

Government workers

FROM PAGE 16
Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd and in municipalities around the country. It also exists in Titas Gas Distribution Company, Dhaka Water and Sanitation Authority, Roads and Highways, and the Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy.

Until 2006, government agencies and autonomous bodies were exempt from employment legislation. However, they must now abide by the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 which states that employers may only avoid putting workers on a 'permanent' contract if their work is of a 'casual nature' or it is 'essentially temporary and likely to be finished within a limited period.' Neither of these categories apply to 'muster roll' workers or those on running contracts.

"These workers are not temporary, they are not casual - they are really permanent and the law requires that such workers be given the full rights of permanent employees," said S A Hoque, an eminent labour lawyer who represents both workers and employers.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) employs about 5,000 harianjan sweepers. Although they have been working full time for the DCC for many years, they are treated simply as daily wage workers--on what is known as the 'muster roll'.

Krishna Lal has worked for the DCC for 12 years. He said, "When I work 30 days a month, I get Tk 4,500 -- but for each day I am absent due to sickness or for any other reason, the DCC deducts Tk 150." A permanent cleaner gets almost double the salary -- 7,500 per month, and benefits.

The small number of cleaners that the DCC employed on a permanent contract not only get almost double the salary -- but also have full employment rights. "Is it fair that people doing exactly the same jobs should be treated differently? How can I bring up a family of six on my salary?" Krishna asked. And when he retires, he will have no right to a pension.

Employing workers on the

'muster roll' has no legislative basis -- though it is mentioned in the DCC's organogram.

Chittagong City Corporation also employs thousands of harianjan workers on the 'muster roll'. The same practice also exists in local municipalities around the country, where conditions are even worse with harianjan muster roll workers receiving as little as Tk 75 per day with a similar lack of employment rights.

Employing workers on the 'muster roll' is only one way of avoiding the on permanent contracts. Other government agencies believe they have found a loop-hole in the labour laws by creating contracts which are only 89 days long -- one day short of the period when a probationary worker is made permanent. The authorities then continually re-contract the same workers every 89 days.

In May 2005 Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA), which has now become the Dhaka Power Development Company (DPDC), issued an office order stating that all of its 1,380 stenographers would be employed on a contract stating that the worker would "never get a formal appointment letter", "never be assured of regularising his job in the office" and "never be employed to work for more than 89 days."

One stenographer told The Daily Star that she had been employed for three years on a salary of Tk 118 per day and that her job was "renewed verbally every 89 days". Similar provisions continue to exist in the newly formed DPDC.

The 89 day contract generally impacts low paid workers. However The Daily Star has found that Biman Airlines now use 89 day contracts for employing engineers. In July 2007, around 3,000 took "voluntary retirement", but on 1 August, it re-employed 592 officials including engineers to do the same job at less than half the previous salary on 89-day contracts.

One Biman ground service officer told The Daily Star that he used to get Tk 35,000 per

month, but that his wage was now Tk 15,000 -- although he effectively works permanently. He said, "Formally permanent employees at Biman who do exactly the same job as me now get Tk 57,000 plus earned leave and a pension and provident fund."

When asked why he continued with this job, he broke down in tears. He said, "My elder daughter is due to be married. As a Biman employee, people respect me. If I lose my job, I will lose my social dignity, and my daughter will not find a suitable husband."

Some government bodies are now recognising the unlawfulness of the situation. In December 2009, the Board of Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd (BTCL) (formerly the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board) decided to regularise all its so called casual employees and make them permanent.

And the chairman of Janata Bank, Abul Barakat, has recently asked the trade union for a list of all the casual employees whose conditions should be regularised.

Sadeq Hossain Khoka, the Mayor of Dhaka, acknowledged to The Daily Star that the harianjan cleaners working in the DCC were living in a miserable condition. He said that he sent a letter in October 2009 to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and Cooperative asking it to regularize the employment status of all those workers who had served for over 13 years. "Now it is the decision of the LGRD ministry, who have to consult with the Ministry of Establishment as the organogram needs to be changed and with the Ministry of Finance as they will be paid under the revenue budget."

Priyotosh Saha, company secretary of the DPDC stated that it has no plans to regularize the "casual workers" He told The Daily Star that "Every three months we internally review the situation."

Info tech

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syllabus of high school and higher education to have a larger pool of skilled manpower in the field.

The government distributed 1,500 laptops to various educational institutions and computer labs will be set up in all educational institutions in phases, Hasina said.

It installed computer labs in 128 upazilas and five Community e-centres in five upazilas. All upazilas will have such labs and E-centres gradually.

Besides, the government has taken a plan to install e-centres for rural people in 8,500 post offices.

She said necessary infrastructure is being built at the Hi-Tech Park in Gazipur while the telecommunication system is strengthened to bring the whole country under e-governance.

"Initiatives have been taken to set up a satellite system to this end," she said.

She said the government has taken steps to have videoconference facility between the PMO and the

cabinet division, deputy commissioners of all districts and the offices of seven divisional commissioners.

Hasina said the fair's main objective is to highlight the initiatives of various ministries and departments to take government services to people's doorstep quickly at a low cost.

The PM's Principal Secretary MA Karim chaired the inaugural ceremony. State Minister for Science and Information and Communication Technology Yeafesh Osman and UNDP Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Renata Lok Dessallien and National Project Director of Access to Information (A2I) at the Prime Minister's Office M Nazrul Islam Khan spoke.

UNDP-funded A2I and the science and ICT ministry jointly organised the fair, which is open to all from 10:00am to 8:00pm every day. Seminars on different subjects will also be held. Four awards will be given for encouraging digital innovations.

Proshika HQ

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A group of plain-clothes policemen along with OC Iqbal Hossain of Pallabi Police Station entered the NGO office minutes after 2:00am, said Proshika Director Nasir Uddin who was in-charge of guarding the building for that night.

"We requested them not to drive us out at dead of night but they did not pay any heed," said Nasir.

Proshika Chief Executive Officer Mahbul Karim told The Daily Star that he did not know on what legal basis police took control of Proshika Bhawan driving out the employees.

Deputy Commissioner (Mirpur zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Khandaker Lutful Kabir told The Daily Star, "We had an intelligence information that a violent clash could occur between the incumbent Proshika authorities and its former chairman Qazi Faruque's men."

Asked why police intervened and drove out the staff, Lutful Kabir said a clash was supposed to occur on that very night.

Mega plan

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On the other hand, around three lakh shallow tube-wells remain inoperative during boro season due to depletion of underground water table mainly in the northern and north-western parts of the country, says Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC).

Bangladesh produces some three crore tonnes of rice a year. And most of the 1.8 crore tonnes of dry season boro rice is produced in the northern and north-western regions, but excessive withdrawal of underground water for irrigation and shortage of river water are causing desertification in many areas of the region, experts said.

Soil in these regions is also good for production of high value crops like wheat, pulses, oil seeds and spices, but these cannot be grown widely because of boro cultivation in vast tracts of lands, they pointed out.

Meanwhile, the agriculture ministry says the country is almost self-sufficient in rice, but is highly dependent on import of most other high value crops.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the country produced 8.5 lakh tonnes of wheat in fiscal 2008-09, which met 30 percent of the domestic demand. And it produced 2.31 lakh tonnes of pulses that met 40 percent of the demand and five lakh tonnes of oil seeds meeting a small portion of the demand. The country is also heavily dependent on import of onion, ginger, garlic, sugar and fruits.

"We have to emphasise production of high value crops and vegetables in the northern region, and rice in summer," Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said.

The government is working on a gradual shift from intensive boro cultivation in the north-west to the comparatively fallow zones in the south, she said at a seminar recently.

Scientists have already developed a saline tolerant rice variety -- BR-47-- but more saline tolerant varieties need to be developed, Matia said.

She mentioned that a mega river-dredging plan is underway to make the government's long-term agriculture strategy a success.

"We already have autarky in rice. But, to achieve self-sufficiency in wheat, maize, spices, oil seeds and pulses, we must release land (for production of those) in the north," Agriculture Secretary CQK Mustaq Ahmed said when contacted.

Besides, development of high yielding varieties of monsoon season rice Aman is an urgent need, he said. "We have asked BRRI (Bangladesh Rice Research Institute) and BADC to develop and try production of HYV of Aman to increase yield."

He added, "We are asking development partners to help us conduct studies on these fields."

Final ODI
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over the Tigers.

The match will start at 9:00am and state-run Bangladesh Television and satellite channel SuperSport2 will beam live coverage of the match.

England are troubled by injuries, pacers Ryan Sidebottom and Stuart Broad have been ruled out for this match with thigh and back injuries respectively.

Bangladesh have no such worries though, and it might be a surprise if they pitch Nazmul Hossain in the last match who has been added to the squad for this match with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza not available.

The pitch is expected to generate runs, but at the same time it will help the spinners more than the fast bowlers. Bangladesh are expected to pick another spin-based attack while England will rely more on their fast bowlers to bring them success.

4 robbers arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatrabari police arrested three members of notorious Dakat Shahid gang at Dhohal Khal and recovered Tk 3 lakh from them early yesterday.

The arrestees, Saidur Arif, 26, Shahjahan Samrat, 25, and Rafiq, 29, were held in connection with a grocery shop robbery in Jatrabari on February 24. The money was recovered from the house of one Manik at Dhohal Khal.

Ten armed robbers, including the arrestees, looted Tk 15 lakh from the grocery store. They shot three people, including shop owner Abul Khayer.

Police said according to the arrestees, three of them shot the shop owner and two of his employees, three emptied the cashbox while the remaining four exploded hand made bombs for the escape.

Sub-Inspector of Jatrabari Police Station Mazharul Islam, who led the drive, said Nahid, manager of a re-rolling mill in Old Dhaka, is the local ring-leader of Dakat Shahid's gang.

"Nahid masterminded the robbery and delivered five illegal firearms to the gang from his office," the SI said.

Asked, he said, Nahid and six other culprits are on the run with Tk 12 lakh and the firearms used in the robbery.

RMG industry

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will be operated under the Crisis Management Cell of the ministry. Joint secretary of the ministry's labour wing will head these bodies.

"A certain quarter is constantly trying to create unrest in our garment industry. The chaos at the Islam Group of Industries on Tuesday was created by this group," said Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, labour and employment minister.

"We have decided to form the eight committees in important garment zones to prevent the repetition of such unfortunate incidents, and to identify culprits and punish them," he said.

He was speaking at a meeting held by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) leaders, the labour and employment ministry, and garment workers at the secretariat in Dhaka.

Siddiqi Rahman, the BGMEA vice president who was present at the meeting, said, "We want to follow the country's labour law. Nevertheless, such chaos is very unfortunate. It will ruin our reputation and eventually we'll lose the majority of our export."

Novo Theatre

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the cases was illegal since he had alone taken the decision.

The Anti-Corruption Commission means a composite body of the chairman and two other members. The commission must act as a whole, and no individual member or chairman can act as commission," the judgement said.

An HC bench comprised of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Borhan Uddin delivered the verdict upon three writ petitions filed by Hasina challenging the ACC chief's approval of investigation into the cases.

Contacted, the petitioner's counsel barrister Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said yesterday seven more cases against the PM are pending with lower courts.

He mentioned that separate petitions are pending with the HC challenging proceedings of those cases, and hearing of the petitions will be held soon.

On March 27, 2002, the Bac filed the three cases with Tejgaon Police Station accusing Hasina and some of her cabinet colleagues (in the previous Awami League government) on charges of corruption and irregularities in dealing with the project for setting up the planetarium.

The charges included spending much more money than needed in appointing consultants for the project and purchasing machinery, and constructing the building housing the planetarium.

Barrister Rafique-Ul Huq, assisted by a number of other lawyers, appeared for Hasina and advocate Fazle Kabir for the ACC.

Illegal jetties

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It issued the directive upon a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, an organisation for protecting human rights and the environment.

Following the court order, the Narayanganj DC on February 9 served a notice to Fazlur Rahman to remove the structures and jetties by February 20.

Fazlur Rahman then filed the writ petition with the HC challenging the notice.

MPs lambasted

FROM PAGE 1

Influriated by Wednesday's incident, the speaker told lawmakers "willing to engage in fights and wrestling" to go to Paltan Maidan or to the ground in front of the parliament building.

Urging all lawmakers irrespective of party affiliation to uphold the sanctity of the House, Hamid said, "You all elected me speaker. I will do whatever needed to maintain discipline in the House. I am ready to go [step down] if you think you do not need me. But I shall not allow recurrence of this [Wednesday's incident]."

From the beginning of yesterday's sitting, Hamid was very strict to enforce order in the House and he did not allow any lawmaker to speak out of context during disposal of a number of private members' resolutions. Both opposition and treasury bench lawmakers praised the speaker's tough stance on the issue.

He said lawmakers should speak in a decent way. The use of words by lawmakers also bespeaks of their modesty and manhood, he said. "Our dignity depends on our behaviour."

Use of indecent words by legislators had been going on in the House during the last few sittings but on Wednesday it was an outburst.

A number of Awami League and BNP lawmakers Wednesday leaped out of their chairs and rushed towards each other gesturing aggressively throwing the parliament sitting into chaos for around 10 minutes.

Without microphones, the lawmakers, particularly the ones elected to reserved seats, were seen shouting loudly and exchanging extremely indecent and vulgar words on the floor, most of which are unprintable.

The chaos erupted following derogatory remarks made against Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and BNP founder late Ziaur Rahman.

Participating in the discussion on the thanksgiving motion on the president's address, a BNP lawmaker on Wednesday compared Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Pharaoh. Awami League lawmakers had labelled Ziaur Rahman a "killer and betrayer".

Pointing to the words Pharaoh and killer, the speaker yesterday said, "None should label a deceased person killer, likewise none should call anyone Pharaoh or Nimrod."

"Harsh words can be said in a humorous way with a smile. You also can liken one to a killer without using the word," he said.

He also said many lawmakers taunt while opponent lawmakers speak but it is not fair. The speaker said it is usual that the opposition will criticise the government in a constructive way and similarly the ruling party may criticise the opposition party that was in power earlier. "But everything should be in a decent way," he said.

After completing his speech, the speaker gave the floor to Awami League lawmaker Fazle Rabbi Mia to begin the discussion on the thanksgiving motion on the president's

Aug 21 probe

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The same court had given CID two more months to submit the probe report on January 4 this year.

On August 3 last year, a Dhaka court ordered the inspector general of police to reinvestigate the cases and submit the investigation reports in two months after identifying the persons who had procured and supplied the grenades used in the carnage of August 21 in 2004.

e-ticketing

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The mobile phone service provider will charge Tk 20 for availing each seat.

Initially the e-ticketing service will be offered for the Intercity trains leaving from Dhaka Kamalapur, Dhaka Cantonment and Chittagong train stations, and gradually all the intercity trains will be incorporated under this service.

Bangladesh Railway (BR) would keep 10 percent of its tickets reserved for e-ticketing while the mobile company would pay for the seats in advance, said BR officials, adding that BR is currently negotiating with other mobile phone companies to expand the service.

On average, about 53.8 million passengers avail railway service in a year. Over 40,000 people travel to and from Dhaka through Kamalapur Railway Station each day.

"SMS ticketing will help passengers spare the hassle of coming all the way to the station during working hours, and waiting in long queues," BR Director General Md Belayet Hossain noted.

The service will also help curb the malpractice of touting train tickets," he added.

address for the day. Referring to Wednesday's unprecedented incident in the House, Rabbi said, "I feel ashamed to give my identity as a lawmaker before the nation."

He said many lawmakers do not have copies of the constitution and the rules of procedure of the parliament. "We would not have had to lower our heads before the nation in shame if they had read the rules of procedure," Rabbi said, adding that the rules of procedure clearly state how lawmakers should speak and behave in parliament.

When discussion on the thanksgiving motion on the president's address ended for the day yesterday, senior parliamentarians of Awami League and BNP took the floor on points of order and welcomed and supported the speaker's toughness.

"I congratulate you sincerely for your stance today. The entire atmosphere of the House has changed," BNP lawmaker Moudud Ahmed said.

"I hope a new era will begin in parliament from today," Moudud, also former law, justice and parliamentary affairs minister, said.

BNP lawmaker MK Anwar echoed the same and said, "I am very much delighted and overwhelmed by today's atmosphere. We hope this new era beginning today will not be hindered again."

Moudud and Anwar said every Awami League man gets hurt if anybody makes any derogatory remark against Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Similarly, every BNP man gets hurt if anybody belittles late president Ziaur Rahman, they said.

The two BNP leaders assured the House that the opposition bench would not make any indecent remarks if the treasury bench does not provoke them.

Lauding the speaker's role in running the House yesterday, Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed said, "We all realised that the parliament was not functioning the way it should."

The speaker adjourned the sitting till 4:00pm Monday.

37 militants killed in Pak airstrike, ground battle

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistan said ground fighting and an airstrike killed 37 militants in its tribal belt on the Afghan border yesterday after dozens of Taliban stormed a paramilitary checkpoint.

The military claims to be making fresh gains against Taliban and al-Qaeda strongholds, under US pressure to do more to stop militants infiltrating Afghanistan and attacking Western troops.

In a pre-dawn attack, more than 100 armed Taliban stormed a checkpoint of the paramilitary Frontier Corps, killing one soldier and wounding four others in the town of Chamarkand in Mohmand tribal district, an official said.

"Troops equipped with mortars and long-range cannons retaliated, killing 30 militants," local administration official Maqsood Ahmed told AFP.

A military statement confirmed the clash and the 30 casualties. Death tolls are impossible to confirm independently as the area is rife with violence and out of bounds to most reporters and aid workers.

DU Syndicate

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while his blue panel contestant Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed got 530 votes.

Prof Md Akhteruzzaman of blue panel won in the provost category securing 572 votes while his contestant white panel nominee Prof Laila Noor Islam got 513 votes.

White panel nominees Dr Tasmeri SA Islam, Md Lutfar Rahman and Dr Mohammad Moinul Islam won in the categories of professor, associate professor and assistant professor respectively while blue panel candidate Jannatul Ferdous won in the lecturer category.

Besides, blue panel candidates achieved majority in the elections of two other bodies -- finance committee and academic council. The blue panel won the single post in finance committee. Out of six posts in the academic council, blue panel secured five while white panel got one.

The election started at Nabab Nabab Ali Chowdhury Senate Building at 9:00am and continued till 1:00am while 1,115 teachers cast their votes. The result was announced at around 4:30pm.

Election to the six posts of 17-member syndicate, the highest decision making body of the university, was last held on September 2004. Election to the posts was overdue for over three years as its two-year tenure ended in September 2006.

Spoon-billed

FROM PAGE 16
in Russia, and in winter it lives in the coastal regions of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, China, Korea and Japan. Its global populations have plummeted to mere 200-250 for reasons yet unknown.

An international team of observers studied these birds at the coast of Bangladesh in 2006 and in Thailand and Myanmar in subsequent years. Their two largest winter population has been seen at the coast of Noakhali, Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar, and in Myanmar next to Bangladesh border.

Little, however, has been done to conserve the places the endangered bird and turtles need in Bangladesh for survival.

With a newly built jetty, Badar Mokam has become a landing station of cattle from Myanmar. The dead cow thrown in water regularly land on the mudflat where Spoon-billed Sandpipers live. Packs of stray dogs fattening on dead meat now perpetually live there to scare the birds and threaten the turtles.

Bird habitat in Belekherdia, although undisturbed as yet, faces the threat of wholesale destruction if Sonadia is chosen as the site of country's deep-sea port.

Bangladesh has declared

9 firms

FROM PAGE 1
partnership PPP) to ease the growing traffic congestion in the city.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already approved the project.

"With the submission of pre-qualification documents, the door for construction of the elevated expressway has opened," said the release adding that the city dwellers would be relieved of the unbearable gridlock once the expressway is completed.

The nine companies who have submitted documents are Soma Enterprise Ltd and Simplex Infrastructures Ltd, Seri Infrastructure Finance Ltd of India, AR Track Hawaii Rocket Rahma of Bangladesh, Sino-Global of US, Italian-Thai Development Public Company Ltd (Italy-Thailand), Sikder Real Estate-KCC JV Consortium (Korea-Bangladesh), Gammon Infrastructure Projects Ltd-Bouygues Travaux Publics SA Consortium (India-France), BPHB-BCC JV (Malaysia-Bangladesh) and China Railway International Ltd (China).

the coasts of Teknaf and Sonadia ecologically critical areas. The Ministry of Environment and Forest runs the Coastal and Wetlands Biodiversity Management Project ostensibly to conserve these areas.

63 dead

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That stampede appeared to have started when a wall along the narrow path leading up to the temple collapsed, killing several people.

Hundreds of people were trampled and suffocated to death in the ensuing panic.

Pilgrimages and festivals are a part of daily life in India and the vast majority of Indians, across the entire social spectrum, will participate regularly.

The choice is vast, as is the size of crowds, which can range from just several hundred pilgrims to the tens of millions who flock to the massive Kumbh Mela festivals at the confluence of the holy Ganges and Yamuna rivers.

In most cases, crowd management measures are rudimentary, or even non-existent, and police action has often been blamed for exacerbating panic when things go wrong.

House body

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The team will also visit the areas affected in the arson and have talks with people there tomorrow morning.

They are also expected to visit Bagaichhari arson affected areas.

Meanwhile, the officer-in-charge of Khagrachhari Sadar Police Station was stand released yesterday in connection with the February 23 violence that killed one and injured 50 others.

Police superintendent's office sources said the action was taken against OC Sharif Khan following orders of Additional Inspector General of Police (Admin) Nabo Bikrom Kishor Tripura early hours yesterday.

Sharif Khan was closed to Rajshahi police range and Sub-Inspector Kamrul Islam has been asked to discharge the OC's responsibilities for the time being.

Superintendent of Police Abu Kalam Siddique confirmed the matter but declined to make any comments.

BNP protests

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industry," the BNP leader said in a statement.

In another statement, Alamgir condemned and protested the 'killing' of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader Fakhrul Islam Shovan alias Tagor by cadres of Jubo League and Chhatra League in Kishoreganj on Wednesday.

Extortionists

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A female witness who spoke on a condition of anonymity said, "I heard several gunshots and looked backwards to see a young man fall down."

"Three youths fled the spot where a police team was standing."

Prem was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue sources said his body bore seven bullet wounds.