

Scopes little

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The latest changes have raised the time gap between two standing committee meetings to three months from one. They have also increased the number of committee members from 15 to 19.

Asked why party forums meet irregularly, Dr RA Ghani, standing committee member, yesterday told The Daily Star they are not searching for reasons for something that had happened in the past.

"From now on, meetings of the forums will be held regularly," he added.

He said though the committees did not meet regularly, the chairperson took decisions regarding running of the organisation in consultation with the party's "core group".

However, within a short period of time before the national council on December 8, the standing committee held a number of meetings to firm up the proposals for amendments to the party charter.

The national council, which was held after 16 years, has relaxed the provision for its meeting as well.

Earlier, the provision said the national council shall convene at least once a year, while the amended one says it should meet once a year, if possible.

The council however did little to ensure the practice of democracy within the party, much to the frustration of the rank and file.

Instead of proposing ways to increase intra-party democracy, the BNP high command worked some amendments that have given the party chief even more authority and stretched the time limit for the executive and standing committees to meet, said several BNP leaders who longed to see an end to the authoritarian nature of decision-making in the organisation.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has emerged stronger than ever from the council.

She still holds the power to dissolve anytime the standing and executive committees, among others. She also enjoys the authority to determine unilaterally the responsibilities and jurisdiction of the executive committee's office-bearers.

Speaking in return for anonymity, a senior BNP leader said the amended constitution seems more undemocratic compared to the previous one. Besides securing more authority for herself, the BNP chairperson has successfully cleared the way for his son Tarique Rahman to ascend to the party helm.

It was she who placed the proposal before the standing committee for creating the post of a senior vice-chairman a few days before the national council, said a standing committee member.

On December 8, Tarique was elected vice-chairman who shall lead the party in absence of Khaleda Zia. And if the post of chairperson falls vacant, he will assume the responsibilities and hold those for the rest of the tenure.

After Khaleda Zia was released from jail, the standing committee on September 13 last year passed a resolution empowering her to lead the organisation for life.

But in the wake of criticism, the BNP chairperson declined to accept the motion. To meet the criteria for registration with the EC, BNP had included some new provisions in its charter, empowering the national council to elect chairperson and other office-bearers for the standing and

executive committees. But things were different at the December 8 council. Tarique was elected senior vice-chairman while his mother had already been re-elected chairperson unopposed.

Besides, the council authorised Khaleda to pick the remaining members and office-bearers for the standing and executive committees.

BNP, which suffered a massive debacle in the last parliamentary election, included a number of controversial leaders in the standing and executive committees.

And in so doing, it ignored a provision in its constitution that says individuals with image tainted by corruption cannot be a member of the party.

Meanwhile, as the main opposition, BNP could not play a constructive role in parliament. It has been boycotting the House since the second session, disregarding its electoral pledges against parliament boycott.

In its electoral manifesto, it said it would not allow a lawmaker to be absent from parliament for 30 consecutive sittings. They announced so to end the culture of parliament boycott.

Outside the House, the party however ran a massive campaign against India's proposed Tipaimukh Dam project. The efforts drew attention of the common people.

As part of a drive to revamp the organisation, BNP arranged councils in 49 out of 75 organisational districts. Besides, new committees were formed in some 200 upazilas before the national council.

The main opposition however did not enforce any major street agitation against the government in last one year.

Housing loan
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pending with the banks and financial institutions cannot be met with the remaining Tk 20 crore.

The scheme with a fund of Tk 300 crore was introduced in fiscal year 2007-08 to help small and medium income group people buy flats.

Under the scheme, a customer is provided with highest Tk 20 lakh loan at a 9 percent interest rate.

Banks and financial institutions disburse the loans from the fund provided by Bangladesh Bank.

The scheme lasts up to June 2010 and so far 3,000 customers have been provided loans under it.

Krishna-Trishna
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Rahman, who returned to Bangladesh from Australia this week, told AFP he had spoken to the twins' mother, Lovely Mallick, several times since his return and was organising a trip to Australia for her to visit Trishna and Krishna.

"I told her that she could very soon travel to Australia to see her daughters. She thanked us for the daughters' operation. She now wants to see them," he said.

The girls were born in December 2006 and six weeks later the impoverished Mallicks placed them in an orphanage in Dhaka. They were later put up for adoption, in the hope they could receive medical care.

Last month the twins, who have been in Australia for two years, were separated in a marathon operation after neurosurgeons prised apart the bone and blood vessels of their brains to allow them to lead separate lives.

Mallick spoke of her delight that her children had survived the risky operation, but said she wanted them to stay in Australia for a better life.

Last week she told AFP that she wanted to talk with her daughters and to hold them in "my lap just for a moment."

Trade fair
FROM PAGE 16
Commissioner BM Enamul Haque.

He also said they want to continue the fair up to January 20 if the district administration permits.

Asked about this, the DC said as the RCCI failed to adequately project local products through this fair (because it was not drawing enough visitors), and local people showed interest in amusements, he allowed staging of the circus alongside the fair.

Averting a direct reply to a question on possible delay in starting classes at the school, the DC said he would allow extension of time limit of the fair only if local people demand this.

Meanwhile, the district unit of Gono Forum organised a human chain in front of Rangpur Press Club yesterday protesting staging of circus on the school ground in the name of trade fair.

Clock

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effect on June 19, when the clocks went forward one hour.

On December 24 the cabinet with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as chair decided that the clocks would go back by one hour on December 31.

Power Secretary Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad has confirmed that the clocks will again change at 11:59pm on 31 October 2010 when the time will become 10:59pm.

This period of DST will continue until March 31, 2011.

Ashura

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and mourning over the tragedy.

This day in the Hijri year 61, Hazrat Imam Hossain (RA), along with the members of his family and close relations, embraced martyrdom at the hands of Yazid's forces in the desert of Karbala.

President Zillur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia issuing separate messages paid their deep respects to Hazrat Imam Hossain (RA) and other martyrs of Karbala.

The president said the supreme sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hossain (RA) and his companions at Karbala for upholding the ideals of Islam remained glorious in the history.

"The eternal message of Ashura inspires us to be vocal against any injustice and repression and walk the path of truth and justice," he said.

The president also called upon the Muslim Ummah to build an equitable and just society imbued with the message of holy Ashura.

In her message, the PM called upon all to combat all kinds of injustice and discrimination in the national life.

Recalling the supreme sacrifice of Imam Hossain (RA) at Karbala, she urged all to uphold the teachings of Ashura through establishing truth and justice.

In another message, Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia said the martyrdom embraced by Imam Hossain (RA) and his relations on the day of Ashura remained an example for all to emulate.

Today is a public holiday. Different religious organisations have chalked out various programmes marking the occasion.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels will air special programmes while newspapers publish supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

China
FROM PAGE 16
aimed at eventually linking Guangzhou, a business hub in southern China near Hong Kong, with the capital Beijing, Xinhua added.

"The train can go 394.2 kilometres per hour, it's the fastest train in operation in the world," Zhang Shuguang, head of the transport bureau at the railways ministry, told Xinhua.

Test runs for the service began earlier in December and the link officially went into service when the first scheduled train left the eastern metropolis of Wuhan on Saturday.

By comparison, the average for high-speed trains in Japan was 243 kilometres per hour while in France it was 277 kilometres per hour, said Xu Fangliang, general engineer in charge of designing the link, according to Xinhua.

Beijing has an ambitious rail development programme aimed at increasing the national network from the current 86,000 kilometres to 120,000 kilometres, making it the most extensive rail system outside the United States.

China unveiled its first high-speed line at the time of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 -- a service linking the capital with the port city of Tianjin.

In September, officials said they planned to build 42 high-speed lines by 2012 in a massive system overhaul as part of efforts to spur economic growth amid the global downturn.

The network uses technology developed in co-operation with foreign firms such as Siemens, Bombardier and Alstom.

Another BDR
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hospital where the doctors declared him dead," Muhasin said.

Rokanuzzaman hailed from Sirajganj district. BDR sources said the deceased was attached to the headquarters at Pikhana though he was from 16-Battalion.

Troops deaths in Afghan war seen rising rapidly
AFP, Kabul

The arrival in Afghanistan of tens of thousands of reinforcements to fight the Taliban will lead to a higher death rate among foreign troops, adding pressure on Western leaders to get out altogether, officials say.

Militants fighting for the overthrow of the Kabul government promised to turn Afghanistan into a "flaming tandoor oven", escalating attacks and deploying more fighters to match the Western surge.

Western military chiefs warn more troops will inevitably lead to more deaths as they try to help Afghan security forces take on the fight alone.

The Taliban leadership, believed to be based in Pakistan, has matched the fighting words by promising a surge of its own.

"With the coming of new forces the fight will be further extended and increased," said Zabihullah Mujahid, a purported Taliban spokesman, who spoke to AFP by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Militant forces would "attack the foreign forces as well as their Afghan allies through suicide attacks, roadside bombs and face-to-face clashes", he said.

"They will transform Afghanistan into a flaming tandoor oven for the foreign forces,"

Scopes plenty

FROM PAGE 1
elect new members.

"I can't remember when the last meeting of the national committee was held," a senior AL leader told The Daily Star wishing anonymity.

The ALCWC has emerged as the most powerful body in making all major decisions on national issues without facing any scrutiny by its superior body due to ineffectiveness of the national committee.

In addition, the advisory council, which is empowered by AL charter to give the party advice and directives on various issues, remain completely dysfunctional, as it does not sit to review the situation, be it national or international.

Asked why meetings of the national committee and advisory council do not take place, two high-up leaders said there is no answer to it, although the party constitution says many things.

Contacted by The Daily Star, AL President Member Obaidul Quader said formation of national committee and completion of advisory council have remained incomplete due to business of AL chief and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"The unfinished work of the party would be completed after the party chief ends her India tour next month. A presidium meeting of the party will be held and decision will be taken to form the national committee and complete formation of the advisory council, among other issues," said the AL policymaker.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the new national committee will be formed before the party's extended meeting in second week of January.

On the other hand, Deputy Office Secretary Mrinal Kanti Das said the district councils would be held early next year through which new members would be elected for the national committee.

On the party's central advisory council, the AL constitution says the party chief will nominate 41 members for advisory council and he/she will consult the council on national and international issues.

The AL chief on July 30 nominated 20 members for the advisory council including AL veterans Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak, Abdul Jalil, Tofail Ahmed and Suranjit Sengupta, who were excluded from the party presidium. The rest of the members have yet to be inducted into the council.

The advisory council, which is supposed to work as the party's "think-tank" as stipulated in the charter, does not sit, as the party chief does not direct any of its members to convene a meeting.

Even the party chief does not consult with the advisory council on national and international issues in line with the party constitution, said an advisory council member.

Some of the party leaders however said the think-tank of the party sat once or twice in 2002-03 when AL was in the opposition. They added the advisory council has become more dysfunctional after some veteran leaders, who were "pro-reforms" during the caretaker government rule, were included.

9 charged
FROM PAGE 1
At the beginning of yesterday's proceedings, prosecutor Lt Col Habibul Karim produced evidence against the accused before the court set at Mechanical Transport Shed at the sector headquarters.

The complainant, Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Reaz Uddin Ahmed of 12 Rifle Battalion, also presented allegations in details against the accused. After this, the head of the court asked all the nine one by one whether they were guilty or not.

The accused all denied the allegations brought against them and claimed to have been innocent.

The court also allowed the accused to question the complainant and they did so with the assistance of their lawyers advocates SM Rezaul Karim, SUM Nurul Islam Chowdhury, Md Nurul Islam and Md Shadad Hossain.

The accused are havildars Sibbir Ahmed, Sohrab Hossain, Md Shamsul Haque, signalman Abdur Rahman, sepoy Md Abul Kalam Azad, Md Sakawat Hossain, Md Raseel Kabir, Md Zahir Uddin and Md Sarwar Kamal.

Two of the 18 witnesses-- Aleya Ferdous, wife of then battalion commander Maj Khan Mohammed Alauddin, and the complainant--gave their accounts before the court.

The mutiny in Rangamati broke out at three of the five battalions. After the trial of the 12 Rifle Battalion began on November 24, the court the next day fixed yesterday for hearing on charge framing.

Deputy Attorney General Md Sohrawardy, on behalf of the attorney general, and Mosharraf Hossain Kajal and Monzurul Alam Monzu, senior PP on behalf of the state, were present at the court, sources said.

Indian HC

FROM PAGE 16
diplomatic assignment.

Prior to his appointment in Bangladesh, Rajet, a Bangalee and one of the bright diplomats in Indian foreign services, was the Indian ambassador to the Philippines.

He replaced Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, another Bangalee who served here for over six years as both deputy high commissioner and high commissioner. Pinak left Dhaka on December 20 and took over his new assignment in Bangkok.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a spokesman of the Indian High Commission confirmed the joining of Rajet to the office. He said that the high commission has already made a request to the foreign ministry for arrangement of necessary formalities so that the envoy can present his credentials soon.

Official sources said a date would be given soon for presenting credentials to the president at Bangabhaban.

Diplomatic sources said the new high commissioner will spend a busy time in Dhaka as he joined here just a few days ahead of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's planned state visit to India from January 10.

Meanwhile, two other high commissioners--one from Pakistan and another from Sri Lanka--will also take up their diplomatic assignments at their respective missions in Dhaka soon.

Present Pakistan's High Commissioner to South Africa M Ashraf Qureshi has been designated as the new high commissioner to Bangladesh. He will join here early next month. Qureshi will replace Alamgir Bashir Khan Babar.

The government of Sri Lanka is sending Sanath Viragoda to replace incumbent High Commissioner V Krishnamoorthy. Sources said political appointee Sanath Viragoda is most likely to join here in the first quarter of January.

Jamaat
FROM PAGE 16
Recipients of the award from Jamaat are Dr Rowshan Ara Begum, Lt Commander (ret'd) Afa Zuddin Ahmed, Salahuddin Ahmed, poet Al Mahmud and (posthumous) Major MA Jalil.

Rawshan Ara told this correspondent she did not know that Jamaat was involved in the programme.

Talking to journalists later, both Rawshan and Afa Zuddin demanded exemplary punishment of Jamaat leaders if found involved in the killings and oppression during the Liberation War.

Salahuddin said the award (Tk 50,000, books and a crest) will help an insolvent freedom fighter like him.

No representative of Jalil was present to receive his award.

Organisers said they would send it to his house as his wife is now abroad.

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojaheed, who was scheduled to be the chief guest at the function, did not turn up. He was represented by Maulana Rafiqul Islam Khan, ameer of city unit of the party.

Several other Jamaat leaders including lawmaker Hamidur Rahman Azad were present at the programme.

Many of the present top leaders of Jamaat including its Ameer Maulana Motiur Rahman Nizami and Secretary General Mojaheed were accused of war crimes.

Leaders of Jamaat's student wing the then Islami Chhatra Sangha, now known as Islami Chhatra Shibir, and some other groups were involved in anti-liberation activities.

Mojaheed was president of East Pakistan Islami Chhatra Sangha in 1971. Mojaheed asked workers of the organisation to form Al-Badr Bahini to resist freedom fighters, according to a "Fortnightly Secret Report on the Situation in East Pakistan". In line with an official procedure, the report used to be regularly dispatched by the then East Pakistan home ministry to General Yahya Khan, head of the Pakistan government.

Many researches, academic studies, accounts of both victims and collaborators, and publications including newspapers revealed that Mojaheed, who headed the Al Badr team in Dhaka at that time, allegedly led those who had been involved in the killings of intellectuals -- only two days before the victory of liberation forces on December 16, 1971.

Thousands of people still bear the scars of war crimes by Jamaat, Islami Chhatra Sangha and some other controversial outfits such as Nizam-e-Islami. Jamaat's opposition to the struggle for independence has been documented in different publications including those by the party itself.

Replaced, he said.

party government.

Rohingya

FROM PAGE 16
Bangladesh side at the consultation while his Myanmar counterpart U Maung Myint, who is deputy foreign minister, will lead his country's team. The five-member Myanmar delegation is due to arrive in Dhaka today.

Bangladesh and Myanmar have claims on overlapping offshore blocks in the Bay of Bengal. India and Myanmar have counter claims on majority of the total 28 sea blocks of Bangladesh. Dhaka has been in negotiations with the two countries for years, but the bilateral talks are yet to bring any tangible result.

The Awami League led government a few months back went to the UN tribunal to settle the maritime disputes. The government hopes that the issue will be resolved through the UN tribunal in four to five years, foreign ministry officials said.

Repatriation of Rohingya refugees has remained a major irritant between the two countries since 1992 when over a million people fled from Myanmar's Northern Rakhain state and took shelter in the bordering Bangladesh to escape persecution.

Officials said Dhaka will talk on repatriation of 29,000 Rohingya refugees and stopping pushback by Myanmar. The refugees are living in three camps in Cox's Bazar.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a high official of the foreign ministry said, "our consultations are basically aimed at improving bilateral relations with our neighbour Myanmar and strengthening economic cooperation."

The Bangladesh side would focus on strengthening the border trade, including banking, to discourage informal trade. Bangladesh will

strongly put up the issue of opening of LC (Letter of Credit) between the two countries for expansion of trade and commerce, he added.

Easing Myanmar's visa regime for Bangladeshi businessmen and other travellers would be discussed prominently. Currently Bangladeshi businessmen get a maximum 14-day visa and can go upto Rakhain state. In border trade, businessmen can go upto Mongdu by taking border pass.

Sources said Dhaka will also emphasise construction of the proposed Bangladesh-Myanmar friendship road and seek to know Yangon's latest position in this regard. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on April 4 in 2004 between Bangladesh and Myanmar to construct 25 kilometres of road at a cost of Tk 195 crore, but the move was stalled.

Of the 25 km, two kilometres in Bangladesh and the remaining 23 km will be constructed on the Myanmar side. Besides, Bangladesh will want to know from Myanmar side about the proposed Chittagong-Kunming road.

According to officials, 110-km more roads will be constructed after the construction of the 25-km friendship road to establish direct road communications with China. Officials said the proposed road is seen as vital for establishing greater links with Thailand and China.

On regional issues, they said since Myanmar is also a member of BIMSTEC and ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum), issues concerning them would also be discussed. Earlier, Myanmar supported Bangladesh in getting observer status at the ARF.

Toasts of Narsingdi
FROM PAGE 1
position countrywide in the newly introduced and largest public examination taken by a total of 18,23,465 students in Bangladesh.

After the reception, Sadia and Moon gave their views of the success to The Daily Star.

"Apart from hard work and perseverance, a daily routine must be followed to get the optimum result," Sadia said.

Understanding is more important than memorising the lessons, she added.

She also stressed the importance of following teachers' instructions in preparing for the examinations.

For her success, Sadia gave maximum credit to her mother and school teachers and said the teachers are approachable at her school that made the communication between students and teachers easier.

"We need not have any private tuition as teachers at school are very supportive and their lectures are enough for us to prepare for the exams,"

Asked about the aim she endeavours to achieve, Sadia jumped from her chair with a jerk and said promptly that she wants to be a pilot as the challenges of the profession amazes her.

Sadia, a daughter of a madrasa teacher, said that the number of classrooms should be increased, as students are not well accommodated.

Moon Rahman wants to be a doctor as she feels that people of the country don't get proper health care.

Like Sadia, she also gave the credit for her success to her mother, a teacher of a school, and her school teachers.

The teachers used to give tests on every lesson, which also helped them gain confidence, she said.

Clear understanding of the subject helps them gain good marks, she added.

With the success of the two girls, Monohardi Model Government Primary School became a role model to others for its teaching procedure.

A total of 112 students appeared in the terminal exam from the school, and 109 students got first division while only three got second division.

Rokhsana Afroze, headmistress of the school, said it is not the first success the school had achieved so far and mentioned, since 2006, her school is having the highest number of students in the district getting scholarships.

"Our responsibility has

been increased further with the brilliant results of our students," she added.

"We give two extra hours to our students so that the classes should be enough for our students to learn the lessons," the headmistress said.

Besides, she said special classes are arranged for students who cannot cope with the regular classes.

The number of students winning scholarship in the last four years is 25 in 2008, 25 in 2007, 31 in 2006 and 18 in 2005.

DC Amrita Bario handed over crests to Sadia and Moon.

Kashmir govt to discuss autonomy report

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Jammu

The Jammu and Kashmir government will discuss Wednesday the controversial report by a prime minister's working group that has recommended autonomy to the troubled state, an official said yesterday.

The official said Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who will chair the Dec 30 cabinet meeting, is keen to discuss the way forward on autonomy. He has asked Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ali Mohammed Sagar to draft an action plan.

The contours of the action plan would be discussed in the cabinet meeting, the official told IANS requesting anonymity.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's fifth working group tasked to suggest measures on how to improve centre-state relationships in Kashmir submitted its report to the chief minister last week.

While the ruling National Conference welcomed the report, its partner, the Congress, has too said it has no problems with the restoration of autonomy to the state.

But the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has categorically stated that it will oppose any such move.

The autonomy as per the 1952 Delhi-Kashmir accord means giving the Jammu and Kashmir government more powers over all affairs except for foreign affairs, defence and communications.

Manmohan Singh had formed five Kashmir working groups in 2006. Four of them had submitted their reports in January 2007.

replaced, he said.

party government.