jafar Iqbal are the best-seller this year, they added.

Meanwhile, the 87 new arrivals at the book fair include Kuwashar Borno Mala by Aminul Islam, Dinapurur Torvaga Andolaner Prastuti Porbo by Mesbah Kamal, Firey Jai Firey Ashi by Hasan Azizul Haque, Samudro Gupta Kobita Shamogro by Samudro Gupta, Nari Bhubon by Baby Moudud and Charur Jonno Chhara by Elias Ahmed.

The gathering at the fair is increasing every day. Authorities and publishers are expecting highest ever sale at the Boi Mela this year.

Torture victim support centre for women, children opens

UNB, Dhaka

A 'Victim Support Centre' has been established to provide all kinds of legal support to women and children who are victim of repression or harassment.

Bangladesh Police and 10 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have partnered in establishing the specialized centre in Tejgaon thana compound with assistance from the donor-aided Police Reform Programme.

Home Minister Sahara Khatun will inaugurate the centre today, said an official announcement yesterday.

State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed, Home Secretary Md Abdul Karim, Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad, Resident Coordinator of UNDP Renata Lok Dessalieu and European Commission Ambassador Dr Stefan Frowein will attend as special guests during the inauguration.

"Women and children victims of trafficking, acid attack, rape, sexual harassment or family repression will get service from the centre round the clock," said the release of the police headquarters.

The victims will also get psycho-sociological counseling and health advice along with legal support under the humanitarian venture.

The centre will provide advice to the victim's family and work for creating public awareness.

"The support centre has been established in a women and children-friendly environment and will be run by trained women police," it said.

The well-trained women police will provide instant service as per victims' need with the help of 10 NGOs.

The 10 NGOs are Ain O Saish Kendra, Association for Community Development, Association for Correction and Social Reclamation, Aparajeyo Bangla, Acid Survivors' Foundation, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, and MaryStopes.

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British, French nuclear subs collide in Atlantic

AFP, London

British and French nuclear submarines collided in the Atlantic Ocean earlier this month, media reports said yesterday.

Britain's HMS Vanguard and France's Le Triomphant were both damaged in the crash in the early hours of February 4, but there were no reports of damage to the nuclear parts, said the Daily Telegraph and The Sun newspapers.

France's defence ministry said on February 6 that Le Triomphant, a ballistic nuclear submarine, was damaged when it hit an object under water earlier that week. It did not identify the object.

The British sub has now been towed to its Faslane base in western Scotland for repair, reports said.

The two submarines are equipped with sonar to detect other vessels. Both vessels -- between them carrying about 250 sailors -- were reportedly submerged and on separate missions when they crashed.

Britain's Ministry of Defence refuses to comment on submarine operations but a spokesman said: "The UK's deterrent capability has remained unaffected at all times and there has been no compromise to nuclear safety."

French officials made no comment on the latest media reports.

France's defence ministry said on February 6 that no-one

was injured and there was no security threat from the incident, it acknowledged.

Le Triomphant, one of France's four nuclear-armed submarines, hit the object -- said at the time to be probably a container -- while submerging, and immediately returned to base at Ile-Lougue, near Brest in northwest France.

"The sonar dome situated in the front was damaged," said a statement from the navy, adding that the incident "did not result in injuries among the crew and did not jeopardise nuclear security at any moment."

Each vessel is 150 metres long and 13 metres in diameter, and can carry up to 48 nuclear warheads on a maximum of 16 missiles.

The BBC, which also reported the collision, said the vessels were both "seriously armed."

HMS Vanguard, launched in 1992, is one of four nuclear submarines operated by the British military as part of its Trident system, and one is always on deterrent patrol.

France and Britain are two of the world's five declared nuclear powers, along with the United States, China and Russia.

France has maintained a sea-based nuclear deterrent force since 1971. Britain is planning to renew its Trident submarine nuclear missile system, at a cost of about 20 billion pounds (now 30 billion dollars/22 billion euros).

Gunbattle at JU

FROM PAGE 1
In the meantime, a few activists of Jony group took position in Bottola area and the activists of Ayon group attacked them with sharp weapons that left five injured.

Following the attack, over 200 activists of Jony group launched an attack on the activist of Ayon group with firearms at Battola.

Later, clashes and counter-chases took place between the two groups in Bangabandhu Hall, Kamal Udd