

UZ parishad

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powers over functioning of the parishads.

AL lawmaker AKM Mozammel Haque moved to place a proposal for dropping the provision that requires the parishads to accept the lawmakers' suggestions in firming up development plans. But fierce opposition from fellow MPs forced him to back off.

Another treasury benches, Abdul Matin Khasru, too faced opposition from the ruling alliance lawmakers while placing his proposal to make UNOs (Upazila Nirbahi Officers) secretaries of the upazila parishads to provide secretarial assistance.

Earlier, in its report on the bill, the committee on the LGRD ministry recommended that UNOs be made chief executive officers of the local government bodies.

The LGRD minister accepted Matin's proposal and incorporated it in the bill.

Interestingly, BNP-led opposition lawmakers, who had earlier submitted notices seeking further examination of the proposed legislation, yesterday voted against sending the bill to the select committee for more scrutiny.

Legal experts have all long been opposing the move as they argue this would allow the lawmakers to meddle in the way the local government bodies should operate.

They also noted that the bill's passage means the lawmakers would now be able to get involved in the administrative functions of the government.

The LGRD and cooperatives minister however claimed that the amendments made to the bill are not unconstitutional.

"They have been misinterpreting the constitution," Ashraf said.

He said the previous AL government wanted to hold upazila polls in 1999, but the then president Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed rejected the EC's proposals to that end.

The LGRD minister also slammed the EC and the immediate past caretaker government for trying to hold upazila polls before the ninth parliamentary election.

In absence of necessary laws, the upazila parishads constituted through the January 22 elections could not yet start functioning.

The bill passed in the House includes a provision that says all activities carried out under the authority of the now defunct upazila parishad ordinance will be deemed to have been done under the reintroduced Upazila Parishad Act.

Parliament yesterday also passed a bill to repeal the controversial Gram Sarkar Act that came into force during the BNP-led alliance government.

The opposition legislators who did not raise any objections to the upazila parishad bill vehemently opposed passage of that on gram sarkar (village governments).

The new law rests all liabilities and assets of gram sarkar with union parishads.

Two other bills—Begum Rokeya University Rangpur Act 2009 and Bangladesh University of Professionals Act 2009—were also passed yesterday.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid piloted those bills. Meanwhile, Finance Minister AMA Muhith placed a bill on public money and budget management.

The proposed law was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry concerned for scrutiny.

Cheated workers

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These workers are among the 53 who went to Malaysia through Tangail Overseas in May 2007. Their employers did not recruit them as per contract nor did they renew their work permit after taking money from them several times, said the workers.

The Malaysian police arrested them adding to their misery, as they became illegal aliens.

Spending Tk 2 to 2.5 lakh for jobs in Southeast Asian countries, these workers instead of sending money took more from home for survival and updating documents.

Three of these 53 workers returned earlier, 30 more on Sunday while 20 others are still waiting for money from home as their families are incapable of transferring fund to expedite their return, said Hannan.

"Each of us had to spend around Tk 3.20 lakh for going to Malaysia, survival there, work permits and so on. We demand compensation," he reiterated.

Meanwhile, officials from the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) went to the airport to visit them and asked to complain formally to the BMET for compensation.

Some leaders of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) also visited the scene and threatened them to cease the strike and leave the airport premises, said Hannan.

"We clearly said we will not leave until we are compensated," he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) yesterday expressed concern over the human rights violation of the workers.

"When these workers were cheated, the role of the expatriates' welfare ministry was not adequate," said a press release signed by ASK acting Executive Director Mohammad Noor Khan.

The government must hold the recruiting agencies concerned accountable to overcome such misery, it said, adding, "We demand that the government solves the problems immediately and makes sure that agencies compensate the returnees appropriately."

7 MPs-elect take oath tomorrow

UNB, Dhaka

The members of parliament (MPs) elected in the April 2 by-elections will be sworn in in the oath-room of Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan tomorrow.

Speaker M Abdul Hamid will administer the oath to the lawmakers at 11.30am, the Parliament Secretariat announced yesterday.

Among the seven new MPs are immediate past speaker barrister Jamiruddin Sircar, ex-minister Moudud Ahmed and Rawshan Ershad.

UZ chairmen

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approaches the government for any development work, the parishad must send meeting minutes within 14 days of holding a meeting to the MP concerned, and upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) will act as the chief executive of the parishads.

The parliament however dropped only the last one. The UNO will now act as secretary to the upazila parishad as per the demand of the upazila parishad representatives.

The newly-elected chairmen and vice-chairmen expressed resentment over empowering MPs in the upazila parishad. They were however happy that at least the upazila parishad as well as its representatives are getting legitimacy.

Harun-or-Rashid Hawlader, coordinator of the upazila chairman association, told The Daily Star last night, "Finally we got legitimacy. Now I hope the government will ensure coordination between MPs and members of the upazila parishads through gazette notification."

A number of chairmen and vice-chairmen, however, said the provisions would ensure supremacy of lawmakers over representatives of upazila parishad and instigate conflict between upazila parishads and lawmakers, which will ultimately hamper development activities.

Some other chairmen and experts hinted that they would go for legal action against a number of provisions of the new law. They would however wait for the gazette notification to see what functions and powers the elected upazila parishad representatives have.

Prof Tofael Ahmed, former member of the now-defunct local government commission, said, "The parliament can pass any bill but the government should be flexible so that necessary steps can be taken when problems arise in the function of upazila parishad under the new law."

Termining the bill unfortunately, Badiul Alam Majumder of Shushashoner Jonney Nagorik (Sujan) said, "It will render the local government body ineffective. It will even be unable to protect public interest."

He also said the parliament will also be less effective as lawmakers will be busy monitoring the functions and activities of upazila parishads.

While talking to The Daily Star last night, Gazi Abdul Hadi, chairman of Dumuria Upazila Parishad of Khulna, said, "Strong local government was Awami League's electoral pledge and it is unfortunate that it made a decision that goes against its electoral manifesto."

Humayun Islam Kamal, vice-chairman of Golapganj Upazila Parishad of Sylhet, said the local government body would be weak if the MPs exercise their power.

New pay scale

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government formed the 7th Pay Commission in September last year and its recommendations are expected to be submitted this month.

The finance minister said that pay commission recommendations are seldom implemented in one go. But he said only in 1963-64 the pay commission recommendations were implemented at a time. After 1949-50 the salaries of the government staff were not increased which facilitated the 1963-64 actions.

The finance minister said 17-18 percent of budgetary expenditure is on account of salary and allowances of government staff. If their salary is increased by 1-2 percent, it accounts for a huge amount of money. When the money comes to markets, it creates inflationary pressure, he said.

Faisal finally

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materials for assembling bullets in Ramkeshar village in Borhanuddin, Bhola. During that drive, Rab arrested three including Russell.

The names of Faisal and Badal also popped up in a simultaneous police investigation in Bhola. But the cases filed by the police against the madrasa did not include Faisal as an accused or perpetrator.

Rab-8 and the intelligence wing of Rab jointly conducted an operation and arrested the two at 4:00am yesterday.

However, the media on March 26 reported that Faisal was arrested in Dhaka the previous day.

Twice cleared as a terror suspect in 1996 and 2002 in British courts but given 18 months imprisonment for possessing illegal firearm in the UK, Faisal's arrest has drawn focus of the British media.

The media also questioned the weak monitoring system of the British Charity Commission that channels taxpayers' money to various NGOs, some of which landed in funding terrorist activities through Green Crescent.

Faisal's father in Manchester in the UK and father-in-law in Dhaka repeatedly claimed to The Daily Star that he has been arrested, but the law-enforcement agencies trashed their claim.

Col Rezanur yesterday denied that claim once again. "He will be sent to Borhanuddin police in Bhola

for the next course of action," he said.

"If the legal process allows we'll take them for questioning," he added.

Prior to this briefing, Faisal and Badal in handcuffs were brought before journalists and photographers were allowed to take their pictures. Wearing a full shirt, Faisal had salt and pepper beard and unkempt hair.

On how the arms and ammunition landed in Faisal's well-protected madrasa, Rezanur said, "This is still under investigation."

A citizen of Britain based in Manchester, Bangladesh-born Faisal registered an NGO -- Green Crescent -- in Doulatkhan in Bhola in 1999. He had a registered charity in the UK under the same name.

He expanded the NGO to Borhanuddin without taking permission from the Department of Social Service. The NGO has a nine-member committee, in which he is the vice-president.

According to his family, Faisal travels to Bangladesh at least once a year. This time he came to Bangladesh in March and just left Bhola to go to Chittagong when Rab unearthed his ammo den.

Rab sources say the ammo den surely indicates the madrasa has links with militants. But they are not sure if it was Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, Harkatul Jihad Al Islami or some other group.

AL mulls radical

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tainted BCL so much that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has stepped down as its constitutional head.

"Sheikh Hasina is considering reorganising Chhatra League to get it back on track," said AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, he said the party high command wants BCL to go through some radical changes to ensure its leaders and workers desist from extortion, tender manipulation and illegal trade over admission to schools, colleges and universities.

The AL high-ups will work out ways to confine the BCL activities to issues of student interests. He however did not elaborate on the prospective measures.

Sources said the top echelons of different organisational units including the central committee would be changed. Committees down to the grassroots level would be reorganised in strict adherence to the 29-year age limit.

The AL president set the age bar to rid the organisation of non-students and promote young leadership. It was first applied to election of the current central leadership including BCL President Mahmud Hasan Ripon and General Secretary Mahfuzul

Haider Roton in April 2006.

But the provision was not much in use as Ripon-Roton committee could not yet form BCL units at the other levels using the age criterion.

This left the two faced with the task of dealing with district and university committee leaders many years their senior. As a result, they failed to have a commanding presence and ensure order and discipline within the organisation.

Observers say the central leadership's failure to assert themselves caused the chain of command to fall apart, leading to factional clashes in different educational institutions.

"The chain of command must be restored through reorganisation of the student body," observed Quader, also former BCL president.

He said the party chief should form a team of recently-retired student leaders to see to BCL politics.

Quader used to take care of matters relating to BCL on behalf of the AL chief before formation of the present central committee in 2006.

Some senior AL leaders think if Hasina would have to take steps to reorganise the student wing or assign someone else to do the job.

No job or no work

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the brokers sell those to the recruiting agencies in Bangladesh.

"To get approvals we need to pay... then there is our profit. That's why the cost of workers to get jobs in Malaysia is so high," the broker adds. Workers on average pay Tk 2 lakh though the government-fixed amount is only Tk 84,000.

To hire workers from Bangladesh in 2006, Malaysia introduced outsourcing companies, which can hire Bangladesh workers not more than 50 in number to supply to a company and get commissions from the workers' salaries.

As per the Malaysian laws, employing companies can also directly recruit Bangladesh workers but not less than 50 in a company.

There are 277 such outsourcing companies, which have job contracts with the workers that they will be paid minimum RM 400, whether they have jobs or not, and in case of overtime they will get RM 700 or more.

But these companies fail to provide jobs to many workers because of hiring more workers than the actual demand.

"If one employing company says it does not need workers, the outsourcing companies look for other companies. But transferring workers from one to another company requires signing of job contracts," says an official at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

Many workers who went to Malaysia for jobs under contracts with outsourcing companies, however, told The Daily Star such companies

transferred them to other companies without signing contracts. As a result, despite their work, they were sometimes paid or provided with food and sometimes not. Many even fled the workplaces failing to bear inhumane work condition with no pays.

As the authorities did not hold the outsourcing companies accountable despite their foul play, many employing companies found such labour supply scheme very profitable and started hiring Bangladesh workers.

"For this type of employers to hire workers, Bangladesh brokers play a key role. We influence companies to get more approvals and the high commission [of Bangladesh] for attestation," says a broker who has been living in Malaysia for over 15 years.

The brokers admit that they are more responsible for today's horrible situation for the Bangladeshis in Malaysia. At the same time, they say the recruiting agencies or the Bangladesh High Commission took no responsibility in checking genuineness of the jobs.

"The high commission has no control over us. It even cannot identify who work for which employers or recruiting agencies. This is because these brokers have no licences and one broker works for many employers and agencies," a broker observes.

Talat Mahmud Khan, labour counsellor of Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, said: "The middlemen take money from both sides -- recruiting agencies and the employers but don't do the real work."

Hatirjheel

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road/embankment has been constructed since the project started in February, 2008.

Officially titled "Integrated Development of Hatirjheel area, including Begunbari Khal", the project is scheduled to be completed by June 2010.

State Minister Abdul Mannan told The Daily Star that the project would be completed in time despite delays in the land acquisition process.

Prof Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), leader of the team that conducted the feasibility study of the project, said the delays in land acquisition slowed down the project significantly.

"The progress of work is very slow as we have not got the land yet," he said.

Mujibur hoped that they would get the land by April and they would try to complete the road/embankment within the next three months.

Out of 299.24 acres of land needed for the project, 139 acres are under private ownership, said a Rajuk official. Another 79 acres of state-owned khas land and Courts of Awards land would also need to be acquired. The rest would be acquired from different government organisations.

Mujibur said one of the main components of the project, a Tk 500 crore wastewater treatment plant at Daserkandi, would be hampered due to delays in evaluating the project proposal. The proposal has not been placed before the Proposal Evaluation Committee even though it was scheduled to start in July, 2008.

The waste-treatment plant project is scheduled to complete by June 2012.

The main objectives of the Tk 1480.98 crore Begunbari-Hatirjheel project include retention of rainwater to reduce water-logging, flood protection, wastewater disposal, construction of walkways and roads around Hatirjheel to improve communication and reduce traffic congestion.

CID starts

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people of the shopping mall as part of our investigation."

The quizzing would continue to unearth the cause of the fire, the ASP said.

CID sources said the investigators have been assigned to unearth the cause of the fire and to estimate the loss of valuables gutted by the blaze.

Earlier, a three-member probe committee, headed by a joint secretary, carried out an investigation into the incident but it failed to find out the cause of the fire.

However, the committee submitted its report to the government with a recommendation to conduct further investigation by the intelligence agency.

100 shanties

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On information, eleven fire units rushed to the spot and brought the flame under control at about 2:55 pm after three hours hectic efforts with the help of local people.

Two of the injured were admitted to Pangu Hospital while others, including fire fighter Majharul Islam of Mohammadpur fire station, were given first aid at local hospitals and clinics.

Rickshaw puller Idris Ali said he frantically came out of his house with his children but could not take his belongings as the flame engulfed his room shortly.

DC of Mirpur Zone under DMP said most of the shanties were made of bamboo, which helped spread blaze rapidly.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzak directed the authorities concerned to distribute Tk 2000 and 20 kgs of rice to each victim family in the slum.

The money and rice already have been allocated, said an official release.

In another incident, a fire broke out in a room on the fifth floor of the 20-storey Sukarna Tower in the city's New Market area yesterday evening.

Police said residents of the tower had doused the fire before the fire fighters reached the spot.

4 killed

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Erhad Hossain and Golam Master, president and general secretary of the 100-party, said when the people of their group were sleeping at night the armed miscreants of the 24-party swooped on them.

President of the 24-party Dula Miah said as members of his organisation went to fish in the Harin Singh Dighi at night armed people of the rival group attacked them. He refused to make further comment.

Assistant Police Super (ASP-B Circle) SM Jahangir Alam visited the spot. He told journalists the situation was under control and an adequate number of police have been deployed to avert any further clashes.

Peerganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Jahangir Hossain said no case has been filed yet.

Quake hits Italian

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L'Aquila, inflicted damage up to 30 kilometres (20 miles) away in all directions.

Rescue workers pulled several people alive out of one four-storey building and said they could hear the cries of a woman still trapped. They planned to try to lift the roof with a giant crane.

Doctors treated people in the open air outside L'Aquila's main hospital as only one operating room was functioning.

L'Aquila resident Maria Francesco said: "It was the apocalypse, our house collapsed. It's destroyed, and there's nothing left to recover."

"It's a scandal what's happened," she told AFP. "For the past three months there have been regular tremors, and they've been getting stronger and stronger!"

Luigi D'Andrea, a student, was asleep when the quake struck. "Everything shook really hard and bricks started falling on me. Then it was an entire wall that collapsed in my bedroom, then a second."

He escaped through a neighbour's flat and returned to recover his computer. "I'm very lucky I wasn't hurt, but now I don't know what to do, whether I should leave here or not. I'll wait and see."

L'Aquila, the region's only university town, suffered the biggest toll while police reported deaths in the towns and villages of Castelnuovo, Poggio Picenze, Tornimparte, Fossa, Totani and Villa Santa Angela, ANSA reported.

Condolences and offers of help poured in from around the world.

"We want to send our condolences to the families there," US President Barack Obama said during an official visit in Turkey. State Department spokesman Robert Wood said the US embassy in Rome would provide 50,000 dollars in emergency relief funding.

Italian authorities told countries offering assistance they did not need rescue teams.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon was "saddened by the loss of life and destruction of property in central Italy," his spokeswoman said.

Russian President Dmitri Medvedev said his country was shocked by the tragedy, adding: "We sympathise with those who have suffered and share their sorrow."

Pope Benedict XVI, too, sent his prayers, the Vatican said. Italy is criss-crossed by two fault lines, making it one of

Ctg arms haul

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salt from Patiya, said Criminal Investigation Department (CID) ASP Muniruzzaman Chowdhury, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case.

The transport agency gave seven out of 10 trucks that carried deadly weapons and ammunition at the jetty of Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL) on April 02, 2004. Motaleb owned five of the seven trucks.

The CID investigators once again sent letter to Bangladesh Coastguard, Chittagong Zone, yesterday, asking for the list of on-duty coastguard members during the seizure of arms and ammunition.

The CID yesterday received government's permission to quiz officials of National Security Intelligence (NSI).

Blasts kill

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Assam state, said senior police official GP Singh.

The first bomb was likely tied to a motorbike and exploded in a crowded market in Guwahati, killing seven people and wounding at least 56, said senior police official GM Srivastava. The blast left several cars on fire amid piles of smouldering wreckage.

Hours later, a second blast, this one tied to a bicycle, went off in a market in the town of Dhekiajuli, 130 miles (210 kilometres) north of Guwahati, Srivastava said. At least four people were injured, he said.

Bombings

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metal were scattered across the marketplace, as Iraqi soldiers and police officers surrounded the bombing site, driving off onlookers and journalists.

The day's violence started with a car bomb at 7:30 am in the centre of the capital, that killed at least six people and wounded 16, said a police official, who described the victims as mostly day labourers seeking work.

Later, a parked car bomb exploded at a market in the Shia slum of Sadr City, killing 10 people, including three women and four children, and wounded at least 28 others, said Iraqi police and medical officials. Within minutes, another bomb went off, at another eastern Baghdad market, killing two more people and wounding 12, said a security official.

Salim Mutar, 18, one of the wounded labourers in the central Baghdad explosion, described a large fireball rising into the air.

"It shook the area," said Mutar, who was hit in the arm by flying shrapnel. "I was so lucky."

Europe's most quake-vulnerable regions, with some 20 million people at risk.

A powerful earthquake in central Italy claimed 13 lives in 1997 and damaged or destroyed priceless cultural heritage.

An October 2002 quake killed 30 people including 27 pupils and their teacher who were crushed under their schoolhouse in the tiny medieval village of San Giuliano di Puglia.

On November 23, 1980, a quake struck the southern region of Irpina near Naples, killing 2,570, injuring 8,850 and displacing 30,000.

Oxygen supply

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through pipelines and they also supply oxygen in cylinders to the hospital.

The BOC Bangladesh Ltd in the city's Tejgaon, the lone oxygen supplier to different hospitals in the country, had never stopped supply of oxygen to any hospitals for outstanding dues, the MD claimed.

Empty oxygen cylinders are returned to the BOC and it generally takes a day for refilling those, which are then sent back to the hospital, he added.

When asked about the short supply of oxygen to DMCH he said, "As it is not possible to carry oxygen without cylinders, the DMCH cannot have the required quantity due to lack of cylinders."

"We have never cut or stopped supply of oxygen to DMCH though the hospital has not been paying our outstanding dues for long," he said adding that they continue the supply only on humanitarian ground.

Zillur accepts

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April 3, 85 days after the Awami League-led grand alliance assumed power, concluding the most challenging task he took -- fighting corruption during the last caretaker government's tenure.

"I think such a situation has been created that requires new leadership at the commission to hasten its functioning. And all of you know the situation, which requires no elaboration," Mashud commented at a press briefing after his resignation.

The ACC is not holding any meetings at present since as per the ACC code chairman and a commissioner are the quorum for a meeting, sources said.

The president is yet to appoint a chairman. He can assign the responsibility either to one of the two senior commissioners at ACC or an individual he considers apt.

According to the ACC code it would take at least a month to appoint new ACC chairman if the government start the process right away.

CID to record