

Khaleda's absence

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frustrated the whole nation.
UNB adds: Speaker Abdul Hamid said, "This rally has been organised on behalf of the Jatiya Sangsad. This is neither a political rally nor any group's gathering. Here both head of the government and leader of the opposition have been invited as guests. Hence, the absence of the honourable leader of the opposition has hurt me."

His remarks came while addressing the 'Anti-poverty Rally throughout the Country', marking the 'International Day for the Eradication of Poverty' at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

He said he wants to make it clear that he had been conducting the House as per the constitution as well as the Rules of Business. "There was no influence (of others) at all in conducting the House," he said.

Hamid said the rally would have been more meaningful had she (Khaleda Zia) joined it. "Still, I hope both the government and the opposition will join hands in the future to work on all national issues, including poverty alleviation."

"As a matter of fact, I have had all preparations to hold such a historic rally after getting her due consent. The issues she has raised as reasons for not attending the event could have been mentioned even at this gathering. And the reaction of the government would have come up at the same time."

The speaker stressed the need for building a consensus to make Bangladesh free from hunger and poverty.

Hamid urged all political parties to be sensible in their behaviour for flourishing the parliamentary democracy.

BSS adds: Syed Ashrafur Islam said, "Begum Zia, even being a responsible leader, has intentionally uttered many untrue remarks to justify her absence from the rally."

He said this while briefing reporters after a meeting of the secretariat body of AL at party's Dhanmondi office yesterday.

He said Awami League will begin general election campaign in the second week of November and the extended meeting of the party will be held in the third week.

In the two-hour long meeting of the secretariat body of the AL discussed the ways for implementation of the decisions taken in the party's first sitting of the newly constituted working committee and reposed duties on the organising secretaries in this regard.

The meeting decided to take stern action against persons violating the party discipline and to be found guilty for corruption and criminal activities.

Terming Khaleda Zia's statement in Friday's press conference as a 'travesty of truth', Syed Ashraf said the nation hoped that the prime minister and the leader of the opposition would take an oath for making the country free from poverty, which was the cherished goal of our Independence.

He said BNP appointed a judge in the High Court who even had no LLB degree. So,

how she says about the independence of judiciary, Ashraf asked.

"We want national unity and hope that the ruling party and the opposition will take important decisions together," he said adding, "but Khaleda Zia dodged the anti-poverty rally as she doesn't want to alleviate poverty from the country."

"The decision of Begum Zia has again divided the nation," Ashraf said urging all to come forward under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina to stamp out poverty.

The secretariat body meeting reposed duties on organising secretaries to organise the party at divisional level.

Jahangir Kabir Nanak, MP has been given charge in Dhaka while Abu Sayed Al Mamun Swapan in Rajshahi, Khalid Mahamud Chowdhury, MP in Rangpur, Mezbah Uddin Siraj in Sylhet, AFM Bahauddin Nasim in Barisal, BM Mozammel Haque in Khulna and Ahmed Hossain in Chittagong.

NASA flies over Antarctica to measure icemelt

AP, Above Antarctica

Hoping to better understand how a melting Antarctica could swamp the planet, a NASA plane outfitted with lasers and ground-penetrating radar made its first flight over the icy continent on Friday.

The DC-8 left Punta Arenas, Chile, on a mission to fly as low as 1,000 feet (300 metres) over Antarctica. Like the NASA satellite that has provided shocking data on how quickly Antarctic ice is disappearing, this plane will measure snow cover and ice thickness. But it also has equipment that will enable scientists to see under the ice shelves, measuring the water below.

The goal is to understand just how warm ocean currents may be pulling the ice sheets seaward, melting their undersides. These ice sheets are rapidly collapsing—as fast as nine metres (27 feet) a year according to a study published in the journal Nature last month. If they disappear, far greater ice masses that lie on Antarctic bedrock could then melt into the sea, submerging coastal communities around the globe.

Bangabandhu

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statements of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman murder case and the apex court will scrutinise those, he said.

Five convicts -- dismissed army personnel Syed Faruque Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Mohiuddin Ahmed, AKM Mohiuddin, and Bazul Huda, now behind the bars, lodged the appeals with the SC in October 2007 against their death sentences pronounced by the High Court.

The Supreme Court started the hearing on the appeals on October 5.

A purchase

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M Meraj Uddin Mollah, MP from Rajshahi-3 (Paba-Mohonpur) constituency, splashed out on a Toyota Noah at a showroom in Chittagong on September 29.

The next day, he spent around Tk 60,000 more to register the multi-purpose vehicle with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, Rajshahi, say registration documents obtained by The Daily Star.

In an affidavit attached to his nomination papers for the December 29 general election, Meraj claimed he is a farmer by profession and that his income from farming is around Tk 75,000 a year.

An additional Tk 36,000 earned from house rents adds up to Tk 1.11 lakh a year.

According to the affidavit, Meraj owns movable and immovable property worth Tk 6.21 lakh. Those include 28 bighas of land valued at Tk 4.06 lakh.

Talking to The Daily Star, Meraj Mollah claimed a businessman by the name of Subhash Kumar Mondal had given him Tk 15 lakh to buy the vehicle.

"The rest of the amount came from some other persons," he said without disclosing the donors' names.

"Subhash was a baby boy when Razakars (collaborators) killed his father during the

Liberation War. It was I who brought him up. Now that he's a rich man by the grace of almighty Allah, he has given me the money I needed to buy the car," he added.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, Subhash, a Chapainawabganj-based businessman, first said he had lent the money to the MP.

But when this correspondent told him about the MP's claim that he had given him (Meraj) the amount for good, Subhash immediately corrected himself: "Whatever the MP says is the case."

Besides buying the fancy minivan, the lawmaker had his three-storey house renovated and re-fitted at a cost of over Tk 10 lakh, said locals.

He however claims he has spent Tk 5 lakh to give his Nawabha house a makeover.

"I'm keeping a record of all the money I have received from others. I can show the list if taxmen or anyone else want," he said.

Replying to a query, Meraj said, "Why should I need to borrow money? People willingly gave me around Tk 40 lakh before the election."

"I don't squeeze a penny out of anyone and neither do I borrow. They give me money out of love for me."

30pc posts

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of freedom fighters were being deprived of the jobs of assistant judges, as there was no quota for them in the recruitment rules of the Judicial Service Commission, sources added.

Sources also said some 394 assistant judges had already been appointed and the recruitments of 211 more had been finalised through the commission without taking into consideration the quota for the children of freedom fighters.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed on October 17 told The Daily Star that his office was working out a plan to introduce a quota in the recruitment rules so that the children of freedom fighters could have access to the jobs of assistant judge.

When asked whether the government has to take permission from the Supreme Court (SC) to introduce the quota system he said the government has the jurisdiction to include anything in the recruitment rules.

The minister also said he is hopeful that the government will complete the inclusion of quota system in the rules and also the recruitment of 211 assistant judges to their offices within this month.

A commission official, requesting anonymity, said that there is only 20 percent quota for the woman candidates in the existing recruitment rules of the commission framed by the military-backed caretaker government.

The rules were framed so that the candidates could be appointed on the basis of merit, he said.

The Judicial Service Commission is already carrying out the medical tests of 211 selected candidates and it will submit its recommendations to the government after completing police verifications, sources said.

Sources said only the entry level judicial officials are appointed to the post of assistant judges while the other tiers are filled through promotion and added that about 400 posts of the lower court judges have remained vacant for more than seven years affecting people seeking justice.

The executive magistrates earlier discharging judicial functions were absorbed in the administrative posts after separation of the magistracy through the separation of judiciary from the executive in November 2007, sources added.

Besides, some of the judges either left the jobs or have been transferred to other services on deputation creating vacancies in the judiciary.

Confined

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another agency in the same area.

While he was discharging his duty, men of his former employers picked him up from in front of Sony Cinema Hall at Mirpur, took him to the agency office and confined him there.

Abdul Moteleb said he got a cellphone call around 1:00pm from a man who asked him to get his brother released by paying Tk 2000.

He found his brother hanging from a grill with a cloth after they had reached the agency office with the money at around 2:30pm, Moteleb said.

Officer-in-Charge Zakir Hossain Mollah of Mirpur Police Station told The Daily Star that Moteleb took his brother to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declined him dead.

They visited the spot but found the agency office was locked and nobody was there, the OC added.

Mineral water

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area and those with IMC marks in Farmgate area. Different such marks are used for different areas.

Some traders in Karwan Bazar said one Badu Mia, whose brother is a local Awami League leader, has driven away at least 20 agents of different mineral water firms who used to supply water in this area. He compelled tea stall and food shop owners to sell water supplied by him.

Asked about it, Badu Mia said shop owners in the area wanted him to supply water.

He claimed he is an agent of Pipasha Drinking Water. He supplies water at Tk 25-30 a jar.

But BSTI officials said a jar of mineral water should cost Tk 60-70.

A jar contains around 60-65 glasses of water.

Traders at Rayerbagh in Kadamtali, seeking anonymity, said Alamgir, Dania unit AL secretary, has driven away agents of different mineral water firms and grabbed water trade in the area.

His men forced traders to take water and cooling machines from them.

Many people in Dholai and adjacent areas of Jatrabari said Haji Azad of AL forced food shops and hotel owners to buy water from his men.

He joined AL recently.

St Martin's Island

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proposal to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office, the navy and air force headquarters and the director general of Coastguards.

The proposal says Myanmar military often crosses the zero line at the Bandraban frontier and carry out operations to combat various separatist organisations. Apart from erecting barbed-wire fences and mobilising army unilaterally, the Myanmar authorities are forcing their nationals to enter Bangladesh territory.

The BDR has suggested designating responsibilities and areas of jurisdiction of the Coastguards and BDR and making intelligence activities of various agencies faster and stronger.

A senior home ministry official yesterday said the Prime Minister's Office is dealing with the "very sensitive and serious matter".

As short-term plans the BDR has suggested increasing and strengthening overall border patrol to prevent Myanmar nationals or groups from entering Bangladesh territory. It has also recommended identifying the routes of refugees and deploying additional patrol teams.

For quick evaluation of the situation and making decisions, the BDR has suggested incorporating army officers in the existing border outposts along the border with Myanmar.

The other suggestions include reinforcement of police personnel in the bordering Ukhia and Teknaf upazilas and additional police patrol on the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Highway, and involving locals including lawmakers, elites, upazila chairmen and members to build awareness against push-in of Rohingya refugees.

"Stern actions should be taken against locals who help refugees come and stay in Bangladesh," says the proposal.

The BDR has suggested erecting barbed-wire fences along the border as a mid-term measure.

The proposed long-term measures include signing an agreement with Myanmar on border security like the 1975 agreement with India, accelerating diplomatic efforts to put pressure on the Myanmar government to resolve the Rohingya crisis.

NGO regulator

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As per the rules, the deputy commissioners and upazila nirbahi officers have the authority to monitor NGOs' activities but they are not directly accountable to the bureau.

While this correspondent contacted for his comment, NGOAB DG Mustaq Hossain Md Iftekar declined to talk to the press.

Acknowledging the fact of the manpower crisis, Muhammad Ibrahim, deputy director of the bureau, said, "The government has a plan to revise The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Ordinance, 1978 to make the NGOs accountable to the bureau."

According to the sources, the bureau receives huge allegations of irregularities and misuse of foreign funds, but they cannot investigate those because of manpower shortage.

The bureau cancelled registration of 45 local and 10 foreign NGOs from June 1990 to June 2008 for not carrying out their activities as per the rules while in 1993-1994 fiscal year, it cancelled registration of 23 local and 10 foreign NGOs for their misconduct, sources said.

Officials of its inspection section, however, could not provide the total number of allegations against the NGOs but one of the officials said, "We frequently get allegations, some of them are investigated while most of the cases are not monitored due to shortage of manpower."

The NGO Affairs Bureau receives about 100 complaints against donor-funded NGOs annually while less than 10 of them are investigated, said another official seeking anonymity.

Tajul Islam, director of the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB), an apex body of about 500 NGOs, told The Daily Star that more manpower and logistic support

and construction of ring roads between border outposts and camps.

To tackle the current tension on the border with Myanmar, the BDR authorities have urged the government to allocate necessary budget for immediate implementation of the short-term plans.

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed of international relations department of Dhaka University said Myanmar is an "isolated state that has minimum links with the international community and has been ruled by military for 20 years".

"Such a country can do anything anytime and Bangladesh should have all kinds of preparations," he said.

"Little diplomatic and political attention has been paid to Myanmar so far. After the BDR proposals, it seems that serious attention is now being paid to Myanmar," said Imtiaz.

42 MPs

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would not pay income tax. However, the NBR should enquire whether those people have taxable income."

Replying to a question, Mirza Aziz said it is not believable that the MPs do not have annual income of Tk 1,65,000. However, none can be held responsible based on assumptions. The NBR has the scope to examine this and it should do that.

Former deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank and now Chairman of Krishi Bank Khondker Ibrahim Khaled said it is an abnormal phenomenon that these lawmakers do not show taxable income. The NBR should investigate the matter. They spent at least Tk 20 lakh during the election and are now saying they do not have taxable income; this is unbelievable.

Ibrahim Khaled said if the NBR investigation finds the lawmakers' income taxable, the political parties should decide on their membership.

The number of taxpayers in the country is only 7 lakh. To increase the number, the NBR has taken a programme to conduct survey down to upazila level.

Ibrahim Khaled said before conducting the survey at upazila level, investigation should be carried out to reveal whether the MPs have taxable income.

Stabbed body of businessman found from his house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The body of a businessman was found with stab injuries at his Nikunja residence in the city's Khilkhet area yesterday.

The deceased Atiqur Rahman Atiq, 38, used to supply garment accessories to different garments in the capital and was a resident of flat No 27 on Road No 15 of Nikunja area.

Police said they had recovered the body after breaking the door of the flat around 9:30am and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital Morgue for autopsy.

Officer-in-Charge ASM Badiuzzaman of Khilkhet Police Station said Khilkhet police and a team of CID found the body left lying in bed with two stab wounds to the chest.

They are yet to ascertain the cause behind the killing, he said.

Sub-Inspector Moazzem Hossain, investigation officer of the case, told The Daily Star that Atiq used to live alone in the flat after he had divorced his wife in January of 2008. A few days ago his parents left the country for America.

He added Atiq had been unavailable since Friday night for his daily meal that he used to have at his sister's house near residence.

Farid Ahmed, husband of Atiq's sister, told police that as they could not reach Atiq over his cellphone, they came to his flat and found its door locked from inside. There was no response from inside.

Police said they had picked up a security guard from the residence for interrogation after Farid filed a case with Khilkhet Police Station in this connection.

Govt urged

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Amin Bazar to Babupura Bridge, they said a green environment could be developed there through tree plantation, which is important for the city dwellers for survival.

According to the initiative to reclaim the riverbank from occupation around the city, they requested the government to continue the drive.

They also urged the people of all walks of life to come forward to save the rivers for the city.

President of the organisation Sukur Salek and other executive members Shahin Parvin, Alauddin Lutfur Ahsan, Sabina Jasmin, among others, were present during the signature campaign.

Increased

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should not be left untreated.

"If four lakh surgery is conducted each year, it will be possible to remove the backlog of cataract blindness," he said.

The experts also pointed out that though 80 percent of the patients live in rural areas, there are only 20 percent of ophthalmologists for them. Moreover, all the ophthalmologists do not perform surgery, which creates lack of skilled mid-level ophthalmic personnel in district hospitals.

The experts suggested integration of primary eye care into primary health care.

Muhammad Abdus Sabur, programme support officer of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, said the country needs 3,000 mid-level ophthalmic personnel for running the eye care programme smoothly.

"So opportunity should be created in public institutions for mid-level training in ophthalmology and it needs immediate gazette notification," he said.

On the issue of eye care service Chief Health Officer of Dhaka City Corporation Brig Gen Mohammad Showkat Ali said the city corporations should be included in the National Eye Care Plan.

"Only 52 wards of the city corporation provide eye care service with the help of Orbis for the last few years while some 37 are out there to reach," he said.

The experts also said the government should also think of human resource development and resource mobilisation in the national eye care plan.

Among others Prof Ava Hossain, president of the Ophthalmological Society of Bangladesh, Abu Raihan of Orbis, Zobia Hannan of Bangladesh Jatiya Andha Kalyan Samity, Comilla, Shah Mohammad Imam of Standard Chartered Bank, Alamgir Hossain of Sight Savers International, Zahida Ispahani and Mastura Khatun of Islamia Eye Hospital, Dulal Podder of Kumudini Hospital, Rafiqul Islam and Khairul Islam of WaterAid Bangladesh were present in the discussion.

Pakistan launches

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At least 90,000 civilians have fled South Waziristan, home to around 600,000 people, since August in order to escape a feared military onslaught.

Long-distance artillery pounded rebel positions as the vanguard of troops engaged in heavy clashes in mountainous forest at Sharwari and Spinkai Raghzai, a local administration official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"They are using heavy weapons" against troops, he told AFP on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media. A military official confirmed that troops had run into resistance.

Four soldiers were killed during clashes as troops thrust north towards the Mehsud stronghold of Makeen, east towards Kotkai, Spinkai Raghzai, and west towards Kunigaram, Saam and Baddar, security officials said.

Remote-controlled bomb attacks also killed three soldiers -- two in North Waziristan and one in South Waziristan, said security officials.

A senior military official told AFP the initial objective was to establish footholds with three divisions of the military, paramilitary and police eventually mobilised, numbering up to 60,000 troops.

"The operation has been launched this morning. Forces are moving inside Mehsud territory," he told AFP.

"It will be a very swift operation bearing in mind the weather conditions.... We will try to complete it before snowfall," he added.

There are 10,000 to 12,000 fighters from the Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) movement in South Waziristan and up to 25,000 across Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal belt with a history of fierce independence, experts estimate.

Pakistan's military has said Central Asian militants, mainly Uzbeks, as well as Arabs, north Africans and even some Europeans are also in the area.

The troop movement was accompanied by an indefinite curfew slapped on parts of South Waziristan in the district of Wana, the main town in the vast and lawless region, as well as in Shakai and Tiarza, officials said.

"Ground and air forces are moving. The objective is to clear all kinds of miscreants from South Waziristan," Tariq Hayat, a senior government official in Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal belt, told AFP, referring to the militants.

The prime minister chaired crisis talks of main political leaders late Friday to listen to a briefing from army chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani.

"In the given circum-

33 killed

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common in India because of lax industrial safety standards.

Earlier this year, a fire at a fireworks factory in Tamil Nadu killed at least 17 people. Two years ago, 32 people died when a blaze gutted a fire-cracker factory in the eastern state of Bihar.

Maldives govt

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coral, the meeting was a bid to draw attention to fears that rising sea levels caused by the melting of polar ice caps could swamp this Indian Ocean archipelago within a century. Its islands average 7 feet (2.1 meters) above sea level.

"What we are trying to make people realize is that the Maldives is a frontline state. This is not merely an issue for the Maldives but for the world," Nasheed said.

As bubbles floated up from their face masks, the president, vice president, Cabinet secretary and 11 ministers signed a document calling on all countries to cut their carbon dioxide emissions.

The issue has taken on urgency ahead of a major UN climate change conference scheduled for December in Copenhagen.

At that meeting countries will negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol with aims to cut the emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide that scientists blame for causing global warming by trapping heat in the atmosphere.

Wealthy nations want broad emissions cuts from all

stances, the national consensus is reaffirmed to establish and maintain the writ of the state to weed out these elements," said the prime minister's office.

On Thursday, gunmen blasted into three security buildings in Lahore, in the country's political heartland, five days after attackers besieged the army headquarters near the capital Islamabad and humiliated the military.

The frequency and sophistication of a string of attacks since October 5 has underscored the weakness of government security forces who many say lack necessary military hardware and counter-insurgency expertise.

One US official said the United States was "doing everything in our power" to help Pakistan improve its counter-insurgency capabilities with military assistance to the nuclear-armed Muslim country "on a war-plan footing".

Hundreds of night-vision goggles, radios and thousands of protective vests were provided in July alone, with overall military assistance amounting to 6.85 billion dollars since 2001, the embassy official said.

In Pakistan's tribal region of Mohmand, nine militants and a soldier were killed following a pre-dawn attack on a checkpoint, the paramilitary said.

Probal Chy

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Probal was kept at Intensive Care Unit of Chittagong Metropolitan Hospital with life-support since Wednesday evening following a massive brain haemorrhage when he was directing a cultural programme at BTV Chittagong centre.

He, hailed from Binajury village in Raazan upazila of the district, left his wife Mira Chowdhury, two sons, a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

He was famous for songs like Bhebonago Ma Tomar Chhela Hariye Giyeche. Jiboner Eki Porajoy and Dhanya Hohechhi Ami Dhanya etc. He had earned popularity with a good number of hit songs in films.

Probal is the fourth among the five daughters and three sons of Manomanohar Chowdhury.

Kalyani Ghosh who was also an artiste of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra and Uma Islam are Probal's sisters while both of his two sons--Ranjan Chowdhury and Taposh Chowdhury--are also singers.

At first Probal's body was brought to BTV Chittagong centre around 10:00am yesterday and later at Bangladesh Betar, Chittagong Press Club and Shaheed Minar where a number of people from all walks of life thronged to pay last tributes.

His cremation was held at Avoymitra Ghat of the city in the afternoon. Before the cremation, a guard of honour was given to Probal Chowdhury for his heroic role in the country's Liberation War in 1971.