

Ensure better

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growth continued to increase at the present rate of 1.39, the population will almost double in the next 49 years as the country's present total population is about 14 crore.

"For this, fulfilling people's basic needs like food, clothing, accommodation, education, health and communications infrastructures will be more difficult," she said.

The government has taken steps to ensure family planning, healthcare of mothers and children from the capital city to union parishad level, she said.

Hasina said the government is reopening the community health clinics to ensure maternal and child health facilities.

The health minister in his speech underscored the need for bolstering the country's population control programme through increasing male users of family planning methods.

He said as per the target of the government's health, nutrition and population programme, it has only next two years in hand to increase the users of the family planning methods by 72 per cent.

The theme of the World Population Day 2009 is "Responding to economic crisis: Investing in women is a smart choice".

The minister said among the 55.8 per cent users of the

family planning methods, only 5.2 per cent are males. Besides, despite having demand, 17.6 per cent capable couples are yet to get contraceptives.

He said population growth rate dropped to 1.39 per cent in 2008 from 3 per cent in 1971 while total rate of re-productivity decreased to 2.7 per cent in 2007 from 6.3 per cent of 1971. "But there is no scope to be complacent. Total rate of re-productivity will have to be reduced to 2.2 per cent and net rate to one per cent by 2011," Ruhul said.

He told the function that the population control campaign will be beefed up in Sylhet and Chittagong divisions and in chars, slums and haor regions as these areas are lagging behind in attaining the target of population control.

The health minister identified early marriage as one of the reasons for the high rate of maternal and child deaths.

Ruhul unveiled a postal stamp and its opening cover at the function. Besides, prizes were distributed among the best workers, institutions of family planning programme, and winners of an essay and painting competition arranged on the occasion.

The function was also addressed by PM's Adviser Syed Mudasser Ali and UNFPA representative in Dhaka Arthur Erken.

Bad loans pile up

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would make things much easier for the banks.

Since independence, 67,336 cases settled, but they got back only Tk 4,200 crore against Tk 9,000 crore they had claimed.

They could not realise a substantial amount because of out-of-court settlements.

On July 5, Finance Minister AMA Muhith placed in parliament a list of 2,196 people defaulting on loans to the tune of Tk 15,451 crore.

Many of the borrowers have been defaulters for up to three decades.

Bank sources said powerful people get their loans rescheduled taking advantage of the legal loopholes and favourable political climate.

Dandy Dyeing, owned by former prime minister Khaleda Zia's brother Sayeed Eskander and her son Tarique Rahman, came 54th on the July 5 list with loans of Tk 41 crore.

It had its loans regularised immediately after the four-party alliance came to power in 2001.

With the BNP-led alliance in opposition, Dandy Dyeing is now listed as a defaulter.

Likewise, several firms owned by Tarique Rahman's friend Giasuddin Al Mamun are also on the defaulters' list.

According to Muhith's list, eight companies of Beximco Group are defaulting on loans of Tk 1,000 crore. Of them, four are among the top 10 defaulters.

Beximco, whose Vice-chairman Salman F Rahman is private sector development adviser to Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, however claims they have regularised all their default loans.

Beximco had its debt payments rescheduled as soon as the AL-led grand alliance came to power.

Moreover, the finance minister has lately announced that the government would soon publish a fresh list that may not have Beximco firms.

The first list of defaulters was published at the beginning of the 90s by the then government's finance minister M Saifur Rahman.

JS body

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recommendations made by the parliamentary committee regarding stripping the MP status of Jamiruddin Sircar.

"There is no scope to question the legality of the committees as the parliament has the right to form such committees. The right has been given in the constitution and rules of procedure," he said.

About the threat of legal battle by the accused if the recommendations were implemented, the speaker said, "In the past such incidents did not take place in our country but it happened in our neighbouring country. However those debates will take place in the parliament."

"The question of legal battle will come once the parliament takes action against them. If they want legal battle against the legality of the parliamentary committee, they can go on," he added.

Muhith's was the second of its kind.

As his list is based on the information updated till March, many of the defaulters got their loans rescheduled by the time it came out.

Against this backdrop, bankers wonder whether the finance minister should publish a list every three months.

Bangladesh Bank once undertook a Large Loan Restructuring Scheme (LLRS) to reduce the volume of default loans.

Under the LLRS, loans amounting to Tk 50 crore and above was supposed to be handled by two committees.

The central bank issued a circular in this regard in 2003, but all these efforts came a cropper.

BDR-BSF

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The conference will take place against the backdrop of killings of three Bangladeshi cattle traders at Benapole border yesterday. BSF gunned down the traders while they were returning home from India in the morning. The incident triggered tension along the border.

Bangladesh will also table issues like killing, injuring and torturing of unarmed Bangladeshi nationals by BSF and Indian nationals in bordering areas and forcing in Bangla speaking Indians to Bangladesh.

"Defence strategy in the name of erecting fences along the border, road construction and excavation within 150 yards of the border line will come as agendas at the conference," read the list of BDR agenda, adding that Dhaka would also ask Delhi for repatriation of the nationals of the two countries who have completed jail terms.

Facilitating development works for preventing river erosion has also been included among the agendas.

In its list of agenda sent to BDR, BSF emphasised making joint efforts to prevent human trafficking and extend cooperation in curbing trans-border crimes.

India will also seek Bangladesh's cooperation in construction of their border fence and facilitating development works along the borders.

"Joint efforts to prevent trans-border crimes like smuggling of narcotics and formulation of joint border management plan will also be featured at the discussion," added the BSF list of agenda.

Regarding security in border, the BSF will put forward the issue of alleged presence of Indian insurgent groups in Bangladesh, deportation of a few leaders and members of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

This is the second DG-level conference between BDR and BSF since the BDR rebellion in Pilkhana in February.

Bodies of 2 Bangladeshis found in river

BSF 'tortured' them to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Saikhira

Police recovered bodies of two Bangladeshi cattle traders, allegedly beaten to death by Indian Border Security Force (BSF), from Ichhamati river at Soladana border near Haroddah yesterday.

The victims were identified as Omar Ali Gazi, 35, son of late Abdul Aziz Gazi of Gorerdanga and Abdur Rahman, 20, son of Akhter Ali of Etagachha village under Sadar upazila of the district.

Police said locals found the bodies floating in the bordering river in the morning.

On information police recovered the bodies and sent them to Sadar hospital morgue for autopsy.

People of the bordering villages said BSF members confronted Omar and Akhter while they were returning to Bangladesh with cattle on July 10 evening.

They claimed that BSF inhumanly tortured the victims and killed them and threw the bodies into river.

Sub-inspector Ali Reza of Sadar Police Station said several marks of injuries were found in both of the bodies.

Contacted, Officer-in-Charge of Sadar Police Station confirmed the incident.

11 hurt

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of the school Nasima Begum said the school building was constructed in 1995 but it became dilapidated over the last few years.

"We informed the higher authorities about the deteriorating condition of the building. But any step in this regard is yet to be taken," she said.

Upazila Engineer Abul Mansur said the school building was officially declared 'unfit for use' in February this year.

4 killed

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Karim, 45, and Nahiduzzaman, 30.

Police and witnesses said the bus, carrying garment workers, rammed into the taxicab at about 8am and plunged into the roadside ditch when the driver lost control over the steering, killing Jewel and Soheli instantly.

Karim and Nahid later died at a local hospital. The injured passengers of the bus were admitted to the hospital.

Sircar's graft

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defend their claims. I think he [Jamir] should have appeared before the committee and let people know whether the allegations against him were right or wrong," said the minister.

However, BNP Joint Secretary General Abdullah Al Noman said, "The constitution does not give the scope for scrapping anyone's membership in parliament."

Questioning the formation of the parliamentary body and its probe, he said, "The allegations were brought against the former speaker, deputy speaker and chief whip to harass them politically."

Dr Piash Karim, professor of Economics and Social Sciences at Brac University, said, "Whether he [Jamiruddin Sircar] had committed a crime or not is a matter of debate. But if anyone commits crime, the person should be punished."

The allegations brought against him should be probed under the formal legal system and necessary actions should be taken accordingly, Piash said.

Economist Dr Nazneen Ahmed of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) said if he [Jamiruddin] had committed any offence, he should be tried under the country's formal legal system.

Commenting on the draft law approved by the cabinet for security of the family members of Bangabandhu, Dr Ruhul said since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had been the target of criminals several times she needs the security.

The family members of Bangabandhu need to be provided with houses as part of security, he added.

BNP leader Noman said both Hasina and the BNP chairperson need security sure but providing extra security and houses to family members of Bangabandhu will not be accepted by people.

Answering to a query the health minister said the government would take steps to improve the condition of the community health clinics to ensure health care facilities to all.

War criminals

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the Upazila Parishad Act 2009 by incorporating a few provisions including those for barring war criminals from contesting polls to the important local government body.

The new law also curtailed the EC's authority to fix the date for upazila parishad election and formulate rules for conducting it.

The EC asked the LGRD ministry to give back the powers, which were vested in the commission by the upazila parishad ordinance promulgated by the last caretaker government, the EC Secretariat officials said.

The EC has decided not to hold the due by-elections to a number of posts of chairman in some upazila parishads until the government amends the act, EC officials said. These posts fell vacant following the death of the previous chairmen.

Elections to 481 upazila parishads were held in January under a set of conditions for candidates' qualifications and disqualifications stipulated in the now-defunct ordinance. But holding by-elections to the vacant posts under the revived act will create discrimination between the existing chairmen and the aspirant, a senior EC official told The Daily Star.

He said the new upazila parishad act also did not make it mandatory for a candidate to submit seven-point particulars to the EC, like the ordinance, to facilitate voters to choose right

candidates.

Officials in the LGRD ministry said they are working on the EC's proposals.

The EC also informed the government about its decision in writing. Amid growing demands, the last caretaker government barred war criminals from contesting elections to both parliament and local government bodies in line with the EC's proposals.

War criminals were not allowed to take part in the elections to parliament on December 29, 2008, and four city corporations and nine municipalities in August 2008.

The AL-led government has already passed a bill in parliament to ratify the ordinance that brought huge amendments to the Representation of the People Order including those that disqualify war criminals from parliamentary election.

Although the government did not ratify the ordinances on city corporations and municipalities, it placed two separate bills in parliament seeking to enact new laws for the two local government bodies. The proposed bills, which are awaiting passage in the next session, also bar war criminals from contesting elections to city corporations and municipalities.

The proposed laws also empower the EC to fix the date for polls and formulate electoral rules and code of conduct for these elections.

Special police unit

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additional IGs, four deputy inspector generals (DIGs), 15 additional DIGs, 23 superintendents of police (SPs), 110 additional SPs, 19 senior Assistant Superintendents of Police (senior ASPs), 306 ASPs, 115 inspectors, 720 sub-inspectors/sergeants, 386 ASIs, 128 Nayeks and 1,142 constables.

The police unit will also have medical officer, budget officer, audit officer, accountant and cashier, 11 computer operators, three data entry operators, 66 cook and 69 sweepers from civilians.

Hasanul Haider, assistant inspector general (AIG) of requirement and manpower (R&M), Bangladesh Police told The Daily Star that the necessity of such an unit was felt seriously since the country-wide synchronised bomb attacks on August 17, 2005.

"We have drafted the proposal of the unit after extensively examining the formation and activities of counter-terrorism organisations of different countries," he said, adding that India has such a unit.

He also said they have focused on protection of human rights and intelligence and technology-based policing.

The core values of the proposed police unit have been set as unwavering obedience to the constitution, respect for the dignity of people, accountability to the laws, fairness and institutional integrity and leadership.

As per the organization, the

bureau will have a training wing, a strong internal oversight wing for counter-intelligence of its members, an administration and logistic wing, a plan and coordination wing and a legal and press wing. An additional DIG will lead each wing.

The bureau will function under two divisions-- investigations and operation division and terror intelligence and analysis division. An additional IG will lead each division.

Investigation and prosecution wing will be the two wings under the investigations and operation division.

Under the investigation and prosecution wing, there will be six sections-- investigation and prosecution, counter terrorism analysis, terror finance and anti-corruption, national threat centre and terrorist tracking, organised and cyber crime and forensic and crime scene analysis sections.

An SP will head the forensic and crime scene section while additional DIGs will lead other sections.

Under the field operations wing, there will be a 30-member district attached office at all districts. An additional SP will lead each district office under the supervision of an additional DIG who will be aided by 15 SPs.

Besides, there will be two more wings under the terror intelligence and analysis division-- coordination and external affairs wing and counter intelligence wing.

Prof Muzaffer

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Muzaffer, however, welcomed Hasina's eagerness to investigate TIB's activities and corruption allegations against its officials.

"I don't have the information about any corruption of TIB officials, but if the government has any they can investigate it," Muzaffer said this after attending a roundtable on "NGOs Accountability and Responsibility: Recent Experiences" at the National Press Club in the city.

Neeti Gobeshona Kendra organised the roundtable and its trustee member Dr Sheikh Towfique M Haq read out a keynote paper that says, "Bangladesh has turned into a NGO-infested country."

Muzaffer, as a chief guest at the roundtable, said that there are several non-government organisations doing business in the name of welfare, which should be stopped, as social services and business cannot go together.

If any NGO wants to be accountable and responsible, first of all it has to bring fairness and objectivity in their activities, he said, adding: "Beneficiaries get only 20 to 22 per cent of the foreign funds while rest are used as 'cost of fund' meaning house rent, salary and other expenses."

Some NGOs in the country practise corporate culture in the NGO sector that doesn't

bode well for the country like Bangladesh as this culture is bringing about division in the society, he said.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman, as a panel discussant, said, "People put blames on NGOs which is not always justified as NGOs are, of course, doing a lot of good jobs too."

The country's financial activities are run in three sectors-- public, private and NGO; as there is a huge gap between NGOs accountability and transparency it raises a lot of questions about the sector, he said.

Director of Neeti Gobeshona Kendra Mahbubul Alam Ripon moderated the roundtable while former secretary Shahidul Alam, Prof of public administration of DU, Dr Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman, Prof ASM Atiqur Rahman and advocate Alina Khan spoke at the roundtable as panel discussants.

Discussants at the roundtable recommended forming an independent NGO commission to ensure transparency and accountability of NGOs.

It also recommended taking measures against fake NGOs and updating the existing legal structures and formulating separate laws for profitable schemes including micro credit programmes.

Buriganga

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Islam said the existing laws would be strictly implemented to free the Buriganga of encroachers and pollution and if necessary new laws would be formulated. He said no matter how powerful the encroachers are, even if they are of the ruling Awami League, they will not be spared. "Legal actions are being taken and will be taken against those who tried to prevent us from freeing the rivers," he said.

After the human chain, several thousand people participated in a boat rally that went up to Tower Ghat in Kamrangirchar and Shamsheer Ullah Ghat in Keraniganj from Swari Ghat.

Bapa Vice-president Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin MP, Nasrul Hamid Bipu MP, Bapa General Secretary Abdul Matin, Keraniganj Upazila Chairman Shahin Ahmed and Lalbagh Awami League President Hasnat also spoke on the occasion.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed claimed that many organisations have been demanding for steps to save the Buriganga but no effective steps had been taken. "Now we are happy that the High Court has issued an epoch-making order to free the Buriganga of illegal occupation and pollution."

During the rally, a 14-point demand was made regarding rivers, their encroachment, pollution and preservation. The speakers said the industrial units, whose waste is responsible for pollution of the Buriganga, have to set up waste treatment plants.

Bhasani

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A group of students and local people, including shopkeepers, locked in the clash and threw bricks at each other, leaving several people, including students injured, campus sources said.

At one stage, the shopkeepers and local people got united and attacked their dormitory and ransacked a students' room on the campus. They also attacked several messes of the students near the university and damaged several computers.

In retaliation, the angry students attacked the shopkeepers and damaged several shops at the bazar, leaving several people injured.

On information, a police team led by ASP Basir Ahmed rushed to the spot but failed to bring the situation under control.

Vice-chancellor of the university Prof Nurul Islam, SP Mizanur Rahman, Additional District Magistrate Saidur Rahman and local political leaders rushed in and talked to both the feuding groups but they also failed to pacify them.

Later, the university was declared closed for an indefinite period to avoid the clash, said Prof Nurul Islam Miah, registrar of the university.

A tense situation was prevailing around the campus till filing of this report at 4:00 pm. Additional police were deployed on the campus to avoid further clash.

Gulshan Lake

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The experts involved will examine chemical and aquatic components in the water to determine the kind of treatment required for the purification. It will make the lake biologically symbiotic and productive, he said.

GS president CM Shafi Sami said they would work with Poba for the purification and biological management of the lake.

This stretch of lake is likely to have toxic contamination and metallic wastes, as untreated liquid wastes used to flow into it, said Poba chairman Abu Naser Khan.

A multi-disciplinary team of experts comprising chemists and biologists is required to bring this stagnant water body under biological management, he said, adding that the initiative may be a pioneering example for purification of water bodies.

He said vice-chancellor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) would coordinate the experts' work.

Prof Mahmudur Rahman of Dhaka University Psychology department, botanist Md Jamshid Uddin and aquatic plant expert SMA Rashid spoke, among others, at the discussion chaired by Shafi Sami.

10 killed in Somalia clashes

AFP, Mogadishu

More than 10 people were killed yesterday in fighting in Mogadishu between Islamic insurgents and troops of Somalia's beleaguered government, police and hospital sources said.

The fighting broke out in the northern district of Manbolyo when the rebels attacked a government position, police officer Abdullahi Dale told AFP.

"The fighting left more than 10 people dead so far but most of them are the combatants," he said. "Our forces are still in defensive positions and we have killed many terrorists."

The head of the Mogadishu ambulance service, Ali Muse, said, "We have seen around 11 people who died during the clashes this morning and the ambulances so far admitted 37 injured civilians in the hospitals."

The authorities could not confirm reports that a senior government military officer was among those killed.

Both sides claimed successes, with a spokesman for the government forces, Farhan Mohamed Arsanyo, showing journalists what he said was the body of an Afghan commander of the insurgents.

He was killed early Saturday in clashes in the northern Mogadishu district of Karan, Arsanyo said, adding, "We have nine others, some of them alive, and we will show (them) to the media."

Mohamed Osman, a commander from the rebel Hizb Al-Islamiya, replied, "What they are claiming is totally untrue, but I confirm that we have killed their officials this morning and including their commanders of the fighting."

Hizb Al-Islamiya and Shebab, a hardline Islamist armed group, launched an offensive against the internationally-backed administration of President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed on May 7.

Cox's Bazar
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electric line snapped abruptly on the stage of the programme and electrified it.

The injured were admitted to Chokoria Health Complex. Later, two were shifted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital as their condition was stated to be critical.

A pall of gloom descended on the wedding house following the tragic incident.

Reshuffle

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said the reshuffle might be done upon Hasina's return on July 17.

It will be the first reshuffle in Hasina's six-month-old cabinet.

"The regions the party leaders come from will be taken into consideration for inclusion in the council of ministers," sources added.

Sources said Hasina might induct new faces into her cabinet this time too.

"She [prime minister] has evaluated the overall performance of ministers and state ministers. The portfolios of those who put up a poor show will be changed to low-profile ones through inclusion of new cabinet members," said sources.

Soon after forming the cabinet, Hasina warned her colleagues of losing portfolios for failure in putting up satisfactory performance.

Rumors of reshuffle in cabinet have been rife in recent times. But sources said the premier took her time to evaluate performance of the cabinet members.

Of the 10 new cabinet members, two to three could be from AL presidium members and joint general secretaries while one might be picked up from Jatiya Party, a component of the Awami League-led coalition.

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad on Thursday night held talks with the premier at her parliament office on inclusion of another JP leader in the cabinet. JP lawmaker GM Quader currently holds the portfolio of the civil aviation and tourism ministry.

A technocrat might also be given a portfolio in the council of ministers.

The prime minister expanded her cabinet on January 24 through inclusion of six state ministers. The council of ministers now has 38 members. Besides, there are seven advisers to the prime minister.

More than 200,000 people have been displaced in the past two months, while hundreds of civilians are believed to have been killed and wounded, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

A Shebab official Saturday denied a report that Islamist fighters had beheaded two men for supporting Ahmed's government.

"The information indicating that several people had been beheaded by Shebab is totally baseless and nobody has been executed," Sheikh Mahad Omar, in charge of the central Bay and Bakol regions, told reporters.

Sources on Friday told AFP the men had been decapitated on Wednesday near Baidoa, a town in southern Somalia controlled by the militia.

The Shebab, fighting to oust Sharif, have imposed strict Sharia, or Islamic law in areas under their control.