

Most political parties hail verdict

BNP says people's Zia belief not to be erased
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most political parties yesterday hailed the High Court's verdict that declared that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, not Ziaur Rahman, proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

The main opposition BNP, however, said the belief of millions of people that Zia had declared the country's independence could not be erased by a judgment of any court.

Talking to The Daily Star, ruling Awami League (AL) Presidium member and Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said, "If you tell a lie ten times to establish it as a truth, it never becomes a truth."

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It's Bangabandhu, not Zia

HC rules Sheikh Mujib declared independence

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and
ASHUTOSH SARKAR

In a watershed judgment, the High Court yesterday ruled that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, not Ziaur Rahman, had proclaimed the republic's independence in 1971.

The proclamation was issued on March 26 and relayed by Kalurghat Betar Kendra in Chittagong the following day, it added.

Observers say the judgment will help end the long and bitter wrangle over a significant episode of the country's independence history.

The unwanted debate over a settled issue began after the assassination of Ziaur Rahman in 1981, as his party BNP claimed he was the proclaimer of independence, not



HC observes...

- * Mujib's proclamation made on March 26, 1971
- * Circulated through Kalurghat Betar next day
- * Protected by the constitution

HC orders...

- * Confiscate books describing Zia as proclaimer
- * Take steps against history distorters
- * Publish real accounts of independence struggle

Bangabandhu.

The HC bench comprised of Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Mamtazuddin Ahmed yesterday dismissed that claim, which had befuddled many over the Liberation War history.

It also ordered cancellation of second edition of the third instalment of 15-volume war documents that portray Zia as the declarer of independence.

The Liberation War affairs ministry brought out the publications during the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government in June 2004.

The court said the government could take actions against those who sought to rewrite history.

In the judgment containing several rulings and observations, it also directed the administration to confiscate the books presenting Zia as proclaimer of independence.

Besides, it ordered to ensure that textbooks at all levels and for all mediums have the facts about the independence struggle.

The HC gave its verdict after reviewing all relevant documents, books, newspapers published at home and abroad in March 1971, and arguments of the lawyers.

It directed the Attorney General's Office and the petitioner to send a copy of the judgment to the educa-

tion ministry.

The debate had the nation deeply split for nearly three decades, much to success of those relentlessly trying to warp the young minds.

The most damaging was inclusion of distorted history in the textbooks.

The judgment, first of its kind, came in response to a writ petition filed by freedom fighter MA Salam.

Salam filed the petition as public interest litigation (PIL) on April 19, seeking court directives to stop distortion of history.

Later, Wing Commander (retd) Hamidullah Khan, a freedom fighter and BNP leader, became party to the case, opposing the petition.

Former chief of army staff Lt Gen (retd) Harun-ar-Rashid endorsed the petition and became involved in the

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JS trio gets letter, won't turn up before probe body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, his deputy Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui and former chief whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain will not respond before the all party parliamentary probe body though it yesterday asked them through letters to appear before it on June 27 to defend themselves against graft charges.

BNP sources said, the three leaders will not respond to the parliamentary probe body as they think the move to summon the trio is politically motivated.

Directed by the committee, the parliament secretariat delivered separate letters to

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Withdraw amnesty to whiten money

Major chamber, business leaders ask govt
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern over allowing whitening of black money in the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2009-10, major chambers and trade body leaders in a joint statement yesterday urged the government to withdraw the provision to encourage the genuine taxpayers.

"If it is to be considered at all, it should be only for those who have legally earned profit in business but did not declare in the past, and such declared earnings may be allowed on payment of normal tax plus a token penalty for default," the statement said.

It also said, the businessmen are very much concerned about

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Muhith spells new formula

Plans to offer tax rebate for honest taxpayers, money-whitening at fixed rate of tax

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the face of intense controversy over whitening of black money, Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday came up with a new formula to do justice to white money holders.

Black money holders would be allowed to make investments by paying a fixed rate of tax. If white money holders going for investments have already paid tax at a higher rate, they would get tax rebate at a certain rate.

The finance minister floated the idea

at a post-budget discussion with Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) at his office.

Muhith said if his proposal gets public support, it would be adopted as a government policy, and linked up with the Public-private partnership (PPP) initiative.

The FICCI team led by its President Waliur Rahman Bhuiyan that participated in the discussion severely criticised the proposed opportunity for money whitening. The scope to use black money for buying flats has already pushed their

prices beyond the reach of middle class people. And only black money holders would be able to buy flats from now on, the team members said.

The finance minister admitted that allowing money whitening is not ethically justified. But the opportunity is being given to attract more investments. He however said there are other options which can be considered.

"Truly speaking, it is very difficult to say how much investment will come out of it (money whitening). There is no

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BNP for 'neutral' water experts

Won't join Tipai team without them
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Farrouque yesterday said if neutral water experts are not included BNP will not join the all-party parliamentary team to visit Tipaimukh dam area.

"We are ready to propose BNP lawmakers' name for the committee if the government sends a team of neutral experts with it," the opposition chief whip said at a press briefing at the Jatiya Sangsad Media Centre.

BNP proposed five names of national level water experts -- Dr Ainun Nishat, former water secretary Asafuddowla, Dr Torofder, MA Rab and Dr Asif Nazrul -- to incorporate into the team, he said.

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Mayhem over illegal toll at Buriganga Bridge-2

50 hurt as CNG drivers, cadres clash for 6 hours
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred CNG-run autorickshaw drivers and hired cadres of the leaseholder of Buriganga Bridge-2 engaged in a series of clashes for six hours over collecting toll, injuring at least 50 people.

Transport movement to the south and southwestern districts of the country was suspended during the period, as the bridge remained blocked from 2:00pm due to the clash.

Police fired rubber bullets and charged baton to disperse the drivers who retaliated by throwing bricks.

Witnesses said the supporters of the auto-rickshaw drivers also fired gunshots and exploded crackers. Keraniganj Upazila Chairman Shahin

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PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

An identified criminal is seen with a firearm during a clash between the men of the toll collection authority of Buriganga Bridge-2 and general people yesterday evening an increase of tolls.

Cross digital divide to reach digital Bangladesh

Mobile operators told at The Daily Star roundtable
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The mobile industry in Bangladesh, which is still lagging at the bottom rung of tele-density in the region, is at the crossroads of growth where the huge untapped rural market beckons it. But the challenge is strong enough as the cost of owning a mobile set and connection is too prohibitive, making the vision of a Digital Bangladesh a pipe dream, a roundtable organised by The Daily Star was told yesterday.

The options to overcome the odds to bring about a revolutionary change in rural lifestyle in terms of internet use, telemedicine help and e-education are quite a few and some of them could be addressed through budgetary measures.

Mobile operators said the Tk 800 tax on SIM card is a big hindrance for a poor person to buy a mobile connection and this single reason pulled down the mobile industry growth from a high 6 percent in

January 2008 to a minus 3.5 percent in October 2008. This extra tax along with a 25 percent duty on mobile sets makes it prohibitive for the commoners to use mobile.

Since the mobile technology debuted in the country in 1993, six operators have added 46.41 million customers to their networks as of May this year. And of this customer base, maximum mobile penetration has been taking place in urban areas.

Bangladesh's tele-penetration is about 34 percent with the industry having generated more than 6.75 lakh direct and indirect employments so far, they said at the roundtable styled "Mobile sector growth prospects".

Operators blamed the tax on SIM card as the major digital divide between the rural and urban areas. They said such tax is one of the major barriers to expanding their costly networks to the rural areas as these areas may not give a healthy return in terms of revenue like in urban areas.

They said one option to close this divide could be withdrawal of the tax, which would ultimately increase the government's revenue collection through high sales and use of mobile connections.

A monthly surcharge--a minimum fixed rent per connection--could be another option from which the government will receive more revenues than it now receives from the tax on SIM card, they said.

Mobile phone operators are willing to introduce cheaper SIM cards for rural areas if the government removes the existing tax. A special tariff package along with the connection could be offered to rural people under this cheap connectivity initiative.

Mahfuz Anam, publisher and editor of The Daily Star, said, "Our next growth lies in the rural areas. So, any rationale for any cost-cutting to penetrate into rural areas

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FULL ROUNDTABLE TEXT ON B4

2 'muggers' bullet-hit in 'shootout' with Rab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two suspected muggers suffered bullet injuries in a "shootout" between their accomplices and members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) last night in the city's Sutrapura area.

Rab sources said a patrol team of Rab-10 came under firing by a group of snatchers near Dayaganj bridge around 9:00pm, prompting them to fire back that ensued a gun battle between the Rab team and the criminals.

After the shootout, the Rab team found the two criminals--Russel, 20, and Johnny, 22, of South Jatrabari--with bullet injuries in their legs.

The injured were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where they were undergoing treatment.

The Rab said the criminals were preparing for a crime.

MPs assured of pay, benefit hike

92 lawmakers get offices
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speaker Abdul Hamid yesterday said lawmakers would see a rise in their remuneration and allowances, as they are not drawing much.

"We are considering hiking remuneration and allowances of members of parliament (MPs)," the speaker said at a function at the

Jatiya Sangsad Media Centre while handing over keys to the offices of MPs.

The parliament secretariat yesterday handed over offices to 92 MPs in the first phase of allocating offices to lawmakers at the old MPs' hostel on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

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