

Internet backbone

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was approved by the board of directors--whereas the deal itself was officially signed on March 19.

The Info-Bahan project was verbally approved at the BTCL's ninth board meeting held on February 19. The board members decided to reach a solution at the next meeting.

The next board meeting on March 11 approved Khabiruzzaman's appointment as the BTCL MD and decided to re-examine some documents of the project but the KT deal was not ratified as it was not on the meeting agenda. The matter was not raised even at the next two meetings.

Sources said the meetings did not have any agenda for issuing a letter of intent to KT Corporation. The deal was signed completely bypassing the board's final approval.

Later, at the April 2 board meeting the board ratified all activities of Khabiruzzaman from February 22 to March 10.

"Before placing the deal before the board finally, the agreement signing with KT Corporation is nothing but overconfidence showed by the BTCL managing director," said a board member. "We do not know why he was so confident that the board will ratify the deal."

The BTCL floated tender for the Info-Bahan project on 24 September 2008. As the project was taken under a loan agreement between Bangladesh government and South Korean government, only Korean companies took part in the bidding.

Korea Electric Power Data Network Consortium (KDN) and KT Corporation submitted tenders for the project.

As per the bidding conditions, the bidder's benchmark testing certificate for all equipment offered for the project must be issued by telecom carriers or Telecommunications Technology Association in the bidder's country.

If any bidder does not provide the required documents including that certificate, the BTCL evaluation committee shall declare the bidder non-responsive and shall not continue with further evaluation of its bid, according to the tender paper.

KT's bid was accepted although it provided the benchmark testing certificate it obtained from China instead of its own country.

Alternative route

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by the Escap commission at its 48th session in 1992. The ALTID is comprised of Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) and facilitation of land transport projects.

Agreements have so far been signed by 32 countries to allow the highway to cross the continent and reach Europe. A significant part of the funding comes from the larger more advanced nations as well as international agencies such as the Asian Development Bank. The project is scheduled for completion in 2010.

At least 15 countries, including Pakistan became founding members by signing the agreement when the idea was conceived in 1959. In 1971, Bangladesh automatically became a founding member but its status was later lowered to observer after it missed the December, 2005 deadline for signing the agreement.

Pollution

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While DO level is alarmingly low in the rivers of Dhaka, load of Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) (amount of oxygen used for decomposition of organic matters), is high in the Buriganga and Shitalakhyarivers, he said.

Tolerable BOD load may remain three milligram (per litre) at best but it remains many times higher than the tolerable level and may escalate further if pollution continues in the rivers, he said.

Six rivers, including the Buriganga, Turag, Dhaleswari, Tongi Khal, Balu and Shitalakhyar, encircle the capital city with around 110 km length, he said, there is no other capital in the world with such fantastic circular waterway.

Khandker suggested water flow augmentation in the rivers and setting up wastewater treatment plants.

There are many laws against environmental pollution and destruction of rivers and wetlands but hardly those laws have been enforced, WDB Additional Director General Kamrul Huda said.

The board, under the water resources ministry, organised the seminar, chaired by WDB Additional Director General Wahid M. Kamrul Huda.

Government's high officials and engineers of WDB attended the seminar.

One lakh data entry operators to get job

Says CEC

A CORRESPONDENT,
Madanipur

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda yesterday said he would recommend to the prime minister for employing one lakh data entry operators who were earlier engaged in voter list and national ID card programme.

He said this in a meeting with the journalists at Madanipur circuit house on a visit to the proposed site for server station and permanent district Election Commission office.

Earlier, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shashi Kumar Singha proposed a land of 20 decimal opposite to his office for primary selection.

Replying to a question the CEC said that server stations set up programme at every upazila would help the people to get voter list and national ID cards facilities locally.

Huda said the Commission was thinking to provide high quality national ID cards for free and admitted that the distributed national ID cards were below international standard.

Dhaka Divisional Deputy Election Commissioner Biswas Lutfur Rahman, Police Super M Khurshid Hossain and Additional DC (revenue) Md Kabirul Hasan were present at the meeting.

War criminals

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ensuring fairness and transparency of the trial. We have already referred the law to the Law Commission for expert opinion to update it," he told a press briefing at his ministry.

The trial of war criminals will start after updating the act, he said adding that it would be published both in Bangla and English versions for maintaining international standard.

The minister, however, said there is no difficulty in carrying out investigation into the incidents of war crimes before amending the act.

He said the government is taking time to start the trial process as it is working for appointing an investigation agency and prosecution team, setting up court and office rooms as well as arranging other logistic supports in this regard. The tasks are near completion, he said.

Asked whether the government is targeting any political party in the name of trial of war criminals, the law minister said the government would not hold the trial considering anybody's political identity.

Only those who were involved in the killings, arsons, rapes, lootings and offences against humanities during the liberation war will be brought under trial after carrying out investigation, he said.

He said if any political party opposes the government's move to try war criminals, it will be considered that the war criminals are remaining in that party.

Replying to a question, Shafige said the government has been giving equal emphasis on both issues of Pilkhana carnage and trial of war criminals.

He also said the investigation into the BDR carnage is going on and after receiving its report, the government will decide under which law the mutineers will be tried.

Noab urges

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collected information from them but did not give them the government position. We will take a decision in this regard later."

He said, "Our general policy is if our produce is of good quality, and price is also internationally competitive, it will be given protection."

Muhith said they (Noab leaders) told him that the quality of local newspaper is not good, and it is not supplied regularly. Two types of newspaper are produced locally, and this creates problem in printing newspaper, he quoted them assaying.

They also told the minister that the price of locally produced newspaper is higher than that of imported ones.

Mahbubul Alam told journalists, "We have also told the minister that though the seventh wage board award (for newspaper industry) has been implemented, the rate of government advertisements has not been increased accordingly. Payment of advertisement bills is also delayed for long."

News Today Editor Reazuddin Ahmed, Prothom Alo Editor Matru Rahman, Chairman of the New Age editorial board ASM Shahidullah Khan, Manabzamin Editor Motiur Rahman Chowdhury, Sangbad Editor Altamash Kabir and publisher of Samokal AK Azad were present at the meeting.

Sri Lanka to resettle Tamils in six months

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka plans to re-settle most of the 250,000 Tamils displaced by the war within six months, two Indian envoys said yesterday hursday after talks with the island's president.

Indian foreign secretary Shivshankar Menon and national security advisor M. K. Narayanan said Sri Lanka intended to take swift action over the civilians, whose fate has been the cause of widespread international concern.

"The government of Sri Lanka indicated that it was their intention to dismantle the relief camps at the earliest and outlined a 180-day plan to resettle the bulk of internally displaced people," they said in a statement.

About 250,000 civilians who poured out of the island's war zone are detained in temporary shelters which the government calls "welfare villages."

International aid agencies have pressed for better access for relief workers to the tightly controlled camps.

The two Indian envoys who held closed-door talks with President Mahinda Rajapakse said both countries "emphasised the urgent necessity of arriving at a lasting political settlement in Sri Lanka."

Menon told reporters before leaving Colombo that Rajapakse was willing to go beyond the 1987 plan in order to consolidate peace in the ethnically divided nation where up to 100,000 people have been killed in three decades of war with the Tamil Tiger rebels.

Meanwhile, there are allegations of children are being abducted, with tacit government approval, from camps housing those displaced by Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, human rights groups charged yesterday.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers said it had received verified reports of child abductions from camps in the main resettlement area of Vavuniya, often by paramilitary Tamil groups.

Children as young as 12 have been among those taken, the coalition said, suggesting that the paramilitaries -- who allied with the military in the fight against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) --

are being used to identify and weed out former Tiger child soldiers.

The paramilitary groups have been allowed "unhindered" access to the camps which are tightly guarded by government troops, it said.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is an umbrella group of global organisations which includes Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

"The motive is slightly unclear," said Charu Lata Hogg, a spokeswoman for the groups.

"Some are being taken away for ransom, they've been kidnapped for ransom, and there've been certain negotiated releases where mothers had some jewellery and they could negotiate a release right within the camp," Hogg told the BBC.

Our Diplomatic Correspondent adds: The United Nations refugee agency yesterday expressed concern over conditions in the camps set up for people displaced by the recent fighting in Sri Lanka, including overcrowding and limited services.

Earlier this week, the Government of Sri Lanka declared that its military operation against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had ended, and that the remaining civilians that were trapped in the conflict zone in the country's north-east had left.

Govt targets

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target for the next fiscal year.

"I am trying not to increase burden on the public, rather trying to ensure that they get commodities at cheaper rates," Muhith said.

In the current fiscal year, the revenue-earning target was Tk 69,382 crore.

The finance minister said of the Tk 80,000 crore more than Tk 60,000 crore has been fixed for realisation by the NBR. In the non-NBR sector, the collection may be Tk 20,000 crore.

However, the revenue-collection target for the NBR in the 2009-10 budget will be more than Tk 60,000 crore, he said.

Target for non-tax revenue collection will be between Tk 18,000 crore and Tk 20,000 crore, the minister mentioned.

Cops' job

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Usually he attends the DC (north) office in the morning at Uttara and then he reaches the DC (MT) office at Rajarbagh at around 1:00 pm where he has lunch and work for about one and a half hours and then rushes to the DC (Discipline) office at Minto road.

Some high officials said each high-ranking officer is tasked with huge workloads. The officers have to remain busy from 9:00am to evening each day.

City people said, muggers, dope gangs, extortionists and grabbers with protection from influential ruling party men are now more active causing slide in law and order in the capital.

Conceding the fact the DMP Commissioner asked law enforcers to launch a special drive against criminals and recover arms.

Against the backdrop of criminal activities the special drive, which started on April 23 midnight ended on April 30 with little success in recovering arms and detaining top-listed criminals.

During the drive DMP Commissioner himself expressed dissatisfaction over the achievement of the drive and said he would further intensify the drive.

Sources close to the police administration said the government is looking for the officers loyal to ruling party for the posts in the DMP administration.

However, DMP and police headquarters sources said due to cadre composition rules the department could not fill up 75 vacant posts of additional superintendent of police though 88 officers of 21st and 22nd BCS batches have already been selected for those posts for long.

Promotion process of 1,999 police personnel from the level of ASI to Additional IGP have remained stopped while a total of 3493 posts are still vacant in the department, sources added.

PM pledges

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as their highest priority is to ensure maximum welfare of the mass people.

The PM made the remarks when Ambassador of Switzerland Dora Rapold, also Dean of the diplomatic corps, paid a farewell call on her at the PM's Office.

Her assurances about balance of power in the local government came in the wake of unhappiness on part of the newly elected upazila chairmen following new rules that made MPs functional advisers of the respective local body.

PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad briefed newsmen after the meeting, where Bangladesh's socioeconomic and administrative situation as well as the upcoming world conference on climate change came up for discussion.

Hasina thanked the Swiss envoy for her government's cooperation in holding the December 29 polls "in a free, fair, neutral and acceptable manner, restoring and strengthening parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh."

The premier also recalled the contribution of Bangladesh Armed Forces in formulating a flawless voter list with photographs during the immediate past caretaker government's rule following the demand of Awami League and its allies.

"The patriotic people of Bangladesh had been very spontaneous in casting their vote in the last general election as they were in long wait for democracy," Hasina said.

The prime minister and the envoy also recalled the memory of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hasina said Bangabandhu's dream was to build Bangladesh as 'the Switzerland of the East'.

As the PM urged Dora to help Bangladesh in removing the country's employment crisis by way of promoting investment here in larger volumes, the envoy assured her of increased Swiss investment and assistance in various sectors, including vocational training, for socioeconomic development of the country.

The envoy handed over an invitation letter from the Swiss prime minister to Hasina to attend the World Climate Conference to be held there in September.

The PM and the Swiss envoy both expressed the hope that the existing friendly relations between Bangladesh and Switzerland would be strengthened further in the days to come.

PM's Office Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman and former ambassador Ziauddin were present.

Conflict with MPs

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enacting the law that authorised lawmakers as advisers to upazila parishads," said Badiul Alam Majumder, general secretary of Shushashoner Jonney Nagorik (Sujan).

"None of the local government bodies-- zila parishad, upazila parishad and union parishad--is subordinate to one another. So leaders of these institutions must come out of the mindset of establishing supremacy. Leadership from the local government will be required to materialize the charter," he added.

"There is no problem if someone becomes an adviser. But it must be looked into so that advice does not turn into order. There must be a specific written code of responsibilities for upazila chairmen and vice chairmen," said Prof Emajuddin Ahmed.

Sa l a h u d d i n M Aminuzzaman presented the keynote-paper in the seminar.

He made some recommendations to resolve the problem. His suggestions include analysing the crisis and finding a solution in line with the constitution, formulating a policy for decentralisation, formulating integrated code for local government, advocacy on local issues and problems by the lawmakers, and holding local government elections among party-nominated candidates as the national elections.

Lawmaker Rahmat Ali said the legislative, executive, and judiciary have authority in their own sectors. They are complementary to each other but people are supreme.

Lawmaker Shammil Akhter, Awami League organizing secretary Mahmudur Rahman Manna and upazila parishad Chairman Nazrul Islam Khan, also spoke at the seminar, among others. Mahbubul Haque Ripon, director of Neeti Gobeshona Kendro, conducted the seminar.

HC asks govt

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directive during the hearing of a writ petition regarding the declaration of independence.

The HC bench comprised of Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Mamtazuddin Ahmed also allowed the Sector Commanders' Forum (SCF) to become an additional party to this public interest litigation.

Earlier on Wednesday, former army chief Lt Gen (ret'd) Harun-or-Rashid filed a petition on behalf of the SCF seeking that it is allowed to be so.

The writ petitioner's counsel Manzil Murshid yesterday told the court that Ziaur Rahman never claimed that he had declared independence of the country.

He presented some documents in support of his arguments.

Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, counsel for M Hamidullah Khan who had earlier become an additional party to the litigation, said this writ petition is not maintainable in the HC. The petitioner could have filed it with a lower court, he added.

The HC bench asked him (Khandaker) to present his

arguments on maintainability of this petition.

He (Khandaker) then prayed for time to make his submissions.

The court fixed May 27 for further hearing of the writ petition.

On April 19, Dr MA Salam, a freedom fighter, filed the writ petition.

As ordered by the HC, the government on Wednesday produced before it copies of the Ittefaq, the Sangbad and the Azad published during the period March 1 to March 25, 1971 to examine the historical background of the proclamation of independence.

On April 20, the HC upon a writ petition issued a rule on the government to explain why directives should not be given to proscribe 2004 edition of the Bangladesh War of Liberation in which (the then major) Ziaur Rahman was said to have proclaimed independence on March 26, 1971.

The court also asked the government to explain why it should not be directed to ban the set of books that distorted facts regarding declaration of independence.

Congress

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will support the government from outside," DMK leader TR Baalul said.

Baalul announced DMK's decision after Manmohan Singh called up Karunanidhi, who conveyed his rejection of the Congress proposal.

The "dialogue" with DMK has not ended, Congress said, indicating that senior party leaders would hold further negotiations to hammer out a solution.

Congress spokesman Janardhan Dwivedi said, without giving details, that DMK wanted "status quo" and "more" ministerial berths--seven portfolios plus more.

There was no official version on what exactly was DMK's demand and what was Congress' offer. There were various versions.

One of those was that DMK wanted seven portfolios of cabinet rank including those for Karunanidhi's son M K Azhagiri, grand nephew Dayananidhi Maran and daughter Kanimozhi.

Another version was that Congress was opposed to inclusion of Baalul and A Raja on grounds of their performance, and alleged corruption which DMK sought to contest. Yet another version was that DMK was also keen on Railways, which is said to be eyed by another Congress ally Trinamool Congress.

DMK has 18 members in Lok Sabha and is the third largest constituent of the UPA after Congress, which has 206 seats, and Trinamool Congress which has 19.

Congress haggled hard with allies like DMK, Trinamool Congress and NCP. Among the 'big four' portfolios, Finance is likely to go to Pranab Mukherjee, Home and Defence would be retained by P Chidambaram and AK Antony.

There is no finality about who will bag External Affairs for which there have been names of Kamal Nath, M Krishna and Kapil Sibal.

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, who may not join the UPA government, held third round of talks with Congress leaders but dismissed suggestions that she was bargaining hard for key ministries.

"There is no talk of bargaining (for ministerial posts) ... We have not discussed this. What they (Congress) want,

they will do. Even if they don't give us anything, we don't mind," Mamata told reporters.

Sources however said the party is keen on Railways, Coal and Mines and Steel portfolios which, it feels, are of importance to West Bengal economy. It was also eyeing the portfolios of Health and Home at the minister of state level.

4 held for New York 'attack plot'

BBC ONLINE, New York

Four men were arrested late on Wednesday over alleged plots to attack targets in and near New York.

The four planned to blow up synagogues and use Stinger missiles to bring down military planes, US prosecutors said.

The four, all Muslims, are to appear in a federal court later.

The men were seized after allegedly planting what they thought were bombs near two synagogues in the Bronx area.

They earlier agreed to buy explosives from FBI agents posing as Islamic militants. New York has been on alert for a new terror attack since 9/11.

The four are charged with conspiracy to use weapons of mass destruction within the US and conspiracy to acquire and use anti-aircraft missiles, officials said.

The charges carry jail terms of between 25 years and life imprisonment.

The arrested were named as James Cromitie (also known as Abdul Rahman), David Williams (aka Daoud and DL), Onta Williams (aka Hamza) and Laguerre Payen (aka Amin and Almondo).

A senior FBI official in New York said three were US citizens and one was from Haiti.

The case appears to be a classic sting operation against suspected home-grown militants rather than a plot with any links to known international terrorism.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg said the alleged plot showed "homeland security threats against New York City (were) sadly all too real".

The arrests were the result of a year-long investigation, officials said.