

300 MP-advisers

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But technocrat ministers and women lawmakers elected to reserved seats are not recommended for the empowerment. All other ministers and lawmakers including the chief whip and other whips will become advisers to the municipalities if the bill is passed by the House.

Lawmakers were already made advisers to upazila parishads, another level of local governments, burying ruling Awami League's (AL) electoral pledge of making local governments self-reliant and autonomous.

Forty five lawmakers elected to reserved seats for women in the parliament however will not be made advisers to the municipalities, since they do not have constituencies to represent. For the same reason, they had not been made advisers to upazila parishads either.

The parliamentary committee however did not recommend making it mandatory for the municipalities to seek suggestions of advisers for running their administrations, unlike a provision made in the Upazila Parishads Act.

It however also did not specify the functions of the advisers, neither did it make it amply clear whether it is incumbent upon the local government institutions to seek suggestions of the advisers.

AL lawmaker Rahmat Ali, chairman of the committee, placed the report in the parliament.

In its report on the scrutiny of the municipalities' bill, the committee also recommended introduction of two posts of deputy mayors in each municipality, one of which will be reserved for women. The post of the chairman will be re-named as mayor, and ward commissioners will be called councillors.

The committee also recommended introduction of a municipality service for the local governments' employees. It also recommended giving legality to the municipality administrations, that were elected under the now defunct municipality ordinance.

The LGRD ministry placed the municipalities bill in the parliament as the

immediate past caretaker government had repealed the then municipality ordinance and promulgated a new one, which also ceased to have effect since February, as it was not ratified in the parliament within the stipulated time.

Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Planning Ministry placed a report on the scrutiny of the Public Procurement Act (Amendment) bill, and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Ministry placed a report on the scrutiny of Law and Order Disruption (Speedy Trial) Act (Amendment) bill.

Both committees recommended that the House passes the bills.

Ctg arms

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had been taken to the taskforce for interrogation (TFI) cell in Dhaka on May 2 for further interrogation in the Chittagong arms haul case.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is investigating the case, could make sure about Liakat's involvement in the offloading of 10 truckloads of firearms and ammunition seized at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Company Ltd jetty on April 02, 2004.

Liakat is expected to make a confessional statement under section 164 today.

But it was not certain if Rezaul would also make confessional statement since he denied his involvement in the case, said CID sources.

During interrogation at the TFI cell both Rezaul and Liakat blamed former NSI director (security) Wing Commander (ret'd) Sahab Uddin for transportation of the deadly consignment, sources said.

Shafique slates

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Pakistan would be cooled if Dhaka goes on with the planned trial of war criminals.

Talking to newsmen at his secretariat office, the law minister said the government will try only those Bangladeshi citizens who had committed offences against humanity in collaboration with Pakistani occupation forces during the Liberation War in 1971.

"The issue of holding trial of the war criminals is our internal matter. We will not try any Pakistani citizen. Pakistan should not make any comment on this issue as per international laws," he said.

BNP to return

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House Abdus Shahid.

A series of talks between the speaker and the opposition chief whip yesterday, however, ended without any result as both of them were rigid on their stances on seating arrangement in the House.

"We have demanded two more seats in the front row and we hope that the speaker will meet our demand," Faroque said at a briefing at the media centre of Jatiya Sangsad Complex after his meeting with Speaker Hamid.

On Saturday, Speaker Abdul Hamid told reporters that he offered the BNP-led opposition one more seat in the front row, arranging seats for senior opposition leaders Moudud Ahmed and Jamiruddin Sircar who were elected in the April 2 by-election.

Hamid said he has nothing to do regarding further demands of the opposition.

Faroque yesterday said the BNP Parliamentary Party would sit in a meeting this week to review the speaker's proposal and decide on returning to parliament proceedings.

Low in Bay

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pressure gradient lies over the north Bay.

Squally weather may affect the maritime ports and coastal areas of Bangladesh, the bulletin said.

The maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to hoist local cautionary signal number three.

All fishing boats and trawlers over North Bay have been advised to remain close to the coast and proceed with caution until further notice.

Under the influence of the well-marked low and steep pressure gradient over the north Bay, the coastal districts of Bangladesh and their offshore islands and chars are likely to be inundated by wind driven surge of two to four feet height above normal astronomical tide.

The people of the coastal belts are advised to take necessary precaution to face the inundation due to the probable wind driven surge for their safety.

Cyclone Aila hit the southern coastal districts of the country on May 25, killing at least 180 people and injuring many others. The storm damaged many houses, standing crops and trees and washed away cattle.

Over 200 kids

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Our Nature correspondent reports: About 200 children were taken to the Singra Hospital with vomiting tendency and stomachache after they took Vitamin-A capsules and deworming tablets in Singra upazila.

However, only 16 of them were admitted to the hospital while the rest were released after giving treatment.

Our correspondent from Jhenidah adds: At least 33 children fell ill on Saturday after taking the medicines. They were admitted to the Jhenidah Sadar Hospital.

Some of them had been released after receiving treatment, said Civil Surgeon Niranjana Kumar Sikdar.

Our Faridpur correspondent reports: At least 10 more children fell sick in several areas in the district after taking Vitamin-A capsules and deworming tablets. Of them, six were admitted to the Faridpur General Hospital and two to the Nagarkanda Health Complex.

Our correspondent from Magura adds: several hundred parents thronged the Magura Sadar Hospital for check-up of their children on Saturday following the rumour of deaths of a few children in Faridpur, Jhenidah and Rajbari.

Meanwhile, the health minister in a statement said the Vitamin-A capsules were manufactured by a renowned Canadian pharmaceutical company and certified by the World Health Organization (WHO). The expiry date of the capsules was 2012.

The deworming tablets with validity till 2010 were supplied directly by the UNICEF, said the minister.

He said the Vitamin-A campaign has been going on successfully in the country for the last three decades.

The minister assured that the capsules are by no means harmful to children and requested the parents not to panic.

While talking to the electronic media in the afternoon the minister said about 2,521 children in some remote areas of Charbhadrans upazila in Faridpur were given Vitamin-A capsules and deworming tablets on June 4.

Of them, 29 in a particular area got admitted to the District Sadar Hospital with diarrhoea and vomiting tendency.

Quoting the district health officials, the minister said examining the facts it could be easily understood that the sickness was caused not only by the side effects of the capsules but also malnutrition, excessive heat and environmental reasons.

Moreover, the area had experienced an outbreak of diarrhoea for the last few days.

The children, who fell ill after having Vitamin-A capsules and deworming tablets, received treatment at various hospitals in Faridpur, Sirajganj, Jhenidah, Madaripur, Magura and Natore, Directorate General of Health Services said, adding that most of them had already been released.

Photo show

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June 1 at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, which was inaugurated by Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Abdul Hamid.

A photography exhibition on river pollution and encroachment was also held there.

Another photography exhibition will be held at Bahadurshah Park in the capital on June 14-16.

Mamun seeks

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inhumanly while in remand and then forced to give that statement in which he named several others in connection with the extortion.

Mamun was produced before the court under tight security yesterday. He is convicted to a total of 20 years' imprisonment in three cases.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Tania Kamal ordered that the retraction petition be kept in the case record.

In his confession given on April 9 of 2007, Mamun said that he along with five others -- including former BNP lawmaker Khairul Kabir Khokon -- extorted the money from a construction firm owner in June 2005.

In the case he filed with Kafrul police on March 27 of 2007, Khan Mohammad Aftab Uddin, managing director of Reza Construction Ltd, complained that Mamun, Khokon and the five others extorted Tk 16 lakh from him in 2005.

Mamun, a close friend and business partner of former BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, was arrested from his house at Banani DOHS on March 26, 2007.

Later, police seized a 22 bore pistol and eight bullets from his house.

Mamun, an accused in a dozen extortion cases, was sentenced to a total of 20 years' imprisonment in separate cases for possessing firearms and ammunition, for not submitting his wealth statement, and for amassing wealth through illegal means.

Clean Heart

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personnel along with paramilitary BDR, police and Ansar joined the operation aiming to quell countrywide violent crimes.

As many as 44 people died in custody and hundreds sustained injuries following torture during the drive, triggering criticism for violation of human rights.

The then government, however, confirmed only 12 deaths and said all the victims died of heart attack in hospital after being handed over to police.

The joint forces during the drive arrested 11,245 people including some 2,482 listed criminals. The drive also resulted in recovery of 2,028 firearms and 29,754 rounds of ammunition.

In absence of parliament session, the then government first promulgated an indemnity ordinance on January 9, 2003 just prior to the start of pulling out troops involved in the drive.

Later the government passed an indemnity law on February 24 the same year.

Promulgation of the ordinance and later passage of the law were widely criticised by a cross-section of people including eminent lawyers and rights activists.

Many of its critics termed the law unconstitutional and contrary to fundamental rights, though the then law minister Moudud Ahmed tried to justify it saying there is a provision in the constitution to provide indemnity.

"Indemnity is an aborted measure. If there is indemnity to prevent trial of any extrajudicial killing, it should be repealed," advocate Sultana Kamal, former adviser to the caretaker government and rights activist, told The Daily Star.

She added, "There should be trial of every extrajudicial killing, not only those committed in the long past but also those occurred in recent times."

Rights activist and eminent jurist Dr Shahdeen Malik said, "This indemnity law can be challenged in the higher court."

The law minister also said any person aggrieved by the law could go to the High Court challenging constitutionality of this law as it violates fundamental rights of the people or petitioner."

Shahdeen termed the Operation Clean Heart a so-called drive.

Army seeks

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QRF as one of its weaknesses in relation to rendering assistance to the government for maintaining internal security.

If QRF is formed, it can also be sent to UN peacekeeping missions on short notice, which will elevate Bangladesh Army's image in the international arena, the report claimed.

The report also suggested forming a national crisis (management) committee in light of the 'current reality' to deal with all possible future crises.

The national probe committee investigating the recent BDR mutiny, in its report submitted to the government last month, also suggested formation of a national crisis management committee at the top level.

The February 25-26 BDR mutiny this year, left 74 people dead, including 57 army officers who had been working in the border security force on deputation.

The proposals for the formation of the national crisis management committee came after the National Security Council, the highest consulting body on security affairs, had become defunct, observed security experts.

"The absence of a national crisis management committee comprising all ministries and forces, might result in a lack of coordination and waste of time. That could create a national crisis, or the public might lose confidence in the security forces," said the army's report.

The report also focused on threats to the country's security, and on possible grounds for Bangladesh to get involved in unwanted internal and external wars.

Internal reasons identified in the report, for which Bangladesh Army might get involved in conflicts are: if the Chittagong Hill Tract separatist movement is revived; if any non-state force or terrorists adopt the policy of an uneven warfare, or if any terrorist base inside the country threatens global peace and stability; and if law and order deteriorates and the government's authority is challenged by anti-people activities of drug and arms dealers.

"According to Bangladesh's foreign policy, we will not initiate a war. But, Bangladesh might inadvertently get

He said: "Such an indemnity is contrary to the constitution and all norms of the civilised nations as no-one is above the law in the country. Hence this law should be repealed and perpetrators of crimes during that period whoever they may be should be brought to justice."

"The government may consider the matter if anyone says there was a killing during the Operation Clean Heart but they could not proceed to get justice due to the indemnity law," the minister commented.

During the operation several murder cases were filed with different police stations in the country. But the indemnity law precludes any move to seek justice in the court of law for custodial deaths and human rights violation during the countrywide clampdown on crime.

The Joint Drive Indemnity Act, 2003 says no-one can seek justice and no complaints can be filed against anyone involved in the joint drive for any arrest, death, torture, violation of rights and for any damage of physical, mental or financial nature between October 16 and January 9.

Moreover, no complaints can be lodged against the person or persons who had ordered the drive.

The law says, "It is necessary and pertinent in the interest of the people to indemnify all the persons, including the members of the armed forces and law enforcers, for all the acts done during the joint drive from October 16, 2002 till the workday of January 9, 2003."

This is the second indemnity in the country's history after the infamous ordinance of 1975 that indemnified the people involved in the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his family members and others on August 15, 1975.

The Khondker Mushtak Ahmed government, which came to power following the bloody coup, issued the 1975 ordinance.

Later, the ordinance was ratified in parliament in 1979 with the Fifth Amendment to the constitution that gave legitimacy to the military rule of Ziaur Rahman.

The Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina repealed that infamous indemnity ordinance in parliament in 1996.

More structures

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sought time to remove machinery, said Islam.

Azim Garments obtained a High Court (HC) stay order, Islam added.

The eviction team yesterday also could not complete the demolition of Merchants Dyeing Limited and Hossain Dyeing factory.

Senior Executive Magistrate Abul Bashar Md Ameer Uddin of Gazipur led the team while Assistant Commissioner (Land) of Gazipur Atul Sarkar and BIWTA Assistant Engineer Shahajad Rahman were present during the drive.

Ameer Uddin said it would take one or two more days to pull down structures of the Merchants and Hossain Dyeing factories.

The team on the Tongi end of the river removed the debris strewn under the Tongi Bridge that was left there after makeshift structures were pulled down.

The eviction team in small groups were engaged at Masjid Market, Fish market and Bata Market in Tongi Poura Bazar to complete the unfinished demolition.

Magistrate Mokbul Hossain said that they had not yet faced any resistance by the river grabbers.

The authorities yesterday engaged a total of 100 labourers and five boats including three tugboats for the eviction drive.

BIWTA Joint Director Abul Bashar and senior Deputy Director Golam Kabir supervised the drive.

The daily expenditure for the drive is Tk 1 lakh including labour cost, fuel costs for transportation and others, said BIWTA officials.

A labourer is paid Tk 300 per day excluding Tk 60 for transport charge for each labourer, they said.

The BIWTA launches similar drive today against grabbers in the river Shitalakkhya of Narayanganj.

WASA STARTS CANAL RECOVERY DRIVE

Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) yesterday demolished 10 concrete, semi-concrete and tin-shed structures constructed illegally on the Katashur canal adjoining Mohammadpur Kaderabad Housing.

Of the demolished structures, two were concrete structures, four semi-concrete and four tin-shed structures, said an official of Wasa.

The drive was conducted to free the city canals from encroachers ahead of monsoon to prevent water-logging, he said.

The drive led by magistrate of Wasa Kazi Wasiuddin started at 10:30am and continued till 5:00 pm. The drive resumes today.

Home asked

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yesterday that his ministry sent the letter to the home ministry following the intelligence report.

"Security should be strengthened on all the court premises across the country," Shafique said while talking to newsmen at his Secretariat office in the afternoon.

Earlier in March this year, the SC authorities had requested the government to take immediate steps to ensure security on the court premises.

In letters sent to home and law secretaries and inspector general of police on March 11, the SC Registrar's Office said judges, lawyers, litigants and staff of the apex court have been "feeling insecure under the present circumstances."

Mentioning deaths of several people including judges and lawyers in militant attacks in the recent past, the letter said the government should make foolproof security arrangements including deployment of additional police at the courthouses.

But authorities concerned did not take steps to provide sufficient security on the SC premises.

Tigers

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that a shock doesn't occur like the Super Eight encounter against the same team at Barbados in the 2007 World Cup to all but book their Super Eights berth for the second successive occasion.

The match starts at 6:30pm Bangladesh Time with state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) and STAR Cricket beaming the live coverage from Nottingham.

Mohammad Ashraful's men must be careful against the ICC associate members as they know the conditions well and have nothing to lose.

The Irish will look to the experience of their county players to make an impact in their first-ever World Twenty20 appearance, but Bangladesh have also very good record against them at any level and they continued it in England when they beat Holland and Scotland quite convincingly in the warm-up games.

Expat experts

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Geological Survey of Bangladesh, Bureau of Mineral Development, Barapukuria Coal Mine Company, Dr Hossain Monsur of geology department of Dhaka University, and representatives from chemical engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) and from Rajshahi University will also participate in the session.

Meanwhile, the plan for this brainstorming session has raised eyebrows as some newspapers reported that it is going to cost Petrobangla around Tk 80 lakh.

Sources however said the event should cost around Tk 30 lakh. Petrobangla will pay for air tickets of six of the eight expatriates while two will bear the cost themselves. The other expenses include those for four-day use of facilities at Jamuna Resort and for transport.

Petrobangla initiated the process of hosting the session following a directive from the energy adviser who had been maintaining links with expatriate energy experts for long.

"There is a 110-member forum of expatriate energy experts. Selection of experts for the session was made through this forum," said one source.

Dr Nasir Ahmed, Buet-educated chemical engineer and double PhD holder on minerals from UK and Australia, is acting as coordinator of the expatriate group. He is a UNDP consultant, and is working on coal mine for the last 20 years in New Castle, Australia.

The other guests include Dr Saad Anapip, professor and chair of marketing department, Pennsylvania State University, US, Dr Khalequzzaman, head of geology department of Lock Haven University, Pennsylvania, US-based environmentalist Dr Sarwat

Chowdhury, Buet-educated chemical engineer and former official of Gas Transmission Company Ltd (GTCL) now living in Australia and working on mines and minerals at Queens Monarch University Saleq Sufi, mining engineer working in Queensland coal and iron mines Masud Hossain, and Melbourne-based Global Positioning System and Global Information System expert Sultana Nasrin.

These experts will give their independent opinions on the draft coal policy that the government failed to approve in the last four years, mainly due to resistance from some groups, and controversy over the Asia Energy Phulbari coal mine project.

During the last caretaker government's tenure, the energy ministry held its last meeting on the draft coal policy in October last year. The present Awami League government started working on the policy from March-April.

Many view the draft policy as anti-investment, unattractive and unrealistic. For instance, the draft makes it mandatory for a coal mining company to set up power plant. In reality, a mining company is unlikely to be a competent one for this task.

On rehabilitation, the draft policy demands that after mining the relevant land must be returned to the original owners in original state. It contradicts the land acquisition act of the country.

The policy also says that a committee would periodically fix royalty on coal production. Such a provision would create uncertainty over the investment. So, there should be a clear-cut range of royalty for both underground or open-pit mining so that project cost and return can be predicted, sources noted.

Budget braces

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Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has projected a growth of 5.88 percent for the outgoing fiscal year that ends this month.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) in a quarterly report last week said Bangladesh's current growth rate is still much better than many Asian nations.

However, analysts say although the country maintained macroeconomic stability in the outgoing fiscal year, prudently, the situation might reverse in the coming year.

Impacts of the global financial meltdown, a big budget and fall in revenue income due to decline in commodity prices prompted them to make such apprehension.

Moreover, public, private and foreign investments are showing a downward trend.

"The economy may be under huge pressure in the first six months of the next fiscal year," said Prof Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue.

He said the country has already started feeling the pinch of the ongoing global financial crisis impacts of which will be seen clearly in the first half of the next fiscal year.

Zaid Bakht, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) also echoed Rahman's view.

"Macroeconomic management will be critical in the next fiscal year," he said.

The current trend indicates that this year's revenue target of Tk 54,500 crore is unlikely to be met. A growth of 12.7 percent has been achieved in the first 10 months of the current fiscal year against the annual revenue growth target of 15 percent.

Year-on-year revenue growth dipped from 20.5 percent in the first quarter of the current fiscal year to 12.2 percent in the three quarters till March with the global recession hitting hard the earnings from import duties.

Bakht said the government is going for an expansionary fiscal policy, which requires a strong revenue backup. But suspension of anti-corruption drives and declining import prices suggest that revenue income is unlikely to go up next year.

"Slow revenue collections might force the government to cut its development expenditure," he added.

Gross investment has declined for the third consecutive year since 2006-07 and stood at 24.18 percent this year against previous year's 24.21 percent.

Public investment hit a record low of 4.63 percent of the GDP this year against 4.95 percent in fiscal 2007-08 and 6.2 percent in fiscal 2006-07.

The ADB in its latest quarterly report last week cited prolonged low investment as a major weakness of Bangladesh's economy.

Prof Rahman said the issue of energy and infrastructure constraints must be addressed to encourage both domestic and foreign investments.

Export earnings are also showing a downward trend as an impact of the global recession, he said.

Data show that export earnings were \$11.6 billion by the third quarter of the outgoing fiscal year against a target of \$16.3 billion.

Although growth of RMG exports is still satisfactory, it is declining sharply -- from 44.6

percent in the first quarter of this fiscal year to 24.2 percent in the first half and 19.9 percent at the end of the third quarter.

Earnings from export of primary goods like raw jute and jute products, leather and leather goods have gone down significantly.

Trade deficit rose to \$3.6 billion in the first eight months