

Wrong policy

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which according to the committee "led to manipulation" in sugar market.

The watchdog body urged the ministry to cancel the policy of exporting sugar immediately and acquire the stock-kept for export from Deshbandhu and take steps to reduce the price of sugar below Tk 50 per kilogram.

The committee has also decided to investigate the matter including why the caretaker government took such decision of exporting.

"It is astonishing that the caretaker government gave permission to export sugar although the country was undergoing shortfall of sugar. It is quite clear that the policy is one of the reasons behind the unstable sugar market," Tofail Ahmed, chairman of the standing committee told reporters after the meeting at the parliament complex.

"The committee asked the ministry to cancel the provision immediately," said Tofail, also a ruling Awami League lawmaker.

Elaborating the issue, Tofail Ahmed said, the caretaker government only allowed Deshbandhu Sugar Mill to import as well as to export sugar and without floating any tender.

Comparing sugar demand and production in the country, Tofail said, "We just cannot understand how the caretaker government allowed exporting of sugar."

"The country's annual consumption of sugar is 14 lakh tons while it produces only 79,000 tons," he said.

Kamal Ahmed Mojmunder, a member of the committee said the Deshbandhu Mill led syndication in sugar market

causing crisis and abnormal price of the essential item.

He said due to caretaker government's policy, Bangladesh Sugar Corporation had to sell about 24 thousand tons of sugar to Deshbandhu Sugar Mill at Tk 33 per kg, which it exported to different European countries.

But the import price of sugar during the time was Tk 42 per kg, he added.

Later, Deshbandhu demanded more 12 thousand tons of sugar from Sugar Corporation at lower price and the state owned corporation allocated them six thousand tons.

"Of the six thousand, Deshbandhu exported only 851 tons and stocked the rest," he said.

"The committee asked authorities concerned to take steps to seize rest of the amount of sugar from Deshbandhu and sell it in open market," Tofail Ahmed told reporters.

The committee also observed that the present government's decision to allow tax-free import of sugar would not affect the market during the Ramadan as the move was made too late.

"We have heard that the caretaker government allowed exporting sugar to get the opportunity of quota system in EU countries. But can it be a reason to allow sugar export when we are in serious shortage of the product?" Tofail questioned.

Contacted, Hossain Zillur Rahman, former commerce adviser to the caretaker government, denied talking on the issue.

"I cannot talk on the matter in this way right now," said the former adviser.

40pc swine flu victims young: WHO

AFP, Vienna

About 40 percent of people who have died of swine flu or fallen seriously ill were young and otherwise healthy, an expert from the World Health Organisation told a conference in Vienna yesterday.

Forty percent of the most serious cases, as well as deaths, concerned people "who would otherwise be considered healthy," WHO expert Sin Lun Tam told a conference on pulmonary diseases that runs until Wednesday in the Austrian capital.

Of those who had fallen gravely ill from the H1N1 virus, over 50 percent were below the age of 20, he said.

Meanwhile, the death rate was highest among people between the age of 25 and 49, he added.

The expert also noted that between 15 and 30 percent of those admitted to hospital with the H1N1 virus had to be treated in intensive care.

And the origins of the disease were still unknown, he said.

In Australia and the United States, children made up the highest number of hospitalisations, according to the WHO.

At least 3,205 people have died of the disease since it was uncovered in April, the organisation said on Friday.

Parties to lose

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national identity and punish if anyone has more than one identity card or fake cards or provides false information in the cards, Azad said.

Registration of national identity would be carried out under the supervision of the Election Commission, the draft bill says.

Azad said the prime minister told the cabinet that no party's registration would be automatically cancelled, as the Election Commission would inform the respective political party through letters if it fails to submit its constitution within the new timeframe.

So far ruling Awami League and its alliance partner Jatiya Party have submitted their amended party constitutions by July 25, the stipulated timeframe fixed by the EC earlier.

The cabinet also approved policies and strategies on the implementation of allocations under the public private partnership (PPP) for 2009-10 fiscal to attain its target for increasing GDP growth rate up to 8 percent by 2013.

He said the government has fixed five strategies to implement the PPP initiative. These are reforming institutional structure, setting up separate units to implement the PPP, necessary allocation in the budget, providing revenue incentive to the investors and launching publicity toward the PPP programmes.

The meeting also approved Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2009 to increase the country's capacity to face the challenges of global warming. It also observed that foreign assistance would be needed to tackle the impact of global warming, the press secretary said.

Besides, the cabinet also approved a proposal to renew the memorandum of understanding between Bangladesh and South Korea under Employment Permit System to export more Bangladeshi manpower to that country.

Ministers, state ministers and secretaries concerned attended the meeting.

PDB floats

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CMEC (lead bidder) and Shenzhen Shenwan Power of China and Asian Entech and Otobit Ltd of Bangladesh.

Interestingly, the Power Cell during the caretaker government rule had disqualified Summit in the first tender for Bibiyana power project on grounds that it did not have adequate funds required to qualify for this project -- a deduction that Summit had repeatedly challenged and the Cell refused to accept. Summit was qualified for a 450 mw power project in Sirajganj under the four-party alliance government, but the contract was never awarded on political consideration.

The Power Cell disqualified three bidders -- Ranhill Berhad of Malaysia, Independent Power of the UK and Globeleg, the UK.

These are well-known power companies, but sources say their documents had some shortcomings.

The Cell's selection once again surprised many in the power industry as it had dropped a large company like Independent Power and a local major player Globeleg while selecting little-known bidders like Meiya-Shasha or Asian Entech-Otobit.

Again, the selection of CMEC-led consortium was based on CMEC's 'experience' of a hydroelectric project that has not been completed and that is undergoing a drastic financial rearrangement.

The Cell sent its recommendation to the Power Division of the energy ministry, which will approve it so that the Cell can invite the four bidders to submit their technical and financial bids for this World Bank-financed project.

Hartal fails

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protection committee, spoke about the action programme at a hartal-hour rally at Paltan.

The 6:00am to 12:00noon shutdown was called to press the government to retract from awarding three offshore gas exploration deals to two foreign companies with what they claim was the provision of up to 80 per cent gas export.

A few activists of the national committee set several copies of the daily Prothom Alo and the daily Amader Somoy on fire at Shabbagh for publishing "misleading" information about yesterday's hartal programme. Several copies of the daily Prothom Alo were also burnt down at Paltan.

Udichi activists held cultural programmes supportive of the strike at the intersection in the midst of rallying and marching of processions.

The hartal was apparently restricted to Paltan, Dainik Bangla, Zero Point, Jatiya Press Club, Bijoynagar areas as police kept barricaded all the approaches to the areas, diverting transport movements to other routes to avoid any unwarranted incident.

Earlier in the morning, hundreds of leaders and activists of the committee holding banners, placards and festoons in their hands brought out processions parading the main city thoroughfares including Paltan, Jatiya Press Club, Dainik Bangla and Shabbagh areas.

The law enforcers restricted transport movements in the aforesaid areas at around 7:30am when some of the hartal pickets threw brick chips at several running vehicles.

Traffic movement was also halted for some time in the morning at Shabbagh intersection as hartal pickets ransacked several running vehicles and tried to barricade the road with barbed wire fences kept by the side of the road.

However, the demonstrators proceeded towards Muktangan from Shabbagh at around 10:30am and then traffic movement eased.

Lawmakers' desire

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The AL lawmaker consulted the LGRD minister and submitted the amendment proposals.

A number of lawmakers in the ruling alliance predict that the government may consider amending the controversial provision in the Upazila Parishad Act that made MPs advisers to the parishads in their respective constituencies.

The newly elected upazila parishads' chairmen and vice-chairmen are continuously criticising the government for making the lawmakers advisers to the parishads that have yet to begin functioning properly.

As lawmaker Mozammel placed his amendment proposals in parliament, some ruling alliance lawmakers protested and shouted. But LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam agreed to accept the proposals.

The lawmakers finally voted for the passage of the bill.

With the passage of the bill, the country's over 300 municipalities got a law to perform their functions lawfully and due elections can be held to these bodies. In fact, the municipalities were running without any law for over last six months.

The immediate past caretaker government repealed the then municipality ordinance and promulgated a new one with some new provisions including two deputy mayoral posts.

The ordinance however ceased to have effect on January 25 as it was not ratified in parliament within the specified timeframe.

On expiry of the ordinance's effectiveness, the government placed a bill in parliament in March seeking to enact a new law on municipalities and the House sent the bill to the committee for scrutiny.

Each of the union parishads will have to publish a citizen charter specifying the nature of its services and how people can get the services.

As an administrative unit of the republic, the union parishads will perform functions relating to administration and the work of public officers, the maintenance of public order and the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development.

around Shabbagh.

The usual traffic gridlocks seemed comparatively eased in the morning as less number of private cars rolled out on the streets. Movement of both the motorised and non-motorised vehicles was usual.

Government and private offices functioned as usual and business establishments and shopping malls in the city remained open during the general strike, the first in nearly three years.

Main opposition BNP extended its 'moral support' to yesterday's shutdown call while two of the government allies -- Workers Party and Samyabadi Dal -- who have representations in the oil, gas protection committee, preferred not to support the strike.

Huge contingent of forces from different law enforcement and intelligence agencies were deployed at different points of the city.

2 die

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Rab members recovered a pistol and two bullets from the spot.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Taleb Rahman of Rab-2 told The Daily Star that Roni, hailed from Munshiganj, was accused in several cases, including five murders.

In Kushtia, a police team of Islamic University Police Station had a gunfight with a group of gangsters near Berbaradi GK (Ganges-Kabadak) canal at about 4:00am.

Police sources said they found a gathering near the canal while patrolling the area. As they reached the spot, the criminals opened fire on the police forcing them to retaliate.

Samir, leader of outlawed Gono Bahini, was found dead lying on the spot after the incident.

His accomplices, however, managed to flee.

One LG gun and two bullets were recovered from the spot. Samir was an accused in seven cases, including three murders.

With this, the death toll reaches 22 in the district from "crossfire" in last 18 days.

Extortion less than in past, says Tuku

UNB, Dhaka

State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku yesterday said the incidents of extortion are not as much as they were during the previous governments.

"I have talked to representatives from road transport sector and business leaders at a meeting on law and order situation on Sunday. They informed me that the incidents of extortion are now less compared to the previous governments," he said.

The minister advised the newsmen to compare the crime situation during nine months of present government with the caretaker and the previous five-year rule of BNP led coalition governments.

Grabbers

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When the BNP-led coalition government assumed power in 2001, it revived the plan quickly and allocated 100 plots among its supporters.

A frantic effort to set up apartments, hotels, shops, restaurants and motels has been witnessed there since then.

A hotel owner recently built a concrete wall stretching up to the sea but was forced to demolish it following intervention by local administration and journalists.

An official of the Cox's Bazar district administration said the present government has already moved to clamp down on the beneficiaries of plots given away during the tenure of previous BNP government.

Each of the 100 plots measuring an acre of land was handed over for Tk 34 lakh. Many of the beneficiaries defied the lease terms and sold their plots at prices up to five times higher than the amount.

Huge investments have been made for building hotels, cafes, restaurants and apartments since then, said the official wishing anonymity.

"There is not much the administration can do now to stop this, other than file cases and wait for years for a verdict. The damage has already been done," the official said.

In a recent move the DoE in Chittagong has served 22 notices to hotel owners in Cox's Bazar asking them to show cause as to why legal actions would not be taken against them for violating law. As per the law one has to obtain environmental clearance before building any installation in "ecologically critical" areas.

The DoE has also filed cases against two hoteliers in the area on charge of violating the law.

The land ministry about a month ago in an official notification imposed restriction on earth filling and construction on the Cox's Bazar beach until further notice. Local people alleged that some developers continue construction work there at night defying the order.

Gias Uddin Ahmed, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar, told The Daily Star that his office did not receive any circular from the land ministry. He however said a circular issued by the Planning Commission in 2002 forbids setting up of structures within 300 feet of the Marine Drive that stretches up to Teknaf.

"We have suggested acquiring the entire beach area between Cox's Bazar and Teknaf for the master plan for Cox's Bazar, which is now under preparation," said the deputy commissioner.

"In the master plan, we are putting emphasis on zoning the whole area and hopefully the master plan will be completed by November this year," he said.

But if someone builds structure on private land along the beach, the district administration can do nothing about it, he added.

Teknaf presents a different spectacle. A gang of local thugs led by hotelier Abbas Uddin has taken over acres of khas land in the beach area by forging documents and bribing local administration. The gang is allegedly backed by ruling party men.

Over the last one week miscreants have reportedly cleared a ten-kilometre long green belt for installing hatcheries, shrimp enclosures and housing plots.

Real estate developers have taken up mega plans for building structures on Kuakata sea beach, about 280 kilometres off the capital.

A gang of encroachers has also been active in grabbing lands on the beach defying court orders. They have already occupied acres of the beach area, officially earmarked as khas land. Large signboards have also been put up there claiming ownership of demarcated "plots".

The frenzy of grabbing lands on the beach began with a sharp rise in land prices in the area. Many land grabbers have already set up hotels, restaurants and shops in the beach area.

No action

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Board near Katabunia village under Sabrang union, 11 kms off Teknaf headquarters.

"We're taking time for lodging case in want of instructions from the higher authorities," Teknaf Coast Forest Range Officer Golam Mostafa said yesterday.

He hinted that Assistant Conservator of Forests SM Hasan is likely to visit the spot today and then a case may be lodged.

Mostafa acknowledged that plunderers hid more felled trees in Sabrang region but the department is unable to recover those due to manpower shortage.

Teknaf Upazila Chairman Shafiq Mia, however, claimed that they could not recover at least 10,000 more felled trees, under the custody of an influential clique in Sabrang, due to non-cooperation from the forest department.

Forest Range Officer Mostafa defended his department, saying that it was not possible for the forest authorities to keep vigil over jhau trees on 700 acres of land with only six to seven persons. He blamed Rohingyas coming from across the border of Myanmar for the theft of trees in the region.

Earlier on Sunday, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), police and BDR in joint raids recovered about 7,500 felled jhau trees from different nearby villages of the beach and arrested a man in this connection.

Coastal Forest Department sources said about five lakh jhau trees were planted on 700 acres of sandy beach on a stretch of about 11 kilometres from Shahparir Dwip in

Sabrang Union of the upazila to Baharchhara in 1995 to save life and property of the people living on the Teknaf coast.

In the course of long 14 years, the trees became big and formed a dense forest. Lakhs of jhau trees act as natural wall to save the coast during tidal surges or cyclones. But for the last few months these trees are being felled.

A group of journalists during a visit on Saturday found that hundreds of trees from the government tamarisk tree garden at Khurer Mukh area under Sabrang Union were being cut and taken away in broad day light by some local people and no one was obstructing them, not even anybody from the forest department.

BSF kills 2

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Ruhul were crossing the border with 250 bottles of phensidyl, BDR sources of Phulbari 40 Battalion said.

But the family members of the victims denied the allegation saying Mohsin and Ruhul were returning home after visiting their relatives in India.

BDR sent letters to its counterpart protesting the killing and demanding immediate return of the bodies.

Meanwhile, BSF returned the bodies of two Bangladeshis on Sunday after conducting autopsy.

They were earlier shot dead by BSF troops along the Sundra border in Sadar upazila on Saturday morning.

Later, police handed over the bodies to the victims' family members.

NBR rejects

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facing criminal cases on charge of tax evasion, saying that the section 163 of the Income Tax Ordinance does not permit to disclose those names.

The finance minister said Bashundhara Industrial Complex Ltd and Mosaddek Ali Fala applied to the NBR for settlement of the cases filed against them.

He also said it is the discretion of the NBR whether it will go for settlement in a tax evasion case filed under sections 165 and 166 of the Income Tax Ordinance 1984.

In a tax evasion case, an anti-graft tribunal in September 2007 handed down eight years' imprisonment to five high-ups of Bashundhara Industrial Complex Ltd, including its Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan.

The other four who got eight years' imprisonment are Akbar's wife Afroza Begum and their sons Sadat Sobhan, Safiyat Sobhan Sanbir and Sayem Sobhan, all directors of the company.

Kabiruddin Mollah, deputy tax commissioner of Circle-8 of the NBR, filed the case against seven persons and the company in connection with evading Tk 8.48 crore income tax between the fiscal years 2004 and 2007.

AL men

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as he had refused to withdraw his tender documents against a bid for construction of the Fulchhari ghat protection embankment in Gaibandha.

He said some 50 ruling party activists led by AL district committee member Delwar Hossain Talukder tried to take him to the DC office by force but police rescued him.

Abdur Rashid, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said on information from the hotel a police team rushed to the spot. Sensing the presence of law enforcers the hoodlums escaped.

Earlier, Water Development Board floated a tender asking the contractors to take part in the construction work of the embankment at a cost of Tk 9 crore.

The contractors of Gaibandha and Rangpur made a coalition to help a ruling party-backed contractor get the work, added Monsur. He did not agree to negotiate with them and dropped tender documents at Rangpur DC office.

Manager of the hotel Tofazzal Hossain said Delwar Hossain and some unidentified people had come to the hotel and started beating up the contractor. He instantly called police.

When asked, Delwar Hossain Talukder said he went there to persuade Monsur to make a negotiation with the contractors of Gaibandha.

The court also fined them Tk 8.3 crore, which is to be paid by the convicts according to their shares in the company. They will have to spend one more year behind bars if they fail to pay the fine.

The court has also ordered confiscation of the company's property worth about Tk 22.5 crore for concealment of information of wealth in the statement submitted to the NBR.

On June 2, 2008 a special court sentenced Fala, also former political secretary to former prime minister Khaleda Zia, to five years' rigorous imprisonment in a relief scam case. Fala filed an appeal with the HC against the verdict. He was arrested at his Cantonment residence in the capital on charge of corruption on February 6, 2007.

US open

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climbed up to the family box to hug friends and kiss her husband, Brian, after adding a second grand slam triumph to her 2005 US Open victory.

"I don't have words for this," she said on court during the trophy presentation ceremony. "I'm just glad I got to come back and defend my title from 2005. It's so exciting for me."

Clijsters, unranked due to her long absence, was invited to play the Open as a wild card and had not competed at Flushing Meadows since her first grand slam triumph -- missing the 2006 championship because of injury and the last two in retirement.

It took a while for Clijsters to find the range with her groundstrokes against the ninth-seeded Dane, who was appearing in her first grand slam championship match.

By the end, Clijsters was cracking winners off both wings and registered 36 winners in all to just 10 for the defensive-minded Dane.

Clijsters scored the decisive break of the second set in the sixth game for a 4-2 lead, breaking at love in a game that saw her go into one of her trademark splits as she raced along the baseline for a forehand retrieval.

The first set was mistake-ridden for both players in windy conditions at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Clijsters traded six service breaks with Wozniacki before capturing the see-saw set thanks to a string of errors from the Dane that allowed her to break at love in the 12th game.

The Belgian, who had appeared bothered early by the change of pace in the groundstrokes from Wozniacki, made 20 unforced errors in the opening act to 15 for the Dane.

Wozniacki was up a break at 5-4 and serving for the set before Clijsters closed it out by winning the last three games.

Sugar sold at

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the mill gates every day. Wholesalers, however, opposed refiners' claim alleging that there was a shortfall in the market due to belated deliveries by the millers, which in turn resulted in a hike in sugar transportation cost.

"It is not wholly true that they (millers) are selling sugar at Tk 39 a kg at mill gates. Many of us had bought sugar at higher prices before millers announced to sell at Tk 39 per kg," said general secretary of Moulvibazar Merchant Association.

He claimed that sugar had not been distributed to traders at government-fixed rate.

Wholesalers at Moulvibazar, one of the major wholesale hubs, also alleged that fewer delivery orders (DOs) were issued at Tk 39 per kg by refiners.

"Those who offered higher price got sugar, but not all," said a wholesaler at Moulvibazar.

However, refiners blamed wholesalers for spreading rumours regarding further price hike after Eid. In a letter to the Ministry of Commerce, refiners brushed aside the allegation of inadequate supply by millers. The refiners also said more than 2 lakh metric tonnes of sugar would arrive by the first week of October.

Visits at different markets revealed that many traders, especially wholesalers, stocked sugar and rationed supplies to retail sellers.

Allegations of unfair means by a section of millers were also found which includes the market going under control of a few refiners amid weak market intervention by government entity--TCB.

TCB itself is suffering from poor stocks and still awaiting consignment of sugar--more than 37,000 metric tonnes--to arrive.

Earlier the government had

BDR men

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members of the TFI cell and New Market police admitted them at around 5:00pm.

They bore severe injury marks on their knees, which indicate they suffered torture, sources added.

While lying on the DMCH bed, one of the BDR jawans said, "We were tortured brutally during the interrogation since we had been taken to the TFI cell on Thursday."

New Market Police Station officer-in-charge told The Daily Star, "We were told from Pilkhana over phone about the sickness of two BDR jawans and then our men took the jawans to hospital."