

Local govt bodies to be strengthened

Says Muhith

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said local government bodies, including district and upazila parishads, would be strengthened with a view to making them effective and increasing the locals' involvement in the development activities.

Although there had been some loopholes, those would be minimised very soon, he said, adding: "We want to make them workable in real sense."

The minister said this at a view exchange meeting at the Sylhet Press Club with President of the press club Muktabis-un-Noor in the chair.

He said, "We are ready to face any just criticism from the media since it helps discharge our duty in a right way. We believe in freedom of the press without which democratic values cannot be restored in society."

"We have zero tolerance on corruption. It is a major social curse."

Without curbing corruption, no development efforts can achieve success. Eliminating graft is possible through bringing major changes in management system, Muhith noted.

He asked the press club authorities for establishing a full-fledged information centre

which would provide all sorts of information through IT. The government is committed to building a digital Bangladesh.

Muhith said, "A country goes digital means it will be an e-state, all its activities such as governance, commerce, education, agriculture, etc will be powered by computer and internet. We are already working that way."

He further said the making of an ICT-driven society in the country is now just few steps ahead. The ruling party's election manifesto pledged to build a 'digital Bangladesh' where people will get a developed life, free of crime, corruption and misrule and be able to face the challenges of the 21st century.

He said today almost every state is heading towards a knowledge-based society and the country cannot stay away from the advantages out of it.

The minister later joined a reception accorded to GPA-5 holders at the city's Bluebird School and College and visited the Bangladesh Betar, Sylhet centre.

Lawmaker Syeda Zebunnesa Haque, Chief Editor of the Daily Uttarpurba Aziz Ahmed Selim, press club Vice President Al-Azad, Sadar Upazila Parishad Chairman Ashfaqur Ahmed, district AL President ANM Shafique and press club General Secretary Ahmed Nur also spoke.

Call to cancel illegal leases in hilly areas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sachetan Nagorik Samaj yesterday demanded the government cancel all illegal leases in hilly areas and bring the land grabbers into book.

It also demanded publication of a list of the grabbers who illegally took leases, including Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin.

It placed a set of demands at a human chain and a protest rally by the organisation in front of the National Museum in the city.

The government should take immediate steps to stop land grabbing by punishing the grabbers, they said, adding that formation of a land commission is a must to end land disputes in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Other demands include withdrawal of all temporary army camps and stopping Operation Uttaran, implementing the CHT Peace Accord and providing constitutional recognition to the indigenous people.

Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Syed Abul Maksud, General Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum Sanjib Drong, Hiron Mitra Chakma, Shourav Sikder and Robayet Ferdous spoke at the rally.

'RTI Act to help ensure accountability'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Information Commission would take steps to implement the Right to Information Act to ensure people's access to information, which will help ensure accountability and justice and reduce corruption in public and private organisations, Information Commissioner Prof Sadeka Halim said yesterday.

Prof Sadeka said this at an orientation programme on 'Right To Information Act and its implementation' organised by Nagorik Uddhyog at its seminar room.

The RTI Act will help ensure accountability in the government and non-government organizations, thereby reducing corruption and establishing good governance, said Executive Director of Nagorik Udyog Zakir Hossain, who chaired the orientation programme.

The speakers also called on the government to strengthen the Information Commission by recruiting more manpower, raising fund allocation and providing other logistic support.

'Don't waste public money, indulge in corruption'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday said wastage or corruption in use of hard-earned public money would not be tolerated.

Every amount of the public money has to be used properly, he added.

The minister said this while speaking at a meeting on budget implement of the current fiscal year at the ministry auditorium.

Nahid suggested moving forward with the view to meet the annual target before the stipulated time.

Education Secretary Syed Ataur Rahman, additional secretaries, joint secretaries and director generals of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Directorate were present at the meeting.

Humanitarian cause of youths can make world different

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

One philanthropic medical student from the US and a group of BBA students from ASA University in the city once again showed that the strength of the youth can make a difference in the world.

Together they launched an organisation titled 'The Basic Needs Programme' with an aim to assist the marginalised segment of society living in the slums of Dhaka, focusing mainly on the street children.

The group also aims at lending a hand to families that lost male breadwinners either through death, disability or abandonment.

It all started back in 2007 when Richard Hubbard, a student of University of Sewanee in the US, came to visit Bangladesh to carry out a medical research.

"I was shocked to see such an incredible number of street children in Dhaka. One particular baby named Halima was my ultimate inspiration. She was malnourished to such an extent that she weighed only seven pounds at the age of one. Her skin held on to her bones like she was an old woman," said Hubbard, president of the programme, who later provided for Halima's treatment.

Halima was the last of seven children abandoned by their father. The mother could hardly provide for them.

Earlier, Richard met another enthusiastic ASA student Sohan Rahman with similar inspiration. Together they decided to do something to give children like Halima a chance to live better in the world. Thus, the Basic Needs Programme started its journey.

Currently, the programme



PHOTO: STAR

ASA University Bangladesh Vice Chancellor Prof Md Muinuddin Khan speaks at the first introductory conference and announcement of 'Basic Needs Programme' at ASAUB in the city yesterday. On his right are Prof Saiful Islam and Md Shafiqul Haque Chowdhury.

has two branches -- one in Sewanee University and the other is managed by 16 BBA students of ASA University.

Sohan, managing director of the programme, said initially, just four families were involved in the programme. Today the programme provides for 25 families, all with the personal charities made by the members and donations from individuals.

The families are involved in the programme for 12 to 18 months until they achieve a level of financial success. They receive food, housing, schooling and most importantly, the mothers are trained and encouraged to seek employment or start a small business with loans, he added.

Basic Needs also launched a school-cum-orphanage in Goichachhia village under

Kendua upazila in Netrokona where there are no other schools. Around 40 students are currently receiving education at the school. It has six classrooms with the capacity for 300 students.

Some 20 orphans will be provided with housing and other facilities at the school. The land of the school was donated by the villagers of Goichachhia. The full construction work will be finished by January 2010.

Basic Needs also runs free medical camps. ASA students also launched a Basic Needs club on their campus. Students from any other education institutions can join their cause of child development.

Hubbard said Basic Needs plans to increase the number of children by 25 percent in

three years. There are also plans to establish a farm, provide clean water and family planning advocacy programmes.

Part of the money earned from the farm will be given to the programme, the rest will go to the families involved, he added.

Hubbard said, "I found it most interesting that most street children are not orphans. Most of them lost their fathers either to an accident or disease or he remarried. And their mothers are trained to be mothers or wives. Lack of life skills led them to their struggle."

"We want to provide a level of relief from the anxiety of survival to the families who are involved in our programmes," he mentioned.

Adulterated ghee factory busted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI) yesterday filed three cases with a Dhaka court against two companies on charges of marketing ghee with BSTI seal illegally and producing and marketing biscuit and cake using materials harmful to human body.

Officials of the BSTI and members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) raided two companies Messer's Janani Special Gaoa Ghee and Messer's New Abad Bakery in Malibagh and Shiddheswari areas in the city yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

The joint team of BSTI and Rab personnel seizes huge amount of adulterated ghee from the outlet of Messer's Janani Special Gaoa Ghee at Malibagh in the city yesterday.

Arrest of 3 Chhatri Sangstha girls challenged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three separate writ petitions were filed yesterday with the High Court (HC) challenging the arrest of three members of Islami Chhatri Sangstha (ICS), female student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, in Pirojpur.

The petitions also prayed to the court to grant bail to the detained ICS members.

The HC bench of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Quamrul Islam Siddiqui yesterday heard arguments from the petitioners' counsel and fixed today for passing orders on the matters.

Petitioners' counsel Barrister Abdur Razaq told the court that the police arrested his clients on suspicion and the detainees were taken on a three-day remand on the basis of a general diary (GD).

The police did not submit any report of the remand to the court and in this situation their detention is illegal and unconstitutional, he said.

Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Razik-Al Jalil yesterday told The Daily Star that he would place his arguments on behalf of the government in this case before the court today.

Police on July 3 arrested three ICS members from a madrasa in Pirojpur, suspecting them to be involved in criminal activities. They are -- Tania Akhtar, 26, a primary school teacher and resident of Parerhat Road in Pirojpur town, Syeda Fauzia Akhtar, 18, of Machhimpur, and Jasmin Nahar, 20, of Zianagar thana in Pirojpur.

STRANDED PAKISTANIS Khaleda assures help if returns to power

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night assured the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh of looking into their problems when her party would return to power in future.

The assurance came when

Biman staffs demand reinstatement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines employees, who went into 'voluntary retirement' yesterday gave a four-day ultimatum to the government to reinstate them.

They threatened to stage a sit-in in front of Prime Minister's Office if their demand goes unheeded.

Several hundred Biman employees who retired under the 'voluntary retirement scheme' yesterday staged a two-hour sit-in in front of Biman head office yesterday to press home their demand.

They also submitted a memorandum to the chairman of Biman Board of Directors.

The agitated employees alleged that they were forced to go into retirement under the 'voluntary retired scheme'.

As many as 1857 Biman officials and employees were sent into retirement under voluntary retirement scheme, an initiative taken during the immediate past caretaker government to turn the national flag carrier into a public limited company in an effort to make it a profitable venture.

a 27-member delegation of Bangladesh Muhajir Welfare and Development Committee led by its founder president Ejaz Ahmed Siddique met the former premier at her Gulshan office at 9:15pm.

After the meeting, Ejaz told reporters that they informed Khaleda Zia of the problems facing the leftover Pakistani nationals in their long camp life. The problems include scarcity of water, electricity, food, healthcare, education of their children, housing and the like.

Work for people's welfare

Minister urges young docs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Increasing number of young doctors resorting to private practices is doing more harm than good to the society, said Minister for Health and Family Welfare Dr A FM Ruhul Haque yesterday.

He advised them to dedicate their lives for the welfare of the nation and its people.

He was speaking as chief guest at the inauguration of the 9th Foundation Training Course for BCS (Health) Cadre Officers at Biam auditorium in the city.

With Md Sirajul Islam, director general of Biam Foundation in the chair, Iqbal Mahmood, secretary to the establishment ministry, and Prof Shah Monir Hossain, director general of DGHS, also spoke on the occasion.

11 shot in gunfight with robbers

A CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

At least 11 persons including four policemen received bullets in an hour-long gunfight between police and robbers early morning yesterday at Thaingkhali under Ukhia upazila on Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway.

Police and witnesses said, when around 10 to 15 armed dacoits put up a barricade on the highway with logs of wood at around 4:30 am and were preparing to rob Dhaka bound goods-laden trucks from Teknaf land port, a police team led by Ukhia thana OC Proddip Das reached there.

The robbers, sensing presence of the police, asked them

to retreat and started firing indiscriminately. Police also opened fire in self-defence and exchanged 20 rounds of bullet, sources said.

In an hour-long gunfight, Ukhia thana SI Ekramul Haq, Md Kibria, Amir Hossain, constable Jamshed were wounded when bullets lodged in their hands, legs or head, police said.

They have been admitted into Ukhia Upazila Health Complex.

Confirming the incident Proddip Das said, police conducted a raid in the area later and arrested bullet-hit gang leader Mujibur Rahman alias Monia dakat, 30, and his accomplice Badsha Miah, 30.

The left leg of Monia was

torn off by the gunshot. Monia and Badsha were admitted to the upazila health complex. Later, Monia was taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital in the morning as his condition deteriorated.

Police also recovered five bullets, two long-range guns, a light gun and a sharp weapon from them.

Monia, son of Abul Manzur of Palongkhali union under Teknaf upazila, is accused in five robbery cases with the Ukhia police station.

Police said, at least five other dacoits were injured during the battle but could not be arrested as they managed to flee into the nearby jungle.

Two separate cases were filed.

UNB, Dhaka

President Zillur Rahman yesterday emphasised on involving the young entrepreneurs, as the future leaders of the nation, in the country's mainstream development.

He made the remark when the visiting Junior Chamber International (JCI) World President Jun Sup Shin paid a courtesy call on him at Bangabhaban.

Shin was accompanied by JCI World Vice President Tae-Gun-Lee and National President of JCI, Bangladesh Aftab Mahmud Khurshid.

During the meeting, Shin told the president that the JCI, a worldwide organisation of young leaders and entrepreneurs, has been working together to develop themselves, their communities and the world with more than two million members across the 100 nations.

The JCI invites young entrepreneurs and professionals in the age group of 18-40 years to make positive changes in the society through providing various training to them.

Zillur appreciated the JCI efforts to utilise the youth force in the development activities.

He also praised the JCI's programmes targeting the poor and distressed people as well as raising voice against the global warming.

The president mentioned that it was very encouraging that many Bangladeshi youths

are becoming entrepreneurs and he urged the JCI to promote leadership quality and entrepreneurship skill in them.

He also urged the JCI to further extend their various welfare programmes in the country, especially during the natural calamities.

Secretary of the President's Office Mohammad Shafiqul Alam, Military Secretary to the President Maj Gen Md Ehtesham Ul Haque and President's Press Secretary Abdul Awal Howlader were present during the meeting.

BSF to launch women battalion

BSS, New Delhi

Women will now guard the borders of India with Bangladesh and Pakistan and assist in checking women and child trafficking as well as narcotics smuggling.

Director General of Border Security Force (BSF) of India ML Kumawat told journalists at the BSF headquarters of Jammu Frontiers at Paloura on Saturday that the battalion would be commissioned by Union Home Minister P Chidambaram on July 25.

He said the battalion has been raised to increase participation of women in maintaining the security of the country and redressing their poor participation rate in comparison with their male counterparts.

The women battalion will be posted on the borders with Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Gujarat, and with Bangladesh in West Bengal, he said.

The women battalion will also carry out frisking operations and night patrolling on the border and other areas.

Kumawat said the deployment of the battalion would be of great help in checking narcotic-related crimes since women are increasingly being used as couriers in trans-border narcotics smuggling particularly on the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Since male BSF personnel were unable to thoroughly frisk women suspects, the female battalion would go a long way in preventing narcotics-related crimes, he said.

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