

JS secretariat

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all-party probe committee says Delwar drew an unusual amount as office entertainment allowances and also forced the secretariat to clear the electricity bills for him and tenants of other flats in his building.

In June 2006, Tarique Rahman, who resigned from BNP during the caretaker government rule, visited Mohadebpur of Naogaon, parliamentary constituency of former deputy speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui.

A government vehicle allocated to the former deputy speaker was used in Tarique's tour that time. The Parliament Secretariat had to pay for 530 litres of fuel, sub-committee chief Shajahan Khan told reporters, flashing the payment documents.

The former deputy speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui's office received the payment for the fuel it mentioned was used in Tarique's tour.

"This is just one example. Many such anomalies will come out if we can examine all documents on fuel allowances in the last seven years," said Shajahan, also a ruling Awami League lawmaker.

He was talking to reporters said after a meeting of the sub-committee at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"But it might not be possible for us to examine the large number of documents within such a short time," he said, adding that they have been asked to submit report to the all-party parliamentary probe body on May 31.

The sub-committee will soon to finalise the report. Asked if Tarique was entitled to such government facilities, sub-committee chief Shajahan said as he was neither in parliament or the government, he did not qualify for the benefits.

But documents show the secretariat paid for the fuel for his tour in Naogaon. They show that 100 litres of fuel was used each day during his tour, he added.

Allegations are rife that Tarique had various government services and benefits during his nationwide tour to revitalise the then ruling BNP.

A member of the sub-committee said they have evidence that the former chief whip's office drew food allowances for 122 people every day for four months towards the end of last parliament.

Interestingly, Delwar in a statement said he did not attend office during that period, the sub-committee member said.

According to documents, the former chief whip's office drew money to buy rice, vegetables, fish, meat, drinking water and soft drinks for 122 people every day from

July to October 2006.

"It's really surprising. We are trying to know how much entertainment allowance the chief whip's office took in those four months," the sub-committee member said.

Delwar already stands accused of receiving illegal medical bills and additional fuel allowance. He is also accused of taking away furniture, a television set, and two refrigerators—all bought by the Parliament Secretariat at a cost of Tk 20 lakh for his use.

The former chief whip did not return any of those on expiry of the last parliament's tenure. He, however, in a letter told the then speaker Jamiruddin Sircar that the furniture and other items had either been lost or damaged. He sought immunity from liability for the "damages and loss".

Sircar let go of it, but said the law would take its own course if questions were raised in future.

At yesterday's meeting, the sub-committee also discussed allegations of anomalies in house allocations for the Parliament Secretariat officials during the last parliament's tenure.

Haji Selim acquitted in murder case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday acquitted former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Haji Mohammad Selim and three others of a murder case filed against them five years ago.

Judge Masdar Hossain of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 gave the acquittal order in presence of Haji Selim and others in a packed courtroom.

In his order, the judge said the prosecution failed to prove the charges against the accused. So, they were acquitted of the murder charges.

The case was filed on March 31, 2004 against Haji Selim, Golam Hossain, Ali Haider and Delwar Hossain on charge of killing Jubo Dal activist Abdul Hannan on March 30, 2004.

Selim, an accused in 120 criminal cases, was brought to the court amid tight security.

A large number of supporters of Selim gathered on the court premises and brought out a procession demanding withdrawal of the case, even though the High Court (HC) had earlier banned all sorts of processions on the court premises.

Special Public Prosecutor Abu Abdullah appeared for the state while advocate Pran Nath defended the accused.

'Criminal' killed in shootout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged criminal was killed in 'crossfire' during a shootout between Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and his cohorts at Savar early yesterday.

Rab members recovered a pistol and several other arms from the spot.

The deceased was identified as Rafiqul Islam Azad alias Sumon, 25, son of Abul Kalam Azad of Darus Salam in the capital.

Rafiq was accused in a murder case in connection with the killings of Sub-inspector (SI) Matur and two Rab members at Amin Bazar of Savar, Rab sources said.

Major Mohammad Sarwar of Rab-4 said Sumon was a member of Gangchil Bahini in Savar area.

As Rab members in plain clothes chased the gang of four to five robbers during a robbery at the NR Filling Station on Savar Road at around 2:30am, the robbers opened fire on law enforcers prompting them to retaliate.

After the gunfight Sumon's bullet-ridden body was found lying on the spot while his cohorts managed to escape the scene, Maj Sarwar said adding that he was taken to Savar Health Complex where on duty doctors declared him dead.

He added they had information on May 23 that the criminals of Gangchil Bahini would rob the filling station and accordingly they stepped up the patrol there.

However, Ramesh Chandra Ghosh, owner of the NR Filling Station, said he heard gunshots in the area but no incidents of robbery or shooting took place at his refuelling station Saturday night.

Family sources of the deceased and locals said Rab arrested Sumon from his residence Saturday evening and they found his body early yesterday.

He was freed on bail few months back in the Rab members killing case, family sources said adding that most of his family members live in Australia and he was a shrimp trader in Sathkira.

Asian powers hold the key to freeing Suu Kyi: France

AFP, Paris

Asian powers hold the key to persuading Myanmar's ruling junta to release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, France's human rights minister said Sunday ahead of key meetings in Asia this week.

France and Europe have done everything that they can and it's now up to Asian governments to turn up the pressure on Yangon, said Rama Yade who is to meet with ministers from Myanmar's neighbours in Vietnam and Cambodia.

"It's obvious that the key is in Asia," Yade told TV5 Monde in an interview. "I fundamentally believe that our Asian partners can incite the junta to evolve."

Yade will represent France at the Asem (Asia-Europe) ministerial meeting on Thursday in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi and the European Union meeting with the Association of South East Asian Nations Saturday in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh.

The junior minister said she has asked to meet with Myanmar's foreign minister to discuss the plight of Aung San Suu Kyi, who went on trial this month for violating the terms of her house arrest.

Body formed

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existing 11 types of textbook curricula between class-I and class-V and recommend introduction of a unified curriculum for all types of primary education.

Even though other committee members are yet to be named, the chairmen of Dhaka Board, Technical Education Board, Madrasa Board and National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) are likely to be in the review committee.

State Minister Motahar Hossain and senior officials also attended the meeting. The committee is likely to submit its report within a month after holding discussions with all stakeholders, reports UNB.

The education minister in several programmes had said a unified curriculum would be introduced at the primary level.

The Education Policy Formulation Committee in their meetings also spoke in favour of introducing a unified curriculum for students up to class-V.

Nazrul's birth

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programmes to celebrate the great poet's birthday. The cultural affairs ministry will place wreaths at his grave on the Dhaka University campus at 6:30am.

President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have given special messages highlighting the colourful life of the poet and his contributions to Bengali language and literature.

The government has taken up elaborate programmes on the occasion to be inaugurated by President Zillur Rahman at a function at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital.

Eminent educationist Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui will deliver a commemorative speech on Nazrul at the inaugural function. Bangladesh Television (BTV), Bangladesh Betar along with private TV channels and radio stations will broadcast the programme.

Special programmes on Nazrul's works including his plays, poetry and songs will be broadcast in TV channels and radio stations marking the national poet's birthday.

A cultural function on Nazrul's creative works will be held at the Shilpakala Academy in the evening. Besides, a book fair and an exhibition will be held at the Central Public Library from May 25 to 31 in the capital.

Dist councils

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yesterday in separate fax messages dismissed the previous interim councils formed during the past caretaker government.

Our Ranganmati correspondent reports: A five-member council was formed with district AL leader Nikhil Kumar Chakma as the chairman of Ranganmati Hill District Council.

Four other members of the council are Aungmyi Prue Chowdhury, Shamima Rashid, Brishaketu Chakma and Avilash Tangchanya.

Our Bandarban correspondent adds: K. Shoilah Marma was made the chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council. The members of the council are Kazi Mujibur Rahman, Prasna Kanti Tangchanya, Kew Sa Prue and Aung Prue Murang.

Ka Shoilah Marma was also the chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council in 1996-2001.

The previous interim councils were recast on July 15 in 2007.

Law on cards

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measures in 15 days for checking such crimes.

The move came in the wake of widespread threats and intimidation by criminals who demand money over the phone using names of high-profile criminals.

The committee includes representatives from all mobile phone operators, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and National Security Intelligence (NSI), police and the home and communications ministries.

"Criminals have been using mobile phones for committing crimes for a long time. If necessary, we shall enact a law to stop it," Sahara told journalists after a meeting for discussing the issue at the home ministry.

Representatives from mobile phone operators, police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), DGFI, NSI, and BTRC were also present.

"We are committed to curbing crimes to ensure public security. We have formed the committee as part of the move to check crimes committed using mobile phones," she added.

The meeting observed that a large number of mobile SIM cards have been used for committing various crimes including extortion. Some suggested that producing national identity cards should be made mandatory for buying SIM cards, said sources.

The home minister said mobile phone trackers will be introduced to track down the criminals.

Replying to a query, she said the national probe committee's report on the BDR mutiny will be made public as soon as possible.

Talking to reporters, the BTRC chairman said, "Issuance of mobile SIM cards will be brought under a transparent system to deny criminals access to mobile phones and we shall make recommendations in this regard."

He said the work for setting up a national monitoring cell is underway and it will start functioning soon.

As part of the national celebrations, Nazrul Institute will arrange a discussion session on the life and work of the poet at the Poet Sufia Kamal Auditorium of the National Museum on May 26. Noted Nazrul researcher Idris Ali will present the keynote paper.

Besides, various programmes have been chalked out to mark the day at Darirampur in Trishal, Daulatpur in Comilla and in Chittagong.

Local administrations across the country will arrange programmes marking the day.

Bangladesh missions abroad will also celebrate the day holding various programmes.

On this day in 1899, Nazrul was born at Churulia in Burdwan district of West Bengal. Through his poems, Nazrul had inspired people to fight against injustice and repression during the colonial rule.

His songs and poems were also a major source of inspiration for the freedom fighters during the Liberation War in 1971.

2 extortionists

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Amin Bazar.

They were members of 'Gangchil Bahini', a criminal gang active at Amin Bazar, Gabtoli, Darussalam and Mirpur, said police.

AKM Nasirullah, officer-in-charge of Savar Police Station, told The Daily Star that when Aman and Mamun along with seven other accomplices tried to extort money from several houses at about 4:00pm, locals caught the two and beat them up.

Their cohorts managed to escape.

On information, police rushed to the spot and rescued them. The two were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the on-duty doctor declared them dead.

Nasirullah said the gang members had been extorting money in the area for the last few years.

Locals said at least 10 members of the gang were killed in crossfire between their cohorts and law enforcers in the last three years.

They used to extort money from the residents at Amin Bazar, Gabtoli, Mirpur Dam and Darussalam areas, locals added.

'Sweden' Aslam gets 17 yrs in arms case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced top criminal 'Sweden' Aslam and three of his accomplices to 17 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) for possessing illegal firearms and ammunition in his DOHS residence in May, 1997.

Earlier on November 5, 2003, Aslam was awarded life imprisonment in another case for possessing illegal firearms and ammunition. Fourteen other criminal cases against him remain pending with different courts in the city, sources said.

The other three convicts are Abu Taher Taru, Hassan Imam and Mohammad Babul. Aslam and Babul were present in the court while the other two were tried in absentia.

Judge Motiar Rahman of the Special Tribunal-7 delivered the verdict in a jam-packed courtroom.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence had completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 11 prosecution witnesses.

According to the prosecution, Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested Aslam from his DOHS residence in the city's Cantonment area on May 20, 1997.

A pistol, a shotgun, a shutter gun, a revolver and six bullets were recovered from his house.

An arms case was filed against Aslam and three others with Cantonment Police Station the same day.

Aslam was cleared of an arms case on October 9, 2003 while another court acquitted him on October 18, 2006.

Deccan

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Left-arm spinner Prayagn Ojha led the Chargers, picking up three key wickets. He found good support from Andrew Symonds and Harmeet Singh who took two wickets each.

The match was in Bangalore's favour for most of the time but when Ross Taylor and Rahul Dravid fell in successive Symonds deliveries, the red-and-gold brigade lost their way.

Earlier, Herschelle Gibbs' 48-ball 53 held the Deccan innings together as they reached an ordinary total by Twenty20 standards. Gibbs slammed three fours and two sixes but found little support from the other batsmen.

Symonds made 33 while Rohit Sharma chipped in with 24. For Bangalore, captain Anil Kumble took four wickets.

KSA-bound

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During the meeting, the premier and the Saudi Ambassador had discussions on various bilateral issues.

As the matters related to facilities of Bangladeshi hajj pilgrims came up in the discussion, Hasina sought pieces of land in holy cities of Makkah and Madinah to set up multi-storied dormitories for Bangladeshi hajj pilgrims.

The Saudi ambassador said that following the visit of Bangladesh prime minister to Saudi Arabia in last April bilateral relation between the two countries has further strengthened.

The PM expressed gratitude to the Saudi king as his government, during her visit, took various decisions including iqama (work permit) transfer for the betterment of Bangladeshi expatriates living in Saudi Arabia.

She also thanked the Saudi king for the hospitality offered during her visit to the kingdom.

Hasina also mentioned with gratitude the assistances provided by the Saudi government for overall infrastructure development of Bangladesh's National Mosque Baitul Mukarram.

She also informed the Saudi envoy that the last Awami League government had initiated the development works of the Baitul Mukarram, but only for political reason, the next BNP-Jamaat government had stopped the development works of the national mosque.

PM's Office Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman was also present during the meeting.

Swine flu forces 18 US soldiers to quit Kuwait

AFP, Kuwait City

Eighteen US soldiers who tested positive for swine flu were removed from a military base in Kuwait, as Australia Sunday shut down a school after identifying two more cases of the disease.

Several countries, many in Asia, announced fresh cases of A(H1N1) influenza, including China where a 21-month-old baby was being treated in hospital, and in Switzerland a woman returning from the United States became the country's third flu victim.

"All the 18 soldiers have left Kuwait," the deputy chief of Kuwait's public health department, Yussef Mendkar, told AFP.

"They had normal symptoms of the disease and were given the necessary medication."

Mendkar said the US soldiers had "had no contact whatsoever with the local population," and that the oil-rich state remained free of the A(H1N1) influenza.

Earlier, Kuwait's Undersecretary of Health Ibrahim al-Abdulhadi told the official KUNA news agency that the soldiers had been immediately isolated at the US base in Arifjan, 70 kilometres (about 40 miles)

south of the capital. The US embassy in Kuwait said it was aware of the cases.

Arab countries in the Gulf region, which have millions of foreign workers, have so far not reported any confirmed cases of the flu.

But authorities in the region have stepped up surveillance of travellers at airports, with Doha, Dubai and Abu Dhabi installing thermal cameras.

Asian countries were the centre of most of the fresh cases of the infection Sunday. Australia confirmed two more swine flu cases, a 27-year-old man and 15-year-old boy in Melbourne, prompting officials in Victoria state to close the boy's school for a week as a precaution.

The closure was part of a package of measures announced on Friday after confirmation of the country's first case of human-to-human transmission of the A(H1N1) virus.

The new "containment" phase allows for the closure of public places and for the cancellation of major events.

With the latest cases bringing Australia's total to 16, Health Minister Nicola Roxon expressed concern over how easily the virus was spreading.

Cyclone Aila roars in Bay

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the special bulletin issued in the evening. The Met office has asked the maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla to raise local warning signal to four.

All fishing boats and trawlers in the north Bay have been advised to return to safety and be at anchor till further notice.

Earlier in April, Bijli, season's first cyclonic storm, hit the offshore islands, but could do little damage because of proper and timely measures taken by the authorities.

Aila, grown out of a deep depression in the west central Bay, was around 540 km southwest off Chittagong port, 485 km southwest off Cox's Bazar port and 430 km southwest off Mongla port at 10:00pm.

The government has asked the deputy commissioners (DC) and upazila nirbahi officers (UNO) in the coastal areas to make necessary arrangements to shield life and property from the cyclone.

In a handout, the food and disaster management ministry said they have asked the

volunteers from 32 upazilas in 11 districts to be ready to deal with emergencies.

The maximum sustained wind speed within 54 km of the storm centre was about 60 kmph, rising up to 70 kph in gusts, the bulletin said.

The low-lying areas in Sathkira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Barguna, Bhola, Patuakhali, Barisal, Pirojpur, Jhalakathi, Laxmipur, Noakhali, Feni, Chandpur, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and their offshore islands may be inundated by the wind-fueled surges as high as seven feet.

The DCs and UNOs have also been asked to open control rooms and keep in touch with the ministry's control room. The telephone numbers of the central control room are 7162116, 7160454 and 7164115.

The decisions came at an emergency meeting of the ministry's Cyclone Preparedness Programme's information board.

Meanwhile, the port authorities have asked all launches on internal routes of Patuakhali not to operate till further notice.

campaign.

The fresh exodus follows press reports last week in which President Asif Ali Zardari said that the government might consider an offensive in Waziristan.

In the restive Orakzai tribal area between Swat and Waziristan, a security official said militants launched an attack on an army convoy.

"Troops backed by attack helicopters retaliated, killing eight militants," the official said.

Security forces say 15,000 troops are now fighting 1,500 to 2,000 "hardcore militants" in Swat, where the government last month ordered a push to eradicate fighters who thrived to within 100 kilometres (60 miles) of Islamabad.

The extremists' advance came despite a February deal with a pro-Taliban cleric, which put three million people in the northwest under sharia law in a bid to end the two-year Taliban insurgency--a deal, which now lies in tatters.

Washington had balked at the February Sharia deal but Islamabad's fresh assault has the full backing of the United States, which has identified Pakistan and Afghanistan as central to its battle with Islamist extremism.

The military says more than 1,100 militants and 66 soldiers have died in the onslaught launched in the districts of Lower Dir on April 26, Buner on April 28 and Swat on May 8, but those tolls cannot be confirmed independently.

HC asks govt

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special committee.

The bench fixed June 1 for a hearing on the ruling, and the direction will continue to have its effect till the hearing.

Secretaries to the ministries of planning, environment and forest, finance, land, LGRD, shipping, water resources, and communications, the chairman of BIWTA, the director general of the Directorate of Land Records and Survey, the director general of the Department of Environment, DCs of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur, and the police commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) have been made respondents to the entire ruling.

Five Supreme Court lawyers--Asaduzzaman Siddiqui, Sarwar Ahad Chowdhury, Aklas Uddin Bhuiyan, Tapan Kanti Das, and Mamun Aleem--on behalf of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) jointly filed the writ petition earlier in the day as a public interest lawsuit.

The petition sought a court order for the government to demarcate the original territories of the rivers Buriganga, Turag, Balu, and Shitalakkhya through a survey by a special team, to restore the rivers to their original conditions, and their protection.

The petition also prayed to the court to direct the authorities to take immediate steps to stop encroachment, earth-filling, and construction of illegal structures on the rivers.

It said the Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Shitalakkhya rivers are the main source of water for millions of people residing in Dhaka and Narayanganj.

Moreover, the rivers are playing a key role in the transport sector as well as in maintaining bio-diversity.

But encroachment, earth-filling, and setting up of illegal structures continue on the rivers in violation of the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, leaving negative impacts on the environment, the petition said.

Petitioners' counsel Advocate Manzil Murshid told the court that the normal flow of water in the rivers has been damaged due to earth-filling of the rivers and construction of illegal structures on encroached upon portions of them.

He said the main source of water for Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) is the Buriganga and Shitalakkhya rivers, and due to wholesale pollution of the river water, purification of water has been seriously hampered.

As a result the quality of water supplied to Dhaka city and its adjacent areas has become degraded, endangering thousands of people's health, he added.

Deputy Attorney General Mostafa Zaman Islam represented the government.