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Shelve MRP, go for e-passport

JS body asks govt to scrap Tk 3.5b project to save money

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday asked the government to cancel the machine-readable passport (MRP) project and introduce electronic passports to save public money.

The parliamentary standing committee on planning ministry also made a set of recommendations including relocation of Kamalapur railway station to Tongi to ease traffic congestion in the capital.

Committee Chairman Col (retd) Oli Ahmed, also chief of Liberal Democratic Party, unveiled the recommendations before journalists at his office at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan following a committee meeting.

The parliamentary body said electronic passports will be used worldwide after machine-readable passports become invalid in 2014. It's undesirable to spend several hundred crores of taka for issuing two types of passports, it said.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) in March approved a Tk 3.50 billion project on machine-readable passport and visa under the home ministry.

The Department of Immigration and Passport under the ministry has already

launched the project for issuing about 18.4 million MRPs by 2014.

Bangladesh has to introduce MRPs by April 2010 to comply with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) requirements. If it fails to become an ICAO member, Bangladeshi citizens' access to the international labour market and visas could be hindered.

The committee said the government would have to spend a big amount again for issuing electronic passports after the MRPs become invalid across the globe. All developed countries in the world have already introduced electronic passports.

"The ministries of foreign affairs and planning will write to the home ministry soon in this regard," the committee said.

The parliamentary body asked for installation of close circuit cameras at airports, introduction of a uniform renewal fee for passports and their quick renewal for Bangladeshis living abroad.

It also recommended simplifying the procedure for issuing diplomatic passports for lawmakers and instructing Bangladesh missions abroad to provide protocol to lawmakers and distinguished people.

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The Dholai Khal, after years of pollution, has turned into a smelly, ugly mess, dumping ground for garbage and a breeding haven for mosquitoes. The photo was taken at Sutrapur where the canal falls into the river Buriganga and where it's quite impossible to trace the water body.

PHOTO: SHAFIQU ALAM

Govt plans sky rail for Dhaka

PM unveils measures to contain traffic jam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government plans to construct elevated and underground railways, flyovers, orbital waterways, and circular roads in and around the capital to ease traffic congestion and to solve transport problems.

Replying to lawmakers' queries in the parliament, the premier said the government took up a project to upgrade Zia International Airport, construction of a bridge linking the Aarong point at Tejgaon and the Gulshan Shooting Club point, and a coordinated development project in Hatirjheel area.

She said the government also took steps to keep the Buriganga river and its adjacent lands free from encroachment.

For reducing the problems caused by air pollution in the capital, the government took measures to gradually remove from roads automobiles aged over 20 years.

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Babar's remand stayed till Nov 1 on HC order

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Several hours after placing the former state minister for home affairs Lutfozzaman Babar on remand in the August 21 grenade attack case, a Dhaka court yesterday stayed its order upon a High Court directive.

First Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ehsanul Haque yesterday passed a five-day remand order around 1:00pm following a 10-day remand prayer by the investigation officer (IO) of the case.

The same court around 6:00pm yesterday stayed the remand order till November 1 after Babar's lawyer submitted a petition stating that the High Court (HC) directed the authorities concerned to interrogate him at jail gate, if necessary.

The court also asked the police officials to send Babar to jail and directed the jail authorities to produce him before this court

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Govt okays BDR proposal to disband 4 battalions

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The government has approved a proposal from Bangladesh Rifles for disbanding four of its battalions for direct involvement in the BDR mutiny.

Battalions 13, 24, 36 and 44 at the Pilkhana BDR headquarters actively participated in the February 25-26 mutiny that claimed lives of 74 people including 57 army officials.

"We have approved the BDR proposal for disbanding the four battalions," said Home Affairs Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder.

He told The Daily Star that

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FILING AUDIT REPORTS

EC delays action as parties miss deadline

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) has finally decided to exempt 39 political parties from submitting to it within the timeframe, audit reports on their financial transactions in the immediate past year, without amending the legal provision in this regard.

It took the decision on Monday in response to a letter from BNP expressing its inability due to some complexities to comply with the mandatory provision for submission of audit report within the deadline -- July 31 last.

Apart from BNP, other registered parties including Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami did not abide by the provision, officials at the EC Secretariat said.

"We did not ask any party to submit the audit report, and no party has done so within the deadline," one official said.

The EC however decided to strictly enforce the relevant rules from next year. So, each of the registered political parties will have to submit audit report on their financial transactions this year by July 31 next year, EC officials said.

Monday's decision of the EC will be communicated to BNP, and it might also be communicated to other parties.

According to Section 9 (b) of the political party registration rules, each of the registered political parties has to get its financial transaction in the immediate past calendar year audited by a registered chartered accounting

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State minister status for 3 envoys

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States Akramul Qader, High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Prof M Sayedur Rahman Khan and High Commissioner to India Ahmed Tarique Karim will now enjoy status of state minister.

The government gave them the status with all facilities of a state minister through separate gazette notifications issued on October 22.

The Awami League after assuming office early this year had appointed them there.

Prime minister's adviser HT Imam yesterday told reporters at Hotel Sheraton

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PHOTO: STAR

Former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar is being carried on a chair to a Dhaka court yesterday in connection with the August 21 grenade attack case.

Families of Bangabandhu killers found closely linked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detective Branch of Police investigating the attack on lawmaker Fazle Noor Taposh found close connection between the family members of Bangabandhu's killers and fugitive brigadier general (retd) Fazlul Bari.

During the state of emergency of 2007-2008, Bari made several attempts to reorganise Freedom Party, and even launched a travel agency with the family members of Bangabandhu's killers, DB sources said.

According to DB sources,

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6 JMB men arrested in Naogaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police yesterday arrested six militants of the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) during a raid at a JMB leader's house under Raninagar upazila in Naogaon.

Among the arrestees, Masud Rana, 40, son of Khabir Sheikh, a JMB area commander and close associate of the executed JMB leader Siddikul Islam alias Bangla Bhai, hails from Bashbaria village of the upazila.

Others are Rajibul Islam Rocket, 33, Manjur Rahman, 26, of Tegachhi Senpara, Belal

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Car bomb kills 92 in Pakistan market

AFP, Peshawar

A huge car bomb ripped through a bustling market in the northwestern city of Peshawar yesterday killing at least 92 people and underscoring the scale of the extremist threat facing Pakistan.

The explosion detonated in a crowded street in the Meena Bazaar just hours after US Secretary Hillary Clinton arrived in Pakistan to bolster the two countries' troubled alliance against Taliban and al-Qaeda militants.

Doctors at Peshawar's Lady Reading Hospital said most of the dead were women and children, as a routine day out shopping in the city's main bazaar ended in horror.

We have received 93 dead bodies, 213 people were injured, we are facing a

shortage of blood," Doctor Hamid Afridi, head of the hospital told AFP as staff declared an emergency.

Hillary, vowing new investments while fending off fierce Pakistani criticism of US policies, expressed solidarity after one of the nuclear-armed state's deadliest ever attacks.

The United States stands "should to shoulder" with Pakistan's people, she said, condemning the "tenacious and brutal extremist groups who kill innocent people and terrorise communities".

"We will give you the help that you need," Hillary told an Islamabad news conference.

The bomb in Peshawar, which lies on the edge of the tribal areas where the Pakistani military is battling extremist

militants on several fronts, trapped people under pulverised shops.

Flames leapt out of burning wreckage and smoke billowed in the air as one building collapsed into dust and rubble. Police evacuated panicked residents from the smouldering wreckage and firemen hosed down the flames.

"It was a car bomb. Some people are still trapped in a building. We are trying to rescue them," bomb disposal official Shafqat Malik told reporters.

Doctor Muslim Khan said: "There are body parts. There are people. There are burnt people. There are dead bodies. There are wounded."

Hillary is the most senior US official to

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PHOTO ON PAGE 16

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