

Tk 283 crore MRP project gets nod

Cost down from Tk 750cr estimated in 2006; passport issuance starts next year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) yesterday approved a Tk 283 crore project for machine-readable passport (MRP) and visa to comply with an international obligation.

Bangladesh will have to introduce MRP by April 2010 to comply with the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). If it fails to become an ICAO member, Bangladesh citizens' access to international manpower markets and all types of visas would be at risk.

Accordingly, the government will start issuing machine-readable passports in 2010 and deliver up to 1.85 crore passports by 2014. Planning Minister AK Khandker told reporters after a meeting of the Ecne chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

But the budget of Tk 283 crore is in stark contrast to a failed procurement scheme spear-

headed in 2006 by the then state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar who sought over Tk 750 crore for it. Babar undertook the scheme without the Ecne approval. The then cabinet also did not approve the project as it had various legal loopholes and also because the home ministry failed to give a breakdown of the project cost.

A home ministry source has also opined that Tk 283 crore might be quite inadequate for 1.85 crore machine-readable passports and visas.

"The MRP is not just a passport book. It will contain digitised information to authenticate the bearer. The whole concept of MRP is based on security aspects so that people cannot use fake identity or duplicate passports," he said.

"Budget should not dictate the quality of the project. If low budget begets MRPs unacceptable to foreign immigration authorities, the whole spending will be a wastage," he added.

At present, 1.5 crore people of the country

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

No reservation about probe but timing is questionable

Says BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition BNP yesterday alleged that the government wants to influence the upcoming parliamentary by-elections in six constituencies by using national institutions like the Election Commission.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

All-party body to probe Sircar graft

Report in a month; expenditures of JS secretariat since 1972 also to be audited

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speaker Abdul Hamid yesterday constituted an all-party parliamentary body to probe widespread allegations of financial anomalies, misuse of power and wastage of public money against previous speaker Jamiruddin Sircar.

First in the history of parliament in Bangladesh, the 11-member committee led by Awami League lawmaker Fazle Rabbi Mia will also investigate allegations of corruption against officials of the Parliament Secretariat.

The speaker also informed the House that the comptroller and auditor general (CAG) would soon send a special team to audit all expenditures of the Parliament Secretariat since 1972.

The parliamentary probe body was asked to submit its report to parliament within a month. Findings of the audit report will also be placed before the House.

"Ensuring transparency and accountability of the government is one of the tasks of parliament. To achieve this goal, the Parliament Secretariat must be kept away from corruption,"

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

Correction

In our yesterday's report headlined "27-member taskforce to watch fallout" we inadvertently mentioned M Syeduzzaman as chairman of Bank Asia. Actually, he is a former chairman of the bank. We regret the mistake. In fact, the finance ministry circular on the committee mentioned him as Bank Asia chairman.



Labourers of dyeing plants at Kamarpara near Tongi wash empty sacks that contained toxic dyes in the Turag, caring little for the environmental damage.

PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

MONEY LAUNDERING ACC clears Mashhud as allegations found baseless

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday dropped charges of misappropriation and laundering of Tk 22.41 crore from Trust Bank Ltd by ACC Chairman Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury as those proved 'baseless and motivated'.

The commission's decision

SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

RESERVED SEATS 45 woman MPs elected

UNB, Dhaka

The Election Commission (EC) declared 45 woman candidates as elected MPs yesterday, the last date for withdrawal of candidature for reserved seats in parliament.

Among the 45 seats, the ruling Awami League (AL) got 36 while opposition BNP five and Jatiya Party (Ershad) four as these three political parties had nominated their candidates for the reserved seats.

The EC will publish the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Tk 17CR GRAFT ACC sues 43 BTCL staff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday filed eight cases against 43 employees of Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd's (BTCL) revenue department in connection with misappropriating Tk 17.26 crore.

The staffs include five directors, eleven senior accountants and seven assistant directors of the revenue offices in Dhaka, Chittagong

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Free judiciary 'forced' to share power with admin

JS body recommends empowering executive magistrates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry recommends that the House allow the government discretion to empower the executive magistrates to take cognisance of offences for trial.

The suggestion comes in a scrutiny report submitted to parliament yesterday on a bill meant to continue separation of the judiciary.

Titled 'Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act 2009', the bill tabled on March 1 will have to wait at least 10 more days to be passed as the legislature yesterday broke for a recess till March 29.

Once the proposed law is enacted with the amendment recommended, the government will be able to let executive magistrates take cognisance of offences in any circumstances.

For that, it will need to issue an order specifying why it is delegating the power to an executive magistrate and for how long.

The magistrates from the administration service however will not be permitted to try any offences.

According to provision proposed by the committee to be added to section 190 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), the government can authorise an execu-

tive magistrate to take legal note of offences like the way chief metropolitan magistrates, metropolitan magistrates, chief judicial magistrates, first class magistrates and specially empowered judicial magistrates do.

But on taking cognisance, he [admin magistrate] will send the offence for trial to a court of competent jurisdiction.

The recommendation appears to be in line with the admin service association's argument that the executive magistrates need the authority to run the administration effectively.

The admin cadres lost the power to

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

No obstacle to court martial

Says law ministry about home proposal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The law ministry yesterday okayed a proposal of the home ministry for trial of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) mutineers in court martial.

Contacted, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed told The Daily Star that his ministry has given its views on the home ministry's proposal, saying clauses of the Army Act 1952 are applicable to the BDR members.

He noted that since the BDR is raised and maintained

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

BDR top brass almost recruited

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) authorities are about to complete the process of rebuilding the paramilitary force that lost most of its high officials during the mutiny at the BDR headquarters.

The authorities have already appointed most of the 12 sector commanders, commanding officers of 46 battalions, directors of various branches and institutions and other officials.

The BDR mutineers killed all 12 sector commanders, three of four directors for training, communications and administration, and three commanding officers of four battalions in Dhaka sector, sources said.

A total of 55 army officials including BDR director general Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed, two brigadier generals, 16 colonels, 11 lieutenant colonels, 23 majors and two captains were killed during the mutiny.

Sources said the authorities yesterday appointed six colonels including colonels Gani, Mahub, Neyamul, Ezaj and Iftekhar as commanders of six sectors.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Trial as soon as possible, says Faruk

FBI team visits Pikhana again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government would complete the trial of those responsible for last month's carnage at BDR headquarters in the shortest possible time, said Commerce Minister Faruk Khan yesterday.

Meanwhile, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) team that arrived in Dhaka earlier in the week visited the crime scenes for the second time. The team also quizzed a number of suspects.

"We want to complete the trial process quickly and for

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

BASHUNDHARA CITY Top floors defy height limit

TAWFIQUE ALI

At least the top 60 feet or six floors of the 20-storey Bashundhara City tower on Panthapath were built violating the civil aviation authority's permissible height limit for buildings in the capital.

According to a notice of Rajhani Unnayan Kartripakha (Rajuk) served on Bashundhara Group authorities, the permissible height of Bashundhara City is 150 feet as per the rules of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) but it was

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR

This photo shows the gutted top floors of Bashundhara City Complex on Panthapath. The top 60 feet of the structure was constructed violating the civil aviation authority's height limit.

BNP council unlikely within stipulated time

EC hopes political parties will fulfil registration commitment

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

BNP might not be able to hold the party's council to approve its amended constitution within the stipulated six-month time limit after the first sitting of ninth parliament.

According to the registration rules for political parties, made by the Election Commission (EC), amended constitution of a party has to be ratified by its national council within this time frame.

But there is no legal provision allowing the EC to take action if a party fails to do so.

"We did not seek any legal provision as we wanted to maintain a soft line on the matter.

But I still expect political parties will fulfil their commitments (in this regard)," said Nurul Islam Khan, joint secretary of the EC, when contacted on Sunday night.

The ninth parliament's first sitting was held on January 25.

Talking to The Daily Star, some senior BNP leaders hinted that the party central council would not be held within the six-month period that ends on July 25.

They said the party will hold its central council at a suitable time after reorganising upazila and district units. And it might be delayed as many of the district committee

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

HR Watch for fair trial of border guards

Speaks against military court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting Human Rights Watch (HRW) Asia Director Brad Adams yesterday urged the Bangladesh government to ensure fair trial of the border guards detained after the Pikhana massacre and their access to legal aid.

Trial of the accused Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) members should be held under the regular judicial system, not the military court, since BDR is under the home ministry not the defence

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4